November 2026

UNDER CANADIAN SKIES HOSPITALITY, WORKERS PAY THE PRICE

With Carney's airport privatization plans looming, could Canadian Skies Hospitality's expansion into YVR Airport be a harbinger of what's to come for airport workers?

A world-class airport depends on the people who keep it running. Vancouver International Airport (YVR), recognized as the top airport in North America for 15 consecutive years and ranked among the 10 best airports in the world, has built its reputation on efficiency, service quality and passenger satisfaction.[1] YVR has also led the way among Canadian airports in its commitment to sustainability and set a standard for its own workforce by becoming a living wage employer.[2] **As the federal government prepares to open up Canada's largest airports to privatization, it raises the prospect of a race to the bottom in workforce standards, like those seen at airport concessions operator Canadian Skies Hospitality Group.**

Canadian Skies Hospitality is the concessions operator of YVR's White Spot and Triple O's locations, employing approximately 80 workers whose pay and working conditions are significantly below the standard offered at YVR's competing unionized airport operators. Headquartered in Alberta, Canadian Skies also operates several concessions outlets at Calgary and Edmonton airports.[3] In 2023, management sold parts of its operation to publicly traded multinational SSP Group for approximately $52 million before expanding into YVR with White Spot and Triple O's locations, where it has since invested millions in its airport operations and renovations.[4]

A new survey of Canadian Skies workers at YVR reveals the challenges facing those who provide critical services at North America's top-rated airport. A majority of workers report struggling to make ends meet or taking on a second-job to support themselves, while tipped workers are also required to share their hard-earned tips with management.

Workers at White Spot and Triple O's organized to form a union last year and are currently bargaining their first collective agreement, seeking living wages and working conditions comparable to those secured by other unionized concession workers. The survey exposes gaps in workplace standards and the changes needed to improve conditions.

UNITEHERE! LOCAL 40

A STRONG AIRPORT STARTS WITH STRONG JOBS

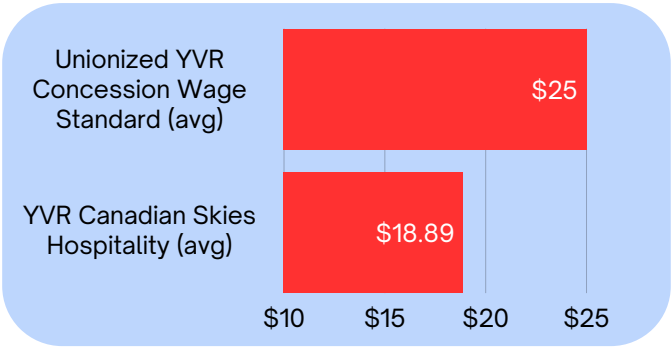
YVR supports more than 115,000 jobs across British Columbia and contributes $13.5 billion to the province's GDP annually.[5] As a major economic driver accountable to the greater community, YVR has a responsibility to ensure fair employment standards are upheld across its operations, including by the companies operating its concessions.

Airport concession work can be perceived as temporary or entry-level, yet many of the sector's workers are older adults and predominantly female. These roles require skill, reliability, and the ability to work under pressure. Fair wages and stable working conditions help attract and retain experienced staff, supporting the quality of airport operations and the passenger experience. At YVR, unionized concession workers have fought for, and secured, higher wages, benefits, and protections to ensure fair scheduling and job security, with entry-level wages averaging around $25 an hour. Their collective agreements have helped establish a benchmark for employment standards across the airport.

ONE AIRPORT, TWO WAGE STANDARDS

Contrary to these established standards, Canadian Skies Hospitality's average wage across all positions in YVR is just $18.89. This is about $6 below the $25/hour wage standard for unionized airport concession workers at YVR. It also falls nearly $9 below Metro Vancouver's living wage of $27.85 per hour, which represents the hourly income needed to cover basic necessities and maintain a decent standard of living in the region (Figure 1).[6]

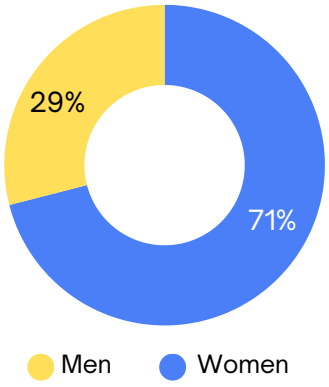
Figure 1: Comparable Wage Standards



The low standard at Canadian Skies has implications beyond the 80 workers directly affected as it risks creating a race to the bottom, by creating a two-tier workforce and putting downward pressure on wages and working conditions. To maintain high operational quality and retain workers, YVR should ensure that the employment standards established across its airport are not eroded by operators offering low wages and few benefits.

THE REAL COST OF WORKING FOR CANADIAN SKIES HOSPITALITY

Figure 2: Respondents by gender



A recent survey of servers, cashiers, cooks, bartenders, and supervisors at YVR's White Spot and Triple O's provides insight into the challenges facing airport concession workers. Of those surveyed, 71% of respondents are women (Figure 2), reflecting the predominantly female workforce in an industry where service work is often undervalued. A substantial percentage of respondents are older: **43% of respondents were over the age of 25**, many at a stage in life when stable income is essential to supporting themselves and planning for the future.

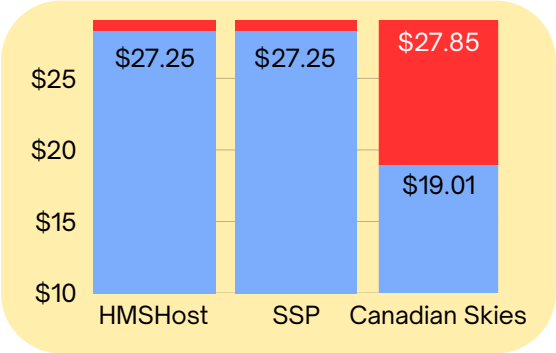
Although Canadian Skies has invested millions in its airport operations, workers continue to face three major challenges: low wages that force many to take on additional jobs, the lack of transit support, and concerns about the company's tip-pooling practices.

1 LOW WAGES FORCE WORKERS TO TAKE ON ADDITIONAL JOBS

The high cost of living in Metro Vancouver makes it difficult for workers to support themselves on lower wages. Canadian Skies line cooks, for example, earn an average of just $19.01 per hour, compared with $27.25 at unionized concessions operated by major companies SSP and HMSHost, whose wages are close to Metro Vancouver's $27.85 living wage (Figure 3).

Although White Spot and Triple O's are often associated with tipped restaurant work, **68% of Canadian Skies employees work in non-tipped positions**, meaning most rely entirely on their hourly wages to make ends meet (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Unionized YVR Line Cook Wages vs. Metro Vancouver Living Wage



The survey findings highlight the financial pressure workers face. Over half (56%) of respondents reported working full-time (Figure 5), while 53% hold multiple jobs to supplement their income (Figure 6). Despite these efforts, **68% say they cannot afford to support themselves or their families on their current hours** (Figure 7).

Survey responses also emphasize the pressure of rising living costs. Respondents were able to identify more than one expense as among their most difficult to manage. **Housing was by far the most frequently identified expense, cited by 67% of respondents, followed by transportation, food, and child and family care** (Figure 8). Food was also a significant pressure, with 55% ranking it as their second most difficult expense.

Figure 4: Tipped workers vs. non-tipped workers

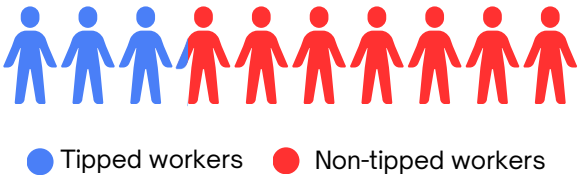


Figure 5



Figure 6

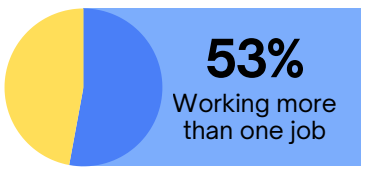
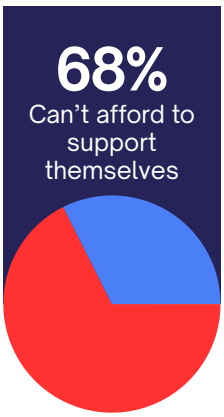


Figure 7



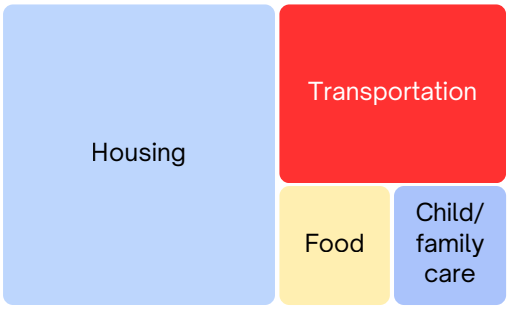
These findings show that even working full-time, or taking on additional employment, is not enough for many workers to keep up with the cost of living. For workers already balancing demanding service jobs and lengthy commutes, taking on additional employment leaves little time for rest, family, or personal commitments. Workers should not have to sacrifice their well-being to make a living while providing essential services at one of Canada's busiest and most lucrative airports.

> *"I work two full-time jobs just to make ends meet, and my commute to YVR takes over an hour. Between working and commuting, I barely have any time for myself. It's hard to have a life outside of work."* Satwinder Kaur, Triple O's Cook

2 LACK OF TRANSIT SUPPORTS FOR LOW-WAGE WORKERS

Getting to and from YVR presents another challenge for workers. The survey findings show just how much time workers spend getting to and from the airport, with nearly one-third (29%) of surveyed Canadian Skies workers reporting commutes of over an hour. Workers commuting from across Metro Vancouver also face considerable transportation costs getting to and from YVR. With early morning shifts beginning at 4 a.m. or nighttime shifts ending after midnight, taking public transit can be difficult or unfeasible, leaving some workers with little choice but to pay for alternative transportation out of pocket.

Figure 8: Expenses Difficult to Manage (Ranked)



Notably, **33% of respondents ranked transportation as their most difficult expense to keep up with**. This is particularly significant given that other unionized operators at YVR already provide transit subsidies to help offset commuting costs. Canadian Skies, however, has not agreed to provide the same support, leaving workers to absorb these expenses themselves.

> *"One night after a late shift, the SkyTrain had already stopped running, and I couldn't afford an Uber home. I ended up sleeping in the airport waiting area and going straight back to work the next morning. It was exhausting, but I didn't have another way to get home."* Matthias Cortez, White Spot server

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No worker should have to choose between an unaffordable trip home and sleeping at their workplace before returning for another shift. Providing a transit subsidy would help offset the financial burden of commuting to YVR, particularly for low-paid employees who travel long distances or work outside of regular transit hours.

3 TIP SKIMMING AND A LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

For servers and bartenders, tips make up a significant portion of their income. Canadian Skies employees put considerable effort into providing attentive service to passengers in a fast-paced environment where reliable and welcoming service is essential.

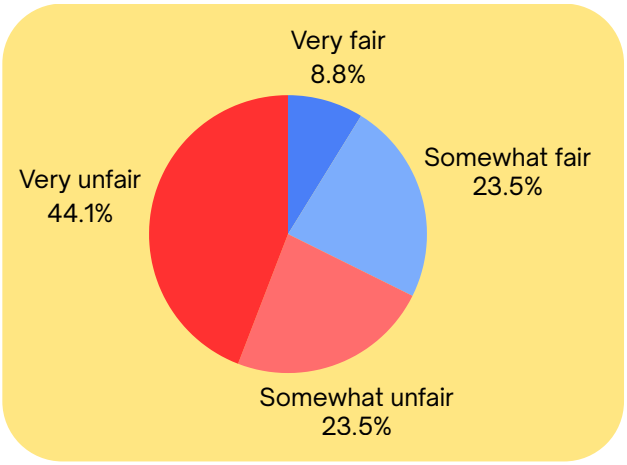
However, workers have raised serious concerns over management's appropriation of their tips. Canadian Skies management requires tipped workers to share a greater portion of their tips with other staff, including management, diverging from practices at competing YVR dine-in restaurants. Servers and bartenders also report having to tip out positions even when those roles are not staffed during their shifts.

A worker has filed a complaint with the BC Employment Standards Branch, alleging that Canadian Skies managers who do not perform serving or bartending duties receive $500 per week from the tip pool. This arrangement requires tipped workers to give up a significant portion of their earnings to supplement other employees' pay, even as many struggle to support themselves on their own wages.

The survey results show the extent of workers' dissatisfaction. Overall, 44% of respondents described the current tip-pooling system as "not fair at all", while a further 24% considered it "somewhat unfair" (Figure 9).

In total, **68% of respondents viewed the system as inequitable**. Dissatisfaction was consistent among 100% of White Spot respondents, where 67% said the system was "not fair at all" and the remaining 33% considered it "somewhat unfair". This is especially significant given that the majority of Canadian Skies' tipped employees work at White Spot, meaning the concerns are concentrated among a large share of the workers most impacted by the tip-out policy.

Figure 9: Canadian Skies Tip Pooling Practices



When workers asked management to reduce the tip-out rate to bring it in line with other unionized concessions at YVR, Canadian Skies management refused. Instead, they are using tips to subsidize pay of management and others with no accountability. Workers who rely on tips to supplement their income should not have to give up a larger share of their hard-earned gratuities to offset the company's low wages.

PUTTING WORKERS BACK ON THE RADAR

Food and retail concessions are an important source of non-aeronautical revenues for YVR. As the federal government moves to open Canada's airports to private investment, questions are mounting about what this could mean for workers. Prime Minister Carney's plan could allow private investors to sublease terminal facilities, subcontract airport operations, and partner with subsidiaries to develop and operate airport infrastructure.[7] While details remain unclear, private investment in YVR raises concerns about the impact on low-wage workers and potential erosion of job security and employment standards.

Regardless of YVR's future ownership structure, ensuring higher standards that enable workers to support themselves and their families in Canada's most unaffordable city must remain a priority. The expansion of Canadian Skies should not come at the expense of the wages, benefits, and workplace protections that airport workers have spent years establishing. YVR must take a more active role in ensuring its concessionaires uphold fair and consistent employment standards, starting with holding Canadian Skies accountable and ensuring the company engages in meaningful, good-faith bargaining towards a first collective agreement.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAIR EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ACROSS YVR CONCESSIONS

1

Establish fair wages and consistent employment standards

Canadian Skies Hospitality should bring wages and benefits in line with standards achieved by other unionized concession operators at YVR.

2

Ensure transparent and fair tip distribution

Canadian Skies must establish clear tip-pooling policies, disclose how tips are collected and distributed, and not rely on profits from tipped workers to subsidize the pay of management and other workers.

3

Provide transportation support

Canadian Skies should introduce a transit subsidy comparable to those offered by other unionized airport operators. This measure would help reduce financial security and the additional costs workers face commuting to YVR.

4

Strengthen accountability for concession standards

YVR should set clear employment expectations for concession operators, monitor compliance with contractual requirements, and address operators that fall short. All operators should comply with employment and labour laws and uphold fair workplace standards.

A RESPONSIBILITY TO ALL AIRPORT WORKERS

YVR's reputation depends on the thousands of people who keep the airport running and serve travellers from around the world. YVR can hold concession operators accountable and ensure Canadian Skies workers are not left behind. With potential privatization on the horizon, YVR must ensure that its commitment to fair wages and decent working conditions extends to every worker, regardless of who operates the airport or its concessions.

The survey of Canadian Skies Hospitality workers at YVR's White Spot and Triple O's was conducted by UNITE HERE Local 40 between September 18 and October 7, 2026.

1 2025 Consolidated Financial Statements, YVR, April 1, 2026
2 https://www.yvr.ca/en/business/careers/living-wage
3 https://gonorth.ca/our-markets
4 https://www.foodtravelexperts.com/media/yp2hcaxd/ssp_ar25_financial-statements.pdf
5 https://news.yvr.ca/airport-workers-day/
6 https://www.livingwagebc.ca/livingwagerates2025
7 Policy statement on investment at National Airports System airports operated by airport authorities, Transport Canada, March 7, 2025.