Union critical of CN plan to move dispatchers

By **Justin Franz** | December 16, 2019
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MONTREAL — Canadian National Railway is preparing to move some of its dispatchers from its Montreal rail traffic control center to Edmonton, Alberta.

The railroad tells the Montreal Gazette that fewer than 15 people will be reassigned to Edmonton, but officials from the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference say some members have been told that the Montreal dispatch center could be closed in the coming months.

Teamsters officials note that some of the dispatchers that have been reassigned to Edmonton were moved from Toronto to Montreal earlier this year.

“CN is moving families across the country like goods on a train. Some of these families had just found schools and daycares for their children in Montreal. You can’t play with people’s lives like that,” says Teamsters Canada President François Laporte.

About 100 dispatchers work in Montreal. The Teamsters represent 200 dispatchers across Canada. CN has rail traffic control centers in Edmonton, Montreal, and Toronto.

Trains News Wire is seeking additional information from CN.

In a statement to the newspaper, a CN spokesman says the reassignment of 15 dispatchers is being done for “efficiency.” The impacted rail traffic controllers primarily dispatch CN’s routes in northern Ontario.

Teamsters Canada Rail Conference President Lyndon Isaak says he worries that the move will mean some experienced dispatchers will quit.

“Uprooting families, some for the second time this year, likely means many RTCs will be unwilling to make the move. Leaving their communities, relatives, language and culture behind may not be an option for many of them,” Isaak says. “CN will end up losing experienced staff and their knowledge of the rail network, which could lead to dangerous situations for railroaders, track maintenance crews and the general public.”

The reassignments appear to be part of a wider operational reorganization at CN that began earlier this month. On Dec. 3, Chief Operating Officer Rob Reilly announced that the railroad was consolidating its network operations from three regions to two, an eastern region and a western region. The eastern region will include operations in the United States, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. The western region include everything from the Northern Ontario Division to the West Coast