

# Air Transat

## Navigating Troubled Waters

By Jen Lofquist  
ALPA Senior  
Communications Specialist

As 2013 comes to a close, the flightcrew members of Air Transat continue to navigate a number of challenges, including working with a new Master Executive Council (MEC), dealing with unhelpful government actions, and transitioning to a new in-house fleet.

In May 2013, the MEC experienced its own challenges as new leaders were put into place due to a sudden turnover. Working with ALPA national officers and legal counsel, temporary leaders were quickly selected; a temporary MEC chairman was named with the sole duty of holding elections as quickly as possible for MEC chairman, vice chairman, and secretary-treasurer. These officers will hold their positions until February 2014.

“Without effective leadership, no group functions properly,” comments Capt. Patrice Roy, the pilots’ temporary MEC chairman. “We were able to lean on ALPA national to help us find a way for our pilots to reconnect with the leadership, and we needed to rebuild trust within the organization.”

In the midst of the change in MEC leaders, Transat A.T. (the parent company) announced in May 2013 that when its charter contract with CanJet expires in May 2014, it will not be renewed, and Air Transat’s fleet will be brought in-house. The pilots were pleased as they had been eager to operate all Air Transat flying since negotiating the charter contract in 2010.

“The fleet [letter of understanding (LOU)] signed in 2010 was very much the product of the time. The LOU could not ensure the sustainability of Air Transat and our jobs,” says Roy. “We were inventing a unique operating model as we went along. We ended up with a multitype internal ‘accordion’ fleet, with several of our pilots having dual qualifications.”

The old LOU was based on a model of reciprocity and on traditional staffing rules. These had to be completely revised to work with the new fleet arrangement. The new LOU ratified in 2013 delivers significant benefits—pilots with dual qualifications will continue to earn their applicable widebody salary when flying B-737s, pilots flying B-737s will retain their permanent bases even during seasonal operations, and pilots will enjoy better salary protection and recognition of service in a higher classification. However, most importantly, the pilot group will have a stable level of employment—crewmembers will be able to shift from one aircraft type to another during seasonal highs and lows in traffic. In addition, the profit sharing the group accepted in 2012 in lieu of salary increases has paid off, with each pilot receiving a 7 percent bonus in 2013.

The first B-737 will be introduced in February 2014, to be followed by four more permanent B-737s by May 1.

An additional challenge stems from a situation created not at the airport, but in the halls of Parliament. The

Temporary Foreign Worker Program has long threatened the airline piloting profession in Canada—and Air Transat in particular, because of its holiday travel focus—by taking jobs away from furloughed Canadian pilots. Some of the problems were based in the government’s lack of understanding of the airline piloting



Capt. Patrice Roy, the temporary MEC chair, in the cockpit.

profession. For instance, there seemed to be confusion between a type rating and a pilot certificate. Also, although Citizen Immigration Canada called for reciprocity between the number of foreign workers coming into Canada and the number of Canadian pilots having foreign opportunities, no clear standard existed as to what that reciprocity meant in practice. ALPA’s Canada Board and Government Affairs Department lobbied in Ottawa, Ont., for stronger language and a distinct definition of reciprocity.

“Although this past year has been challenging,” says Roy, “we have moved forward by unifying not only within our group, but with the other pilot groups in Canada. It’s only by cooperation that Air Transat pilots can work through these difficult times and come out stronger.”

### TSC at a Glance

**Pilots joined ALPA:** 1999

**Number of pilots:** 425

**Headquarters:** Pierre E. Trudeau International Airport, Montreal, P.Q.

**Pilot bases:** Montreal, P.Q.; Toronto, Ont.; and Vancouver, B.C.

**Fleet:** 9 A310s and 12 A330s, plus 5 B-737s arriving in 2014