



A new taskforce has been established to attract federal help for Saint John Airport.
Photo: Brian Comeau/Submitted

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Emma McPhee and Barbara Simpson | Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • Saint John business leaders are launching a new campaign aimed at getting senior government support for Atlantic Canada airports hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce announced Wednesday an online letter-writing campaign aimed at members of Parliament. It also unveiled on its website

business and community surveys to gauge consumer attitude and confidence in airport travel.

"We're trying to understand what it'll take for people to fly again," said Derrick Stanford, president and CEO of the Saint John Airport.

According to Stanford, analysts' best global estimates predict a five-year recovery period to restore passenger and revenue levels to 2019 levels. The Saint John Airport's projections for the next few years are giving the airport until 2026 to reach 2019 levels, Stanford said.

"The demand is low," he said. "The airport system in Canada is modelled around a user pay model. So with no users, it's impossible to keep infrastructure going right now."

In Atlantic Canada, passenger traffic dropped 96 per cent – or 2.1 million fewer passengers – from April to June, according to data from the Atlantic Canada Airports Association in a chamber press release. The association is projecting a loss of \$140 million in revenue based on a decline of 70 to 80 per cent of traffic by year's end in 2020.

In response, the Saint John chamber has launched an advisory committee made up of business, political and economic development leaders working to support the Saint John Airport. The committee is putting asks on the table for both the federal and provincial governments.


"Locally, we are lobbying for access to low-to-no interest loans, the elimination of the airport rent for the remainder of the Saint John Airport lease and making airports eligible for bilateral infrastructure agreements," said David Duplisea, CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, in a press release.

According to Duplisea, without federal assistance, "it's going to be a fairly bleak outlook for recovery and growth in our region."

Another concern, Stanford said, is the uncertainties surrounding when the Atlantic bubble will expand.

"Air Canada would call us multiple times a week, trying to understand what's it going to take for New Brunswick to open," Stanford said.

Currently the airline is offering one flight per day from Saint John to Montreal. Stanford said that Air Canada has been happy with the volumes on that flight, and have tentatively scheduled the start of daily flights to Toronto on Sept. 8.

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with most politicians making masking the new cult, travel volumes will be low for a long time. And NB has border guards - who would want to come here ?

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