

Yellowknife Airport Evolution

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has passed legislation to establish a revolving fund for the Yellowknife Airport. This initiative will allow for significant improvements to the Airport that will enhance services for users and make the Airport a bigger economic driver for the entire North.

The new revolving fund will come into force on July 1st along with a new Airport Improvement Fee and increases to aeronautical charges. Mr. Speaker, the increased revenue generated by the Airport will allow us to make critical changes to the airport facilities to increase business opportunities and improve the quality of service for travellers.

The Department of Infrastructure continues to communicate with air carriers, businesses, residents, and other stakeholders about these changes and is committed to ensuring they are able to provide input into how these funds are used.

The Yellowknife Airport will benefit from the advice of several committees and Members of this Legislative Assembly. Airport committees include the Airline Consultative Committee and the Airline Operating Committee, which provide the opportunity for the airline community to meet formally with airport management to discuss issues of concern and to develop potential solutions.

The Economic Advisory Committee will provide a forum for communications with businesses, utilize the expertise of business leaders, and build community awareness for airport-related opportunities to enhance business and economic

development for the NWT. Committee members will help shape the development of the Yellowknife Airport, attract outside investment, and enable it to act as a catalyst for the wider NWT economy.

The Department of Infrastructure will continue to provide updates to the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment and to seek the Committee's input. The revolving fund budget will be presented as an information item in the Business Plan and Main Estimates of the Department of Infrastructure. Members will also be able to review the Airport's progress in the audited financial statements of the revolving fund that will be published with the GNWT's Public Accounts.

Mr. Speaker, key airport stakeholders also provided input in the development of a draft business plan for the Yellowknife Airport identifying improvements necessary for a strong and effective Airport going forward. The Department of Infrastructure is revising this business plan using public feedback. The revised version will be made public and implementation of the plan will begin in July. All of the actions identified in the business plan will be accompanied by clear timelines for implementation.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Infrastructure plans to renew the Yellowknife Airport business plan on an annual basis. In developing the annual plans, the input of all of the advisory committees and Members of the Legislative Assembly will be critical, and the draft business plan will be shared with the Economic Advisory Committee and the Airline Consultative Committee for their review and input. Each committee will provide advice based on their mandates and expertise, which will include commentary on the Airport's developing capital plan. Annual reports will provide information to the public about how well the Airport is achieving its mission.

As the Department of Infrastructure refines the current business plan, we are not wasting any time beginning improvements to the Yellowknife Airport.

Mr. Speaker, one of the key things we heard from the public about improvements to the Airport is more efficient services. Design and implementation plans are currently being finalized for Common Use Terminal Equipment, which allows airlines to interchange terminals and ultimately shorten check-in wait times. The planned addition of self-service check-in kiosks further reduces the wait for passengers.

The Department of Infrastructure has begun developing a tender to complete design and geotechnical work for an improved de-icing bay at the airport. This improves the efficiency of airline operations while helping ensure on-time departures for passengers.

Pre-design of a new security screening facility is underway to reduce passenger screening time while continuing to maintain a high level of safety and security for passengers and staff. Some of you have probably seen that Javaroma is now serving food and beverages in the departure lounge. This is just the beginning of our plans for additional services, food, and beverages in the security area.

A number of improved services will also support businesses. New phone charging stations will be established throughout the Airport, and Wi-Fi upgrades are also planned. We are creating a Gate 5 Business Centre, which will give mine staff unlimited Internet access and increase their productivity during wait times. Industry-specific security screening will take place at the Airport prior to departure,

rather than at the mines upon arrival. This change will save person-hours and allow staff to work more efficiently.

We also heard that better use of space at the Airport will reduce congestion. The Department of Infrastructure has plans to relocate the Oversize Baggage facility in the check-in area of the Airport to create more passenger queue space. We are also working with Edmonton International Airport to develop an economic growth plan that would support parking facility upgrades, a terminal improvement plan, and a real estate growth plan.

The Department of Infrastructure continues to work with air carriers on new routes. Expanding flight options would provide new travel opportunities for residents while helping support increased tourism within the territory.

The establishment of a revolving fund is enabling the transformation of the Yellowknife Airport into a centre of capital growth, economic investment, and quality service for travellers both outside and within the NWT. The Department of Infrastructure will continue to update airport stakeholders and the general public on the changes we expect to take off in the coming year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.