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GREATER SAINT JOHN

LOCAL NEWS

NEW AIR TRAVEL PRICING GOOD FOR COMMERCE, SAYS BOT

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SAINT JOHN – New harmonized pricing for Air Canada passenger traffic into three New Brunswick cities is good for business in the Port City and has the potential to attract new enterprises here, says the Saint John Board of Trade.

“It’s another one of those things that people look at when setting up business – having an airport in the community that offers affordable flights to key connections, key business connections,” said Eric Poirier, the board’s chairman.

The Saint John Airport negotiated harmonized pricing with Air Canada in recent months so that an airline ticket would cost the same for travellers flying out of Saint John as it would be for those flying out of Fredericton and Moncton.

The new pricing regime came into effect this spring.

Already, Saint John Airport officials say the new pricing has boosted the number of travellers flying out of the city. So far this year, there are roughly 10,000 – or 10 per cent – more passengers than this time last year.

Poirier said the revised pricing is a major step forward for commerce because being able to connect easily with major markets is critical for growing business in a port city such as Saint John.

“It’s all about making things simpler, easier for the business traveller,” he said. “We have quite a few businesses here that are export in nature and are dealing with customers from abroad. It’s positive that you don’t have to worry about having to shop (around).”

Poirier said it’s particularly convenient and conducive to doing business in Saint John when the closest airport is also an economical choice.

“If it’s simpler to come in and out and do business and fly out of the airport that’s five minutes away from your office or your home, that’s a good day,” he said. “That’s what this accomplishes.”

Air Canada spokeswoman Isabelle Arthur said the southern New Brunswick market is unique with three airports in close proximity and that the new pricing is being offered on a trial basis.

“As we are always looking for ways to stimulate travel in every market we serve, a trial fare structure was recently introduced to encourage passengers to fly from their local airport,” she said, in an emailed statement. “Once the trial period is over this fall, results will be evaluated to determine if these changes become permanent.”

Dave Allen, president and CEO of Saint John Airport, said the harmonization came into effect after a period of negotiation with Air Canada.

"It's a big deal for Saint John because it means you don't have to drive up to Moncton to get cheaper flights or to Fredericton to get cheaper flights," he said. "You can get them here."

Allen said the cost of passenger tickets out of Saint John has historically been anywhere from \$30 to \$150 more expensive at times than the other two cities.

In addition to the new pricing, there have been improved Air Canada scheduling, seat capacity, as well as a busy year with Sunwing Vacations.

It has collectively meant a "great year" for the airport so far, said Allen.

Sunwing, now planning its seventh season in Saint John, has announced the company will return in 2014.

The recent growth in passengers at the Saint John Airport has put the city ahead of all other airports in Atlantic Canada for year-to-date growth for airports that belong to the National Airport System, said Allen.