

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Flair Airlines won't land in Saint John – yet



Derrick Stanford, CEO of the Saint John Airport, said with WestJet cancelling flights to Moncton and Fredericton, there's a risk of other airlines following suit.

Photo: Submitted

 Published 4 hours ago



Emma McPhee | Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • Flair Airlines, which was supposed to launch service in New Brunswick this summer, has pushed back its launch indefinitely, until the Atlantic bubble opens up.

The Saint John Airport was to be its only location in the province. Derrick Stanford, CEO of the Saint John Airport, said the airline and airport are in talks on a regular basis.

In an emailed statement, Sarah Riches, vice-president, commercial for Flair Airlines, said the airline wasn't yet in a position to announce its plans, but they "remain committed to bringing affordable air service to Saint John and area."

"The bubble just makes it impractical for airlines to expand," Stanford said.

The delay with Flair's Saint John launch is only one of many setbacks facing Saint John's beleaguered airport.

With the announcement of WestJet indefinitely suspending service to Fredericton and Moncton starting Nov. 2, Stanford said there's a risk of other airlines following suit.

WestJet, which announced Wednesday it was also suspending service to Sydney, Charlottetown and Quebec City, does not service Saint John. But both airlines that do, Porter and Air Canada, have either delayed the resumption of service or severely reduced service.

Porter Airlines announced this week it would not be resuming flights until Dec. 15, citing ongoing travel restrictions.

Air Canada is offering only one daily flight between Saint John and Montreal. A plan to restart its flight between Saint John and Toronto has been delayed until Nov. 15, pushed back from a planned Oct. 2 resumption, according to Stanford. A statement from Air Canada spokesperson Pascale Déry cited travel restrictions as the reason for the delay.

"The Atlantic bubble is so restrictive. The airlines are bleeding money left, right and centre," Stanford said. "They're starting to act on their concerns. They've got to do what's best for them."

COVID-19 has already taken a heavy toll on Atlantic Canada airports. At the end of September, the Atlantic Canada Airports Association, representing 11 airports in the region, reported a 92 per cent drop in air travel year-over-year from April to the end of August compared to 2019. That represents the loss of 3.7 million passengers.

Year-end projections show a net loss of \$76 million for 2020, according to the association.

Already the Saint John Airport has made a 50 per cent reduction in its workforce and has scrapped its capital plan for 2020 and 2021. Meanwhile, fixed costs remain the same, Stanford said.

"We can't really go anything past (50 per cent) because of safety and federal regulations," Stanford said, adding the airport needs to remain open for things like medivac.

Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce CEO David Duplisea is also keeping his eyes on what's happening in the airline sector.

"Once airlines start to stop routes and stop servicing an area, then there is an indication to other airlines to start to follow," Duplisea said. "It can be like a domino effect."

Duplisea, who said the majority of the chamber's member businesses have been impacted by the lack of airline service, said the association is looking for rapid testing and response at airports and "meaningful financial assistance" for airports from government.

“We're in a pandemic mode, and we need to start thinking about recovery, and what new normal is going to look like,” Duplisea said.

According to Stanford, getting back to a pre-COVID normal is a long way off.

“Analysts are saying it’s going to be five years to see 2019 passenger levels,” Stanford said. “And that’s assuming there’s a vaccine and people feel more comfortable travelling.”

- *With files from Tom Bateman and Clara Pasieka*

 Published 4 hours ago



Comments

My profile

Post a comment

2500 characters remaining

Post

All Comments 1

Steve__Kincade_ 15 hours ago

Such a shame. Saint John is the industrial center of the province but Moncton gets to stay open. Fredericton, I am guessing is open for the politicians so WHY is Saint John still closed? It is not because of COVID no matter what they say since we have the rest of the province open. It is a mystery as to why Saint John is being unfairly put upon once again. Open Saint John Airport or close the entire province. This is the ONLY fair decision to be made here.

Reply 

Report 



COLLAPSE

