

NWT Airport Improvements

Mr. Speaker, airports are an integral component of our northern transportation infrastructure. Air travel contributes to social cohesion by enabling relatives and friends to stay connected. Air travel saves lives through our medevac system and facilitates business enterprises throughout our vast territory. Many communities rely on air travel to deliver essential goods.

The Department of Infrastructure is committed to working with public and private sector partners to continuously maintain and improve airport infrastructure and operations. Today, I am pleased to report that a number of projects have been completed or are underway.

Last year, our government successfully completed the replacement of the airfield lighting at the airports in Tuktoyaktuk and Norman Wells, thanks to over \$3 million dollars in funding from Transport Canada under the Airport Capital Assistance Program and \$200,000 dollars from our government. The previous airfield lighting dated back to the 1970s and was in need of replacement. Not only will the new lights be more effective for aircraft pilots, they're also energy efficient LED lighting, which will help our government meet territorial and national commitments to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Speaker, our government recently completed runway surface rehabilitations at the airports in Hay River, Inuvik, and Yellowknife. Federal and territorial funds were also used to construct new airports in Trout Lake in 2014 and Colville Lake in 2012 under the Building Canada Plan. These projects have increased the safety and capacity of air travel in the communities and the longer runways allow for the use of pressurized medevac aircraft.

The Department is continuing to collaborate with NAV Canada so the aviation industry can access weather information 24/7 for all public airports up to 75 nautical miles from the airport sites. The availability of real-time accurate weather data is critical to the aviation industry, allowing for improved decision-making by the medevac service contractor and the safe operation of airports.

In addition to improving airport infrastructure, our government is also committed to preventative maintenance, such as the improvement of the drainage systems at the airports in Hay River, Inuvik, Yellowknife, Aklavik and Sachs Harbour. Studies have shown that some airports have subsurface drainage problems leading to ongoing patching and repairs to airfields. Drainage improvements are expected to increase airfield stability and reduce the frequency of asphalt and granular overlays, thereby helping to reduce future maintenance costs and improve airfield reliability.

Looking ahead, a very exciting project is included in the 2018-2019 capital plan, the replacement of the air terminal building in Inuvik. The current terminal was constructed in 1958 and has reached the end of its service life. Detailed design and site preparation is scheduled to take place in April 2018, with construction starting in 2019, followed by demolition of the existing air terminal building in 2021.

The design takes into account the requirements set out by standards and guidelines for air terminals, such as public space, baggage systems, concessions, airport operation and administration, and a tower height that meets required specifications. Overall, travellers will notice an improved passenger experience and an airport that better fits the needs of various users.

These improvement projects would not be possible without collaboration from the federal government. The Airport Capital Assistance Program, for example, has allowed for \$24 million dollars in improvements since 1995 to airports across the territory, with roughly \$3 million in infrastructure funding invested by our government.

Mr. Speaker, as the largest and busiest airport in the Northwest Territories, the Yellowknife Airport continues to grow and improve. As part of this transformation, parking was recently expanded to include additional vehicle spaces, more convenient parking was added for tourism operator buses, and we implemented a new free downloadable Pay-by-Phone parking app in select areas.

Going forward, we are committed to a new security screening system which will improve wait times for travellers. This also supports the number one priority of the Yellowknife Airport, and airports across the Northwest Territories, which is, safety and security. Additional enhancements include a new retail gift shop opening soon and the installation of common use terminals, which will create a better travel experience for passengers. The transformation of the Yellowknife Airport will also allow for additional revenues and employment opportunities for residents of the North.

Various external stakeholders have played a significant role in guiding the transformation of the Yellowknife Airport, such as the Yellowknife Airport Economic Advisory Committee. The Committee consists of business and industry leaders who meet regularly to provide strategic recommendations and advice.

Mr. Speaker, improvements to NWT airports are vital to supporting safe and efficient travel and to enhancing business opportunities. We will continue to work with our federal partners, air carriers and other stakeholders to make improvements to our air transportation system while investigating new ways to make strategic investments in our infrastructure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.