

The Chamber Urges Government to Save Atlantic Airports

Series of lobbying Initiatives include an MP letter writing campaign and travel surveys

For Immediate Release

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Saint John, NB - The Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce together with the Chamber's Airport Advisory Group, today launched a series of initiatives in support of Atlantic Canada's airports. Federally, the Chamber has launched a letter-writing campaign that encourages residents of Atlantic Canada to write members of Parliament in support of local airports as they struggle to survive the financial fall-out of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the Chamber launched business and community surveys to gauge consumer attitude and confidence of how to travel safely in the current environment.

The Chamber emphasizes the importance of voicing concerns as airports struggle to survive in this current environment. In Atlantic Canada alone, traffic is down by 96 percent, with 2.1 million fewer passengers from April to June, according to data from the Atlantic Canada Airports Association. The association anticipates a decline of 70 to 80 percent of traffic for 2020 – a total of 5.5 million passengers. It projects a loss of \$140 million in revenue.

"Locally, we are lobbying for access to low-to-no interest loans, the elimination of 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 Chamber. "Without assistance from the federal government, it's going to be a fairly bleak outlook for recovery and growth in our region," Duplisea added.

"Access to market has never been more important for growing our economy both from an investment attraction and workforce development perspective." Ron Gaudet, CEO, Economic Development Greater Saint John.

Asks for both Federal and Provincial governments include:

Federal:

- Provide short-term operating grants to help airports maintain financial liquidity
 - Similar to the 10 billion in operational funding provided to US Airports for pandemic relief
- Elimination of airport rent for the remainder of lease
 - Rent is a fee in which Canadian airports pay the federal government

- Assist airports in meeting critical infrastructure capital expenditure needs
 - Such as Airports Capital Assistance Program, National Trade Corridor Fund, Fed/Prov bilateral infrastructure funding

Provincial

- When will the Province eliminate domestic border restrictions? What will it take? Timelines? KPI's?
- Access to funding to restore lost service. NB airports have lost a significant amount of routes and frequency. Airports facing a 5-year recovery to restore passenger and revenue levels to 2019 levels. Will need to market and promote Province again to air carriers.
- Access to funds for capital projects through bi-lateral Infrastructure Agreements – airport reserves have been wiped out. Airports facing a 5-year recovery to restore passenger and revenue levels to 2019 levels.

In a previous letter campaign launched by the Chamber, public response was tremendous with over 14,000 letters sent. “We hope this campaign will be as successful and will allow our MP’s to take our concerns back to Ottawa”, adds Duplisea.

To facilitate the initiative, the Chamber has added a link on their website, www.thechambersj.com, that allows people to simply “point and click” to send a letter to their MP’s as well as access both business and community surveys.

The Chamber has established the advisory committee to shape lobbying efforts on behalf of the Saint John Airport as the airport works to survive the financial fall-out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The group will work to establish connections with airlines and if necessary, seek government intervention to prohibit the cancellation of routes vital to our national and regional connectivity.

The group is comprised of several large and small businesses and organizations that will work to advance the voice of the Saint John Airport in government. It is in the best interests of all members, the business community and the citizens of our region to lead this initiative to ensure the Saint John Airport continues to be a viable resource for the travelling public and an economic driver for our community. Members of the advisory group include, Moosehead, Irving Oil, Commercial Properties, Cooke Aquaculture, City of Saint John, The Saint John Airport, Tabufile, Cox and Palmer, National PR, MP Wayne Long, CanLease, CFO Atlantic, Owens MacFayden, and regional stakeholders EDGSJ and Discover SJ.

*The **Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce** is a nationally accredited business organization dedicated to fostering an economic climate that enhances growth, prosperity, and improved quality of life in the*



community. With close to 700 businesses, representing the interests of approx. 35,000 people, The Chamber is a dynamic advocate and the principal voice for the business community of Greater Saint John. It offers a variety of programs, activities, services, and networking opportunities designed to enhance the business prospects of members and the overall business climate of the area.

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