

Supporting the Northern Aviation Industry

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is following through on its mandate commitment to strengthen connections with public and private sector partners in transportation infrastructure.

Given our vast geography and harsh climate, Northwest Territories communities and businesses rely on the aviation industry for the safe and reliable delivery of people, goods, and services.

That is why the GNWT has made supporting the northern aviation industry a priority. Our work includes focusing efforts on maintaining and improving aviation infrastructure; exploring ways to increase economic benefits in this industry; and working with our partners to take action to fill the aviation skills shortage.

Mr. Speaker, we have 27 public airports in the Northwest Territories, all of which are critical to the economic and social well-being of our residents. They provide essential services, including community resupply, air ambulance, search and rescue, forest fire response, and much more. Ongoing improvements to our airports allow for safe and efficient movement of these and other essential goods and services.

When it comes to investing in aviation infrastructure, some of the improvements our airports have received, or will be receiving soon, include:

- Airfield sweepers for the Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Hay River, Inuvik and Fort Simpson airports;

- Runway rehabilitation at the Hay River, Inuvik, and Yellowknife airports;
- Dust suppressant applications on gravel runways;
- Replacement of the Inuvik air terminal building; and
- Continued investment in improvements to maintain safe, secure, and prosperous airports.

The GNWT also works closely with our federal counterparts and has received additional support to invest in airport infrastructure including:

- Airfield lighting in Fort Smith, Tuktoyaktuk, Aklavik, and Norman Wells;
- Surface overlays in Tulita, Inuvik, Yellowknife, and Norman Wells;
- Drainage improvements in Yellowknife and Sachs Harbour; and
- Emergency response and mobile heavy equipment at the Yellowknife, Hay River, and Norman Wells airports.

The GNWT is also seeking federal funding to continue improving our airports, including funding from the Airport Capital Assistance Program for snow blowers for Fort Smith and Inuvik, new airfield lighting in Fort Simpson, and an overlay of the Hay River runway. We have also submitted applications to the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund for projects to make our airport infrastructure more resilient to climate change.

Mr. Speaker, our government is always looking for ways to increase the economic benefits the aviation industry brings to our communities. We continue to reach out to potential partners and customers to ensure the longevity of the aviation industry in the North, and maintain its growth and success.

I have previously spoken in this House about the Yellowknife Airport Cold Weather Testing Group, who are working to capture economic opportunities and benefits for the local economy through cold weather testing partnerships. This past winter, the Group partnered with Bell Helicopters to host 30 engineers and pilots for approximately 90 days in Yellowknife, infusing an estimated 2.3 million dollars into the local economy.

In recent months, the Cold Weather Testing Group has also had discussions with Mitsubishi to test their medium-sized jets, and Korean Aerospace Industries has inquired about testing their helicopters here. Further planning efforts are underway to develop a preliminary competitor analysis, a marketing framework, and the decision to link the Cold Weather Testing Marketing Strategy to Destination Canada's Business Events Canada Marketing Program for the Aerospace Industry.

We know that our success depends on strong partnerships. The GNWT is pleased to continue our collaboration with partners such as the Northern Air Transport Association. NATA is an organization that has worked for many years to ensure Northern Canada is well-represented in the decisions made about the industry. I would like to thank the NATA leadership for the opportunity to speak at their recent AGM, and look forward to continuing to work together to ensure the safe, secure, accessible, and reliable movement of people and goods throughout the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues discussed at the recent NATA AGM that is of great importance to supporting the aviation industry in the North was addressing the skills shortage the aviation industry is currently facing.

In the Northwest Territories and all across Canada, there is a shortage of pilots and aircraft maintenance workers, and we expect this shortage will continue to increase.

Addressing this gap in the Northwest Territories will require support from government, opportunities for local training and industry champions.

Mr. Speaker, this past month, Transport Canada certified the Terry Harrold School of Aviation as an approved flying school. The school is located in Fort Smith and was created by Northwestern Air Lease, Ltd. to help northern residents achieve their pilot licence.

We know from experience that many northerners want the option to train at home and this will give them that option. We also know that flying in the North is unlike anywhere else. This flying school will give students a true sense of what it's like to fly in our northern skies. I want to congratulate Northwestern on their new school and wish them all the success.

Government also has a role to play, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleague, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, in implementing the Skills 4 Success initiative to improve employment success for NWT residents, close skill gaps for in-demand jobs, and more effectively respond to employer and industry needs.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories will continue with the efforts I have described today, and continue to work with our public and private aviation industry partners to strengthen and support the aviation industry in the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.