

CN, CP sign three deals to share tracks, boost productivity: 'There are always ways to do a better job,' CP official says

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Rival railways CN and CP have struck three track-sharing deals, including one between British Columbia and Alberta, aimed at boosting efficiency in a time of rapid growth, the companies said Tuesday.

In the Alberta-to-B.C. deal, CN rail will allow CP Rail to move eight bulk-commodity trains per week on 880 kilometres of CN track between Edmonton and Coho, B.C., which is near Kamloops.

The CPR trains will be operated by CN crews.

"In this period of very rapid growth, we are looking for ways to improve the utilization of the assets we have and generate higher productivity out of them," CPR spokesman Len Cocolicchio said. He added that CPR did not seek the agreement because of customer complaints over delays. The railway is "moving everything coming at [it]."

"But there are always ways to do a better job," Cocolicchio said.

Cocolicchio said the trains coming from Edmonton will allow CPR to move higher volumes of grain, sulphur and fertilizer for existing customers on a new route.

This latest agreement follows a similar track-sharing deal at the Lower Mainland's ports, where the railways agreed to let each other use competitors' track as shortcuts, and CPR gets access to CN's main line to Surrey Fraser docks.

CN spokesman Mark Hallman said the two railways have many track-sharing agreements, and not just with each other.

They also work with U.S. railways to find more efficient routes for freight.

"We think there are opportunities to remain very active competitors yet work together in terms of infrastructure in order to maximize asset utilization," Hallman said.

The companies also announced Tuesday a track-sharing agreement that will allow CN to move freight over 480 kilometres of CPR track in northern Ontario.

As well, the firms struck a "directional running" agreement on 160 kilometres of parallel track between Sudbury and Parry Sound, under which each railway will handle all rail traffic in opposite directions.

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