The Airport Operators

Official publication of the Alberta Airports Management Association

AAMA
ALBERTA AIRPORTS MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

2025

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Industry steps towards unleaded avgas replacement fuels

How regional airports support local communities

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE ALBERTA AIRPORTS MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

LOGAN BOYD

The Alberta Airports Management Association (AAMA) has concluded another year, marking my ninth year of involvement with the association. This past year has been one of our busiest and most impactful yet!

The previous year ended with the unveiling of our independently authored (HM Aero) Airport Long-Term Viability Study, which aimed to achieve four objectives:

1. Outline the value of Alberta's community airports;
2. Communicate the operating and financial realities;
3. Identify challenges threatening Alberta's community airport network; and
4. Provide targeted and data-backed recommendations to ensure the continued viability of Alberta's community airport network.

Since then, our efforts have been rewarded, as highlighted later in this issue of *The Airport Operators* magazine. The study and subsequent government outreach led to a successful meeting with the premier and the Transportation & Economic Corridors (TEC) minister to discuss the study's findings. This meeting marked the first time the AAMA has ever met with a sitting premier. We will continue our dialogue with the premier's office, TEC, and other ministries throughout 2025 and into 2026, aiming to implement the study's data-backed recommendations. Our goal is to ensure that the issues raised by the AAMA and the study are considered in Alberta's policy and budget decisions.

The AAMA is actively engaged in several other initiatives and tasks. These include authoring the first-ever *Alberta Airports Information Guide*, organizing and hosting the annual conference and training in Edmonton, and strengthening ties and relationships with like-minded industry members and aligned organizations.

In closing, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the remarkable efforts and contributions of my fellow board member and past chair, William Stewart, AAE. Before passing the torch to me, William served as chair of the association for over 10 years—more than half the association's existence—and has served on the board for even longer. His leadership was instrumental in the AAMA achieving all-time highs in membership levels, engagement, and financial sustainability, bringing the association to where it is today. Thank you, William, for your unwavering commitment and invaluable contributions to the organization.

As we look ahead, the AAMA remains committed to advancing the interests of Alberta's community airports network. With continued collaboration and dedication, we are confident that we can achieve even greater milestones in the coming years. On behalf of our board, I wish to extend my gratitude for the ongoing support and engagement of our members!

"We are the voice for a thriving and valued provincial network of community airports."

The Alberta Airports Management Association (AAMA) was formed to present a forum and membership opportunity for airport operators to resolve common issues and problems. The Alberta Airports Management Association (AAMA) is composed of airport operators and companies/individuals associated with airport equipment, supplies and consulting.

Member airports can expect to operate with minimal delays based on timely and accurate information provided by the association through direct consultation, newsletters, annual meetings, maintenance seminars and dialogue with other member airports.

ALBERTA'S COMMUNITY AIRPORTS FACE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

AAMA study calls for urgent funding to support rural airports

The AAMA, which represents operators of Alberta's small and regional airports, commissioned aviation consultancy HM Aero Aviation Consulting to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the province's community airport network. Seen here is the St. Paul Aerodrome.

By Shayna Wiwierski

In Alberta, the small airstrips dotting rural landscapes are vital lifelines. From medevac flights whisking patients to safety to aircraft battling the province's increasingly destructive wildfires, community airports are the unsung heroes of public health and safety. Unfortunately, a new study by the Alberta Airports Management Association (AAMA) reveals a troubling reality—78 per cent of these facilities are not financially self-sustaining, raising alarms about their long-term viability and prompting urgent calls for government action.

The AAMA, which represents operators of Alberta's small and regional airports, commissioned aviation consultancy HM Aero Aviation Consulting to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the province's community airport network, which includes smaller regional hubs like Grande Prairie, down to tiny strips in places like Manning and Elk Point. The findings paint a stark picture of aging infrastructure, mounting operational costs, and a funding model that leaves municipalities shouldering burdens they can scarcely afford.

"We were hearing concerns from our members—things like infrastructure degradation, lack of financial support, and vulnerabilities in regional air service," says Logan Boyd, AAMA chair and airport manager at the Medicine Hat Regional Airport. "These airports are critical, but they're struggling to keep up."

The study identifies high fixed costs as a primary culprit. Maintaining runways built in the 1940s and '50s—many of which have seen only sporadic upgrades—requires significant investment, from snow-clearing crews in Alberta's harsh winters to equipment and staff to meet safety standards. Yet revenue streams remain elusive.

"They're lifelines for communities, but there's only so many opportunities to recover costs from users," says

Rightfully, runways must be inspected more frequently, maintained to exacting standards, and kept clear of snow. Seen here is the Lac La Biche Airport.

The AAMA has taken its case directly to the government. Seen here is the Whitecourt Airport.

Boyd. "Unlike larger airports buoyed by passenger fees or commercial leases, small facilities rely heavily on municipal budgets, which are increasingly stretched thin."

This financial strain has tangible consequences. Alberta Health Services has hesitated to serve some communities with medevac flights due to pavement deterioration and inadequate maintenance staffing. Aerial firefighting, search and rescue, and law enforcement operations, which account for a significant share of traffic at these airports, are also at risk.

"The province is the biggest user of these facilities," says William Stewart, director of terminal services at the Grande Prairie Airport and an AAMA board member. "If they're relying on them, they should be funding them."

The regulatory landscape adds another layer of complexity. While formal regulations for small, registered airports remain minimal, expectations from provincial air carriers have soared. Rightfully, runways must be inspected more frequently, maintained to exacting standards, and kept clear of snow. While this is all for good reason, Boyd says the cost was a struggle for small operators to bear. What's more, carriers are less willing to take risks these days. If they're not comfortable with the condition of a facility, they won't land.

The AAMA has taken its case directly to the government. In a recent face-to-face meeting with Premier Danielle Smith and Transportation Minister Devin Dreeshen, the AAMA presented the study's findings, pressing for both capital and operational funding. The reception, they said, was encouraging.

"The premier was engaged and asked for specifics—like how much it costs to run a community airport for a year," Stewart recalls. The association has since provided that data, hoping to influence the province's next budget cycle.

The study argues that current funding mechanisms fall short. The Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP), the primary provincial grant for small airports, allocates just $2 million to $3 million annually at a 75 per cent cost-share—far below the $15 million the AAMA estimates is needed to address a backlog of capital projects.

The study argues that current funding mechanisms fall short. Seen here is the Wetaskiwin Regional Airport.

The AAMA envisions a future where these facilities thrive as connectors of remote regions, bolstered by policy alignment and investment. Seen here is the Lloydminster Airport.

The association's recommendations are clear: expand STIP eligibility to non-municipal operators, broaden the scope of fundable projects, and establish an operational grant tied to provincial usage—say, a stipend for each medevac landing. Seen here is the MD of Bonnyville Regional Airport.

The Lethbridge Airport.

Eligibility is limited to municipalities and restricted to runway paving and lighting, leaving gaps for needs like weather observation systems or perimeter fencing.

"That $2 million doesn't go far when you've got dozens of airports applying," says Boyd, adding that operational funding, meanwhile, is nonexistent, leaving daily expenses to local taxpayers.

The association's recommendations are clear: expand STIP eligibility to non-municipal operators, broaden the scope of fundable projects, and establish an operational grant tied to provincial usage—say, a stipend for each medevac landing. Boyd says that these are assets for public health and safety, not just municipal priorities. There needs to be clarity on roles—provincial or federal—and stronger support.

For now, Alberta's community airports hang in the balance. The AAMA envisions a future where these facilities thrive as connectors of remote regions, bolstered by policy alignment and investment. But without action, Stewart warns, they may not exist in their current state—or at all. As wildfire seasons intensify and health care demands grow, the stakes could not be higher. For the operators keeping these runways open, the message to the government is simple: help us help you.

"These community airports are an incredibly important portion of the province's activities insofar as both medevac and firefighting, which has been incredibly relevant lately," says Stewart. "I think it's incredibly important that we don't lose these resources that the province uses regularly."

ESSENTIAL FOR GROWTH

How regional airports support local communities

The Wetaskiwin Regional Airport, located an hour south of Edmonton, celebrated 50 years of service in 2024.

By Shayna Wiwierski

Regional airports may not always be in the spotlight, but their role in supporting local communities is immense.

While smaller airports often lack the scheduled commercial services found in larger hubs, they provide important services that contribute to various sectors such as agriculture, health care, tourism, and local events. These airports are also tightly integrated with the communities they serve, providing both economic and social benefits.

In Alberta, two airports— the Wetaskiwin Regional Airport and Slave Lake Airport—demonstrate how these facilities contribute to everything from agricultural support to emergency services, making them vital for both business and daily life in their areas.

The Wetaskiwin Regional Airport, located an hour south of Edmonton, celebrated 50 years of service in 2024. While it lacks scheduled passenger services, it has built a unique position within the community.

"We have hanger homes, so we actually have a community of people that live at our airport. This community is blended with businesses that either rely on the airport to operate or support aircraft operations, that range from aerial application services and flight training to aircraft sales, avionics upgrades, maintenance, and repair services," says Wendy McArthur, airport management coordinator at the Wetaskiwin Regional Airport. "For the most part, we facilitate an indirect contribution to employment and the GDP through supporting the agriculture and flight training industries for the City and surrounding communities and generate some tourism as well since we are attached to the Reynolds-Alberta Museum."

The airport's support for the local economy extends to health care as well. Wetaskiwin provides a crucial medevac service, offering access to fixed-wing aircraft for those requiring specialized care and transport to larger hospitals. The facility also hosts community events, such as a skydiving celebration during its 50th anniversary last year, and partners with the city on a range of local activities.

Notably, Wetaskiwin's airport is not self-sustaining financially.

Wetaskiwin provides a crucial medevac service, offering access to fixed-wing aircraft for those requiring specialized care and transport to larger hospitals.

The Wetaskiwin Airport also plays a key role in training young pilots, helping to address the national pilot shortage by offering education and flight training that keeps the aviation sector growing in Alberta.

"We are subsidized by the local municipality," McArthur explains. This financial support from the city ensures the airport can continue to provide valuable services despite its operating costs exceeding revenues. The airport also plays a key role in training young pilots, helping to address the national pilot shortage by offering education and flight training that keeps the aviation sector growing in Alberta.

Further north, the Slave Lake Airport is a certified facility that plays a critical role in emergency services and industrial support. Pierre Gauthier, airport manager, underscores the airport's importance to the community with a focus on medevac services and forestry operations. The airport is strategically located for quick access to medical transport, serving as a vital link for those needing urgent care in Edmonton, three hours away by road.

"Being three hours away from Edmonton, it provides a quick service to [the city] for those in need," says Pierre Gauthier, airport manager at the Slave Lake Airport Services Commission. "[Medevac] also serves the communities north of us and the surrounding communities."

The airport also supports the forestry industry, providing access for helicopters and firefighting aircraft during the summer months. This creates significant employment in the area, as pilots, crews, and ground

Above: The Slave Lake Airport is a certified facility that plays a critical role in emergency services and industrial support. Inset: The Slake Lake Airport also supports the forestry industry, providing access for helicopters and firefighting aircraft during the summer months.

staff all rely on the airport for their operations.

Beyond emergency services, Slave Lake supports the oil and gas industries. Charter flights and private flights are regular occurrences, often related to industrial needs in the surrounding area. However, Gauthier notes that, while the airport has seen an influx of private pilots, the number of helicopter operators based at the airport has declined, which may point to broader industry challenges.

Despite these fluctuations, the community benefits from events that bring the town together, including a skydive event in 2021 and in August of this year, a Fly-In and Airport Discovery celebration is planned for the airport's 60th anniversary. These events provide the local population with opportunities to engage with aviation firsthand, whether by participating in a skydive or touring medevac aircraft and forestry helicopters.

Both Wetaskiwin and Slave Lake face challenges in maintaining and growing their services. Wetaskiwin, for example, is working on a multi-year pavement rehabilitation project, however, has utilized all sources of grant funding, leaving the remaining costs of the pavement in need of rehabilitation to be funded by the municipality. Growth is unlikely, or will be very slow, without further airport infrastructure investments that facilitate and attract airport growth, like extending the runway or developing more hangar spaces. Yet, McArthur admits that the airport operates at a loss every year.

The local government steps in to provide financial support to keep the airport running, a model that is not unique to Wetaskiwin, but common for many regional airports in Alberta.

"The city sees the value of the airport to the community and subsidizes our operations accordingly," says

McArthur. "There is property tax collected on all the hangar properties, so that does generate some revenue going back to the municipality. For the most part, a small amount of user fees is the only revenue we generate."

Slave Lake, meanwhile, is grappling with unique environmental challenges. The airport's proximity to Lesser Slave Lake means that shoreline erosion threatens its runway. The airport is currently seeking funding to install protective measures, such as sheet pilings, to safeguard its operations. Despite these challenges, Gauthier remains optimistic about the future, especially for airports that serve critical industries like forestry and medevac.

The future of regional airports in Alberta is closely tied to the support they receive from local municipalities and the provincial government. Both McArthur and Gauthier agree that while their airports provide significant value to the community, they remain underfunded, particularly in comparison to larger facilities.

"I think it's becoming challenging with the cost of operating for small airports that don't generate a lot of revenue," says Gauthier. "I think there's a definite challenge there for them to continue operating, to continue plowing snow and maintain their lighting system or their asphalt without more support from the Alberta government."

Regional airports like Wetaskiwin and Slave Lake are not just places where airplanes land and take off—they are integral to the fabric of their local communities. They support industries, provide emergency services, contribute to economic development, and offer spaces for recreation and education. As aviation technology evolves, especially with the growing use of drones and remote piloted systems (RPAS), these airports will continue to be central to Alberta's economic and social life, even as they navigate the challenges of funding and sustainability.

"We're very much part of the community," says Gauthier. "Airplanes come and go daily and whether you're at the campground or in your home or business, you can see them coming and going right out your window. We're definitely a big part of the community."

AIRFIELD ELECTRICAL SAFETY: NAVIGATING A HIGH-STAKES SYSTEM

Unlike the familiar parallel voltage-driven circuits found in commercial buildings, airfield lighting operates on a series current-driven model—a design that presents unique challenges and significant safety risks.

When it comes to electrical systems, airfields are not your typical setup.

Unlike the familiar parallel voltage-driven circuits found in commercial buildings, airfield lighting operates on a series current-driven model—a design that presents unique challenges and significant safety risks. As the lifeblood of airport operations, airfield electrical systems demand highly specialized knowledge and a strict adherence to safety protocols.

For Anthony Kish, an experienced airfield electrician at the Lethbridge Airport, the dangers of working with airfield electrical systems are never far from his mind.

"It's a whole different ballgame," Kish explains. "The voltages involved can potentially be between 50 to 5,000 volts. Safety is of the upmost importance when working with it."

Airfield electrical systems are designed to keep running under any condition, ensuring that crucial lighting such as runway edge lights and approach beacons remain operational even in the face of extreme weather or technical malfunctions. However, this robustness comes with a dark side: a lack of personal safety features.

Kish says that unlike commercial systems, which have built-in protection for workers, the airfield system isn't designed for that. The goal is to keep the system running, not to protect the person working on it. This makes working on the airfield a high-risk job, requiring extensive training and careful adherence to safety procedures.

The design of airfield circuits—built around a series current-driven model—makes the systems not only dangerous, but also more difficult to repair. The complexity of troubleshooting and maintaining these systems is one reason why airfield electricians must have specialized training and certification.

In Alberta, this requirement is supported by legislation, which restricts electrical work on airfields to those who are certified for airfield lighting systems, however, one of the biggest hurdles in airfield electrical work is the scarcity of qualified electricians.

"There's few qualified and trained electricians across Canada that work on the series circuit systems," Kish says. "And so, it's really hard to troubleshoot or get help really when you're looking for this, so that's why we stick together."

Keeping up with the regulations is no small task. Electrical systems on airfields must comply with rigorous standards set by Transport Canada, which cover everything from circuit design to safety protocols. The Canadian Airports Electrical Association (CAE) plays a vital role in ensuring that airfield electricians stay compliant and up to date. Through its Canadian Airports National Electrical Workshop (CANEW), CAE

Airfield electrical systems are designed to keep running under any condition.

offers annual hands-on training, allowing electricians to refresh their skills and learn about new safety issues.

"Specialized training and experience is extremely necessary when dealing with airport systems," says Kish. "You can really rely on the training that you've experienced and all the training that you get from the CANEW program to help mitigate [issues] because airfield lighting is like nothing else in North America. It's such a different beast."

The risk of fatal injury on the job is something every airfield electrician contemplates daily. But Kish notes that the stakes are higher than

Above: The design of airfield circuits—built around a series current-driven model—makes the systems not only dangerous, but also more difficult to repair. Inset: Anthony Kish, an experienced airfield electrician at the Lethbridge Airport.

personal safety alone since on the airfield, it's not just about going home safely at the end of the day—it's about ensuring the safety of those working at the airport and the people in the planes.

To mitigate these risks, airfields have strict safety protocols. In many airports, regulations mandate that only certified airfield electricians are allowed to handle airfield lighting systems. Even simple tasks like checking a light fixture or adjusting a bulb are off-limits to non-certified personnel. The reason is clear: the dangers involved are simply too great.

"We operate in an environment where there are no second chances," Kish says. "The risks are always present, but our safety procedures are designed to protect everyone—from the workers to the passengers in the air."

Like many industries, airfield electrical systems are evolving with new technologies. Recently, many airports have begun transitioning to more energy-efficient systems, such as LED lights, in an effort to reduce energy consumption and improve the sustainability of airport operations. However, these new technologies do not necessarily reduce the danger.

"The introduction of LED lighting and other modern technologies doesn't make the system any less dangerous," Kish explains. "The series circuits still carry high voltages, and the safety concerns remain the same. It's just as risky as the older systems."

As airports work to implement these technologies, the cost of maintaining safety and ensuring compliance remains high. Keeping up with the constant evolution of airfield lighting systems, while ensuring that proper safety measures are in place, requires ongoing investment in both technology and training. Despite the advancements, airfield electrical systems remain an extremely high-risk environment.

Airfield electrical work is one of the most specialized and dangerous forms of electrical maintenance. With systems that require expert knowledge, extensive training, and adherence to strict safety protocols, airfield electricians are the unsung heroes ensuring the smooth operation of airports across the country.

"Airfield lighting is unlike anything else," says Kish. "You need to ensure that all the work is being done by a qualified, certified airfield electrician and that needs to be a high priority. People need to understand that airfield lighting is a one-of-a-kind system and it is very dangerous."

GETTING THE LEAD OUT

Industry steps towards unleaded avgas replacement fuels

Piston-engine aircraft departing Wetaskiwin Regional Airport.

100 low lead aviation fuel, or avgas, is a staple at airports throughout Alberta, powering piston-engine aircraft operated for general aviation, flight training, aerial work, and air taxi purposes. Based on Transport Canada materials from 2014, 65 to 70 million litres of avgas are used annually by approximately 30,000 aircraft nationwide.

Avgas contains lead to boost octane and limit detonation in piston aircraft engines. Avgas is now the only leaded transportation fuel that remains in large-scale use in Canada and represented approximately 17 per cent of national airborne lead emissions in 2009 per Environment and Climate Change Canada. With growing concerns for public and environmental health, the aviation industry is making strides to develop unleaded avgas alternatives to sustain piston-engine fleets while decreasing their impacts.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Pressure is increasing in the United States to develop and operationalize unleaded avgas replacement fuels. In 2023, the Environmental Protection Agency released its determination that lead emissions from aircraft engines cause or contribute to air pollution that may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public health and welfare. The agency now has a duty to propose regulatory standards for aircraft lead emissions. The 2024 Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act supports the continued availability of avgas until the end of 2030, or when a certified unleaded alternative is available.

In an unprecedented move, the municipal owner of Reid-Hillview Airport in California banned the sale of leaded avgas in 2022 – the facility has since begun offering unleaded fuels, although the prohibition generated considerable discourse and scrutiny.

The U.S. federal government is actively leading programs to advance unleaded avgas replacement efforts. The Piston Engine Aviation Fuels Initiative (PAFI) was launched in 2014 to identify, evaluate, and deploy unleaded avgas replacement fuels

Aviation fuelling system at Bonnyville Regional Airport.

and support fleetwide authorization. Launched in 2022, Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions (EAGLE) was created as a government-industry partnership to safely replace leaded aviation fuels by 2030.

Three producers are advancing candidate 100-octane replacement fuels: Swift Fuels (100R), General Aviation Modifications Inc. (G100UL), and LyondellBassell/VP Racing (UL100E). Both Swift Fuels and General Aviation Modifications currently have unleaded replacement fuels available for sale at select U.S. airports, with use growing in recent years. Swift Fuels also offers a 94-octane product suitable for a subset of piston-engine aircraft. Research and testing continue on each fuel to ensure safety and suitability for use.

THE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE AND OUTLOOK

Although Canada has not yet seen the same regulatory and industry momentum as in the U.S., the implementation of unleaded avgas replacements may be on the horizon. The National Research Council is a participant in the PAFI

Technical Advisory Committee in an information-gathering and research capacity and has contributed to ground and flight testing through its altitude chamber and Harvard Mk. IV aircraft.

Representatives from the Government of Canada and National Research Council participated in the 2022 stakeholder briefing on EAGLE, although no further involvement has been announced. The Canadian Owners and Pilots Association has joined EAGLE as a member.

While progress is being made towards the success of unleaded avgas replacement fuels, the path to widespread availability at Alberta airports remains uncertain. Key factors that may affect this transition could include regulatory requirements, the scaling of fuel production to meet demand, supply and distribution networks, and economic considerations, such as fuel pricing.

Through actions such as preparing business cases for carrying unleaded fuels, readying storage and dispensing infrastructure, and revising procedures for fuel testing, handling, and into-aircraft services, airport operators will play a critical role in the potential success of unleaded avgas replacement fuels in Alberta.

Unleaded G100UL fuel bowser at Reid-Hillview Airport. Photo by General Aviation Modifications Inc.

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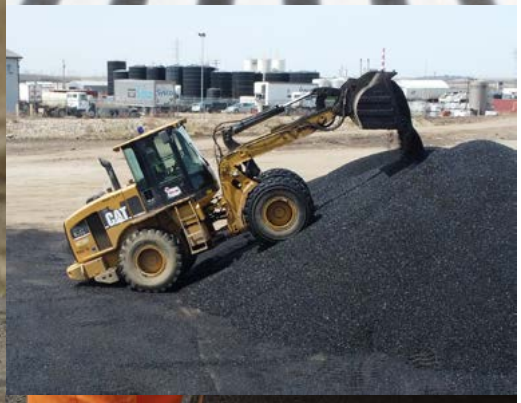

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Training exercises help responders not only practice their skills, but also build teamwork and understand the dynamics of an airport emergency.

READY FOR THE UNEXPECTED

How airport emergency preparedness keeps operations safe

By Shayna Wiwierski

As air travel continues to grow, the importance of effective emergency preparedness at airports becomes increasingly critical. Whether responding to a fire, a crash, or a security incident, airports must be ready for any situation. But ensuring that preparedness is not as simple as just having the right equipment or plans in place. It requires ongoing training, coordination, and a thorough understanding of both the airport's unique risks and the capabilities of the emergency responders.

According to Jamie Coutts, a consultant with Seahawk Services and Growing Up Fire, the level of preparedness varies significantly between larger and smaller airports.

"The big airports like Edmonton, Calgary, and Winnipeg have full-time personnel and dedicated fire halls on-site, which ensures they're always ready to respond," says Coutts. "The smaller ones usually do not, and so, the local fire department – whether they like it or not – is in charge of that."

One key area that many airports tend to underestimate is the complexity of airport-specific operations. Coutts says that airport personnel often forget that the general public doesn't understand airport processes. The average person doesn't know about the aircraft types, fuel volumes, or the unique interaction between ground vehicles and aircraft. This lack of awareness can pose a serious risk during an emergency, where clarity and precise coordination are essential for quick and safe action.

To address this, Coutts emphasizes the need for continuous airport familiarization training.

"Training needs to go beyond basic fire drills and include real-world scenarios at the airport," he states.

Inset: In a world where the unexpected can occur at any time, airports must remain vigilant. Right: Post-incident recovery can take days or even weeks, especially if an investigation is required.

This is where live exercises, such as using vehicles to simulate aircraft accidents, become vital. These exercises help responders not only practice their skills, but also build teamwork and understand the dynamics of an airport emergency. By closing the airport, monitoring traffic, and coordinating multiple teams, airports can simulate an emergency environment that closely mirrors real incidents.

For smaller airports, budget and staffing constraints often limit the scope of training. However, Coutts offers practical solutions.

“Invite as many people for as many tours as they’re willing to come for. Do the tabletop exercises with anyone that’s willing to participate and if you can move up to the bigger live exercises, the faster you can do that, the better,” he says. “You want people to be familiar and comfortable at the airport and with those processes that happen.”

New technologies, particularly in communication systems, are also reshaping how airports manage emergencies. Alberta’s transition to a digital radio system for first responders, for example, has introduced some challenges, as airports must now manage multiple communication systems. Coutts says that airports have to juggle ground-to-ground and ground-to-air communications, and then they have to integrate the new first responder systems into their operations. This technological complexity underscores the need for regular training to ensure that communication systems are effectively integrated into emergency operations.

Once an emergency is resolved, airports face another challenge: returning to normal operations. Post-incident recovery can take days or even weeks, especially if an investigation is required. Coutts stresses that airport operations must be prepared for this downtime.

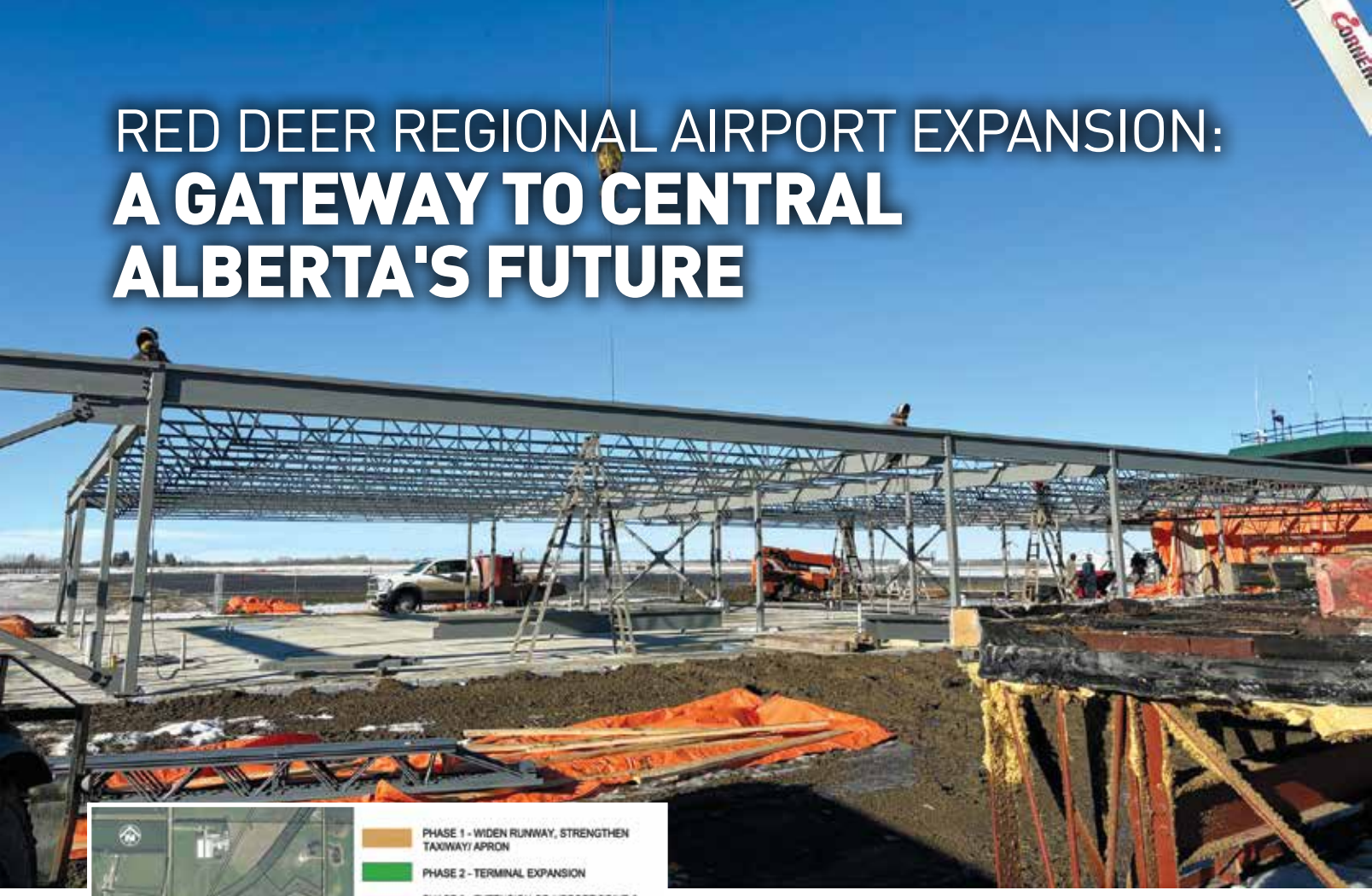
“Understanding what’s going to happen after something happens is important,” he says. “Was there an aircraft vehicle incursion? Was there an actual event that happened? Did somebody crash? There’s going to be a timeline after that for investigation, cleanup, repairs, and then back to normal operations.”

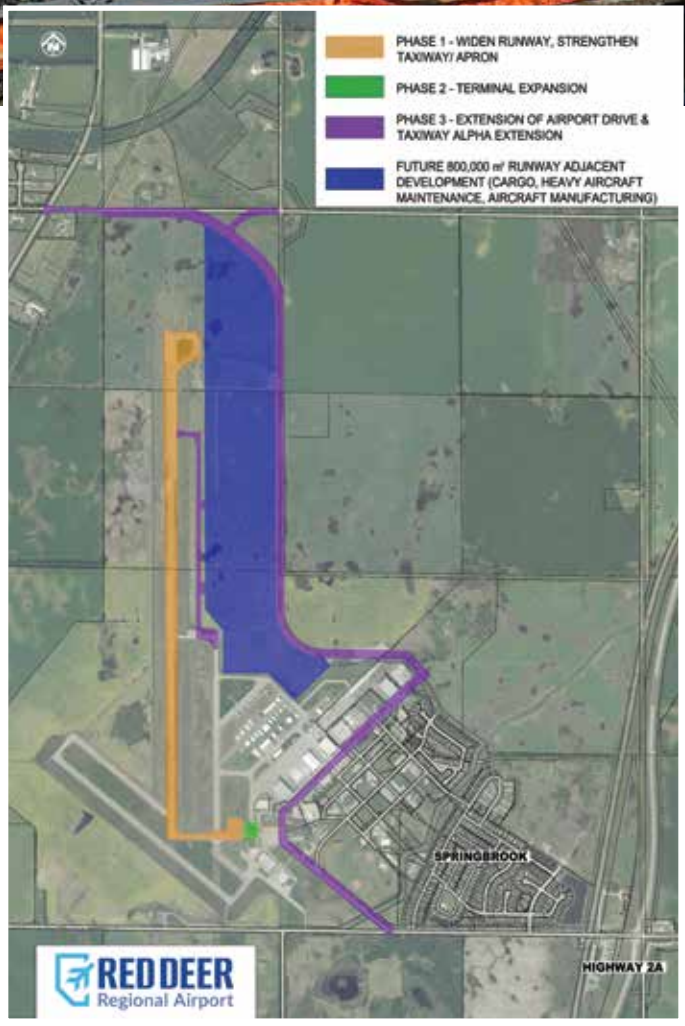
In a world where the unexpected can occur at any time, airports must remain vigilant. Through continuous training, coordination with local responders, and embracing new technologies, airports can ensure that they are always ready to keep passengers and staff safe, no matter the crisis.

Looking ahead, Coutts predicts two major trends that will impact emergency preparedness: increased air traffic and limited funding.

"We’re just going to keep getting bigger numbers of aircraft moving around. I also don’t think the funding is going to keep up the pace of that increased traffic,” says Coutts. “So, I think there’s just going to be more opportunity for bad things to happen and I think we’re seeing it in the news every day today. And so, I think that they have to keep pushing forward to have a current emergency program and that it’s actually trained on constantly so people know what’s going on.”

RED DEER REGIONAL AIRPORT EXPANSION: A GATEWAY TO CENTRAL ALBERTA'S FUTURE





Above: The Red Deer Regional Airport (YQF) is undergoing a transformative three-phase expansion that is set to redefine travel, commerce, and connectivity in the region.

In the heart of Central Alberta, surrounded by rolling plains and thriving communities, the Red Deer Regional Airport (YQF) is undergoing a transformative three-phase expansion that is set to redefine travel, commerce, and connectivity in the region.

Phase 1, completed in 2022, marked a major milestone with the widening of the main runway by 50 feet, strengthening and expanding Taxiway Bravo, and enhancing the main taxiway. These upgrades now allow the airport to accommodate larger aircraft, including Boeing 737s, significantly increasing its operational capacity.

Phase 2, the construction of a brand-new terminal, officially opened in September 2024, coinciding with the celebration of the Red Deer Regional Airport Authority's 25th anniversary. This 10,000-square-foot addition features enhanced security screening, a baggage claim area, space for future customs services, and the ability to process up to 189 passengers from a full-capacity Boeing 737-800. This expansion elevates the passenger experience and further positions YQF as a key travel hub for the region.

Phase 2, the construction of a brand-new terminal, officially opened in September 2024, coinciding with the celebration of the Red Deer Regional Airport Authority's 25th anniversary. Photo by the Snap Happy Photographer.

The three phases are more than just an airport expansion, they represent a bold vision for Central Alberta's future. Photo by the Snap Happy Photographer.

The story continues with the expansion of Airport Drive in Phase 3, currently set to wrap up in spring 2025. In collaboration with the Government of Alberta, Red Deer County, and the City of Red Deer, this phase will transform Airport Drive by creating direct access from Highway 2A and Township Road 374. This crucial infrastructure upgrade will not only streamline traveler access, but also enhance emergency response routes, prioritizing safety, efficiency, and long-term growth.

Together, these three phases are more than just an airport expansion, they represent a bold vision for Central Alberta's future. The Red Deer Regional Airport is not only boosting capacity and travel convenience, but also helping to unlock new economic opportunities across the region.

Beyond the runway, YQF sits on a vast stretch of over 800,000 square metres of prime aviation real estate, ideally positioned near key markets and major transportation routes in Western Canada. With the expansion of Airport Drive and ongoing collaboration with regional partners, the airport is laying the foundation for future commercial and industrial development.

From aircraft maintenance to aerospace ventures, drone testing, aviation offices, charter services, and airline storage, the possibilities are endless. This strategic growth creates a unique opportunity for both local enterprises and international businesses to invest in a high-potential aviation hub.

As the Red Deer Regional Airport continues to grow, its commitment to innovation, accessibility, and regional prosperity remains unwavering. The future of travel and business in Central Alberta is taking flight and YQF is leading the way.

For more information on the airport expansion project, land and lease opportunities, visit flyreddeer.com.

YQF sits on a vast stretch of over 800,000 square metres of prime aviation real estate. Photo by the Snap Happy Photographer.

TRANSFORMING AIRFIELD MAINTENANCE: HOW PREDICTIVE PRACTICES ENHANCE SAFETY AND EFFICIENCY

Efficient and safe airport operations depend on airfield ground lighting (AGL) systems. However, maintaining these systems is an ongoing challenge. Airport operators must ensure that AGL systems meet strict regulatory standards, function reliably for uninterrupted uptime, and deliver safe and seamless navigation.

To support these goals, predictive maintenance practices are emerging as key innovations. Traditional reactive approaches – addressing problems after they occur – can lead to unnecessary downtime and costly repairs. By integrating advanced diagnostics, data-driven insights, and real-time monitoring systems, airports can be better equipped to anticipate and prevent issues before they escalate.

ADB SAFEGATE's Maintenance Package, part of its CORTEX SERVICE system and Airside 4.0® Ecosystem, demonstrates how predictive maintenance is reshaping airfield operations. Its technologies are built to help operators proactively monitor, maintain, and optimize AGL systems, reducing operational disruptions while improving safety.

KEY INNOVATIONS DRIVING PREDICTIVE MAINTENANCE

Predictive maintenance relies on systems that monitor equipment performance and detect potential issues early. The maintenance

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package introduces four key tools for this purpose:

1. ***Airfield Lighting Fixture Seal Leakage Detection:*** Seal failures in airfield lighting fixtures can lead to moisture intrusion, damaging internal components and shortening light fixture lifespans. Embedding sensors in light fixtures provides a way to measure temperature and pressure changes, identifying compromised seals before damage occurs. Early intervention reduces repair costs and costly spare parts, while increasing system reliability.
2. ***Series Circuit Powerline Communications Performance Monitoring:*** Reviewing the health of communication systems is essential. Adding cloud-based analytics to your AGL systems can provide insights into connection quality, response rates, and system-wide diagnostics. Tools, such as heatmaps, allow operators to identify trends and address issues before they become major disruptions.
3. ***Remote Light Fixture Intensity Calibration:*** Standards for airfield lighting require frequent photometric testing, cleaning, and adjustments to maintain compliance. Remote light fixture calibration over the powerline communication network enables operators to fine-tune airfield lighting performance without replacing fixtures unnecessarily, extending their lifespan while ensuring consistent light output.
4. ***Airfield Light Fault Detection and Mapping:*** Light failures must be identified quickly to minimize visibility risks. Real-time fault detection, combined with precise mapping tools, allows operators to pinpoint the affected light fixture instantly, streamlining repair prioritization, enhancing efficiency, and improving safety.

BENEFITS OF SHIFTING TO PREDICTIVE PRACTICES

Predictive maintenance offers wide-reaching benefits that address operational, environmental, and regulatory priorities. Airports adopting these practices can achieve:

- ***Improved safety:*** Proactive maintenance ensures uninterrupted visibility across runways and taxiways, ensuring safer aircraft operations, even in low-visibility conditions.
- ***Enhanced reliability:*** By detecting and addressing issues before failure occurs, airports can prevent disruptions and maintain consistent AGL performance.
- ***Increased efficiency:*** Automating fault detection and reducing labour-intensive inspections means airports can achieve faster response times and minimize operation interruptions.
- ***Reduced costs:*** Extending fixture lifespans can significantly lower the need for frequent replacements, spare parts, and costly repairs.
- ***Consistent compliance:*** Prioritizing predictive maintenance ensures your airport remains fully compliant to strict photometric and serviceability standards.
- ***Sustainable operations:*** Fewer replacements mean reduced waste, supporting environmental goals in airside management.

A COLLABORATIVE SHIFT FORWARD

Transitioning to predictive maintenance reflects broader trends in aviation, including moving toward technology that enhances operational efficiency while addressing environmental and cost concerns. Tools like seal leakage detection and performance monitoring are part of a larger strategy to elevate airfield management practices.

For airport operators, understanding and adopting these technologies can be key to staying ahead in an increasingly demanding industry. Predictive maintenance not only helps meet immediate operational needs but also prepares airports for long-term growth.

As the aviation industry evolves, implementing data-driven, proactive maintenance offers airports a way to adapt and thrive while safeguarding critical infrastructure. Recognizing the value of predictive systems – and leveraging them effectively – will become increasingly central to airfield operations in the years ahead.

Contact ADB SAFEGATE to learn more about elevating your airport to new standards of reliability and efficiency with Airside 4.0®.

Visit the WIPO Brand Database for country-specific registrations of the Airside 4.0® trademark.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS INTO REGIONAL AIRPORTS, NOT AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS

By Harold Thorin

For regional airports looking to accept international flights, the process is far from straightforward. A key requirement is securing Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) customs services, which, for many airports, can prove to be a significant challenge.

The request process for CBSA service can take up to 12 months, and even then, the response may be unfavourable. If this happens, the only option is to reapply, with no guarantee of success. Currently, unless a new service request is within 100 kilometres of an existing CBSA location, the likelihood of approval is slim.

There is an option to fund CBSA services privately, but it comes at a steep cost. Estimates suggest it could exceed $30,000 to process a single international flight—an expense that many regional airports simply cannot justify.

Even if CBSA approval is granted, the hurdles don't stop there. Transport Canada's new non-passenger screening (NPS) regulations apply to all airports handling transborder or international flights. These rules dictate that Transport Canada must be notified six months before the first international flight departs, and NPS must remain fully operational for six months after the conclusion of the final international flight. These regulations require that not only passengers, but airport staff, ground crew, fuel truck drivers, pilots, and flight attendants must all be screened. Additionally, starting in 2026, vehicles accessing the primary security area will also need to be screened, requiring another significant investment in infrastructure. All of this infrastructure must be provided by the airport operator, regardless of the cost.

"The regulations around non-passenger screening are complex and costly, especially for airports that operate seasonally or only handle international flights for limited periods," says William Stewart, director of terminal services at Grande Prairie Airport. "It's hard to predict the level of infrastructure that will be required, and there's very little flexibility built into the system as written."

Transport Canada has indicated that NPS requirements will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, which is crucial when international service may only be in demand for a few months, such as during peak tourist seasons. However, the lack of clear guidelines leaves airport operators with little certainty, making it difficult to plan for short-term international flights.

In today's globalized world, direct flights between airports, no matter their size or location, have become an expectation. But as regional airports work through the complex web of federal regulations, financial constraints, and logistical challenges, it's evident that the road to providing international service is not as simple as it may seem.

GATEWAYS TO GROWTH: OLDS-DIDSBURY AND SUNDRE AIRPORT'S ROLE IN MOUNTAIN VIEW COUNTY

The Sundre Airport, nestled near the foothills of the Rockies, serves as a gateway to a region known for its tourism and resource-based industries.

In the vast expanse of Alberta, where distances can be significant and communities spread across the landscape, regional aviation can play a significant role. Airports like Olds-Didsbury and Sundre in Mountain View County, are threads in the economic and social fabric of their respective regions. Their value extends beyond simply facilitating the occasional private flight; they are important infrastructure that supports local businesses, enhances emergency response capabilities, and contributes to overall regional connectivity.

Regional airports, like Olds-Didsbury and Sundre, are more than just runways.

The Olds-Didsbury Airport, strategically located between the major hubs of Calgary and Edmonton, offers a link for businesses in Mountain View County. Its proximity to the Queen Elizabeth II Highway enhances its accessibility, making it an attractive option for companies needing efficient transportation. The airport supports

The Olds-Didsbury Airport, strategically located between the major hubs of Calgary and Edmonton, offers a link for businesses in Mountain View County.

a range of services, including fuel, maintenance, and flight training. Furthermore, the potential for future development, including aviation-related projects and commercial opportunities, signals its growing importance as an economic catalyst for the region. Easy access to larger airports in Calgary, Spring Bank, and Red Deer further complements the regional airport's role, providing a multi-layered transportation network.

Similarly, the Sundre Airport, nestled near the foothills of the Rockies, serves as a gateway to a region known for its tourism and resource-based industries. The airport supports local businesses, particularly those in the tourism sector, by allowing accessibility for visitors and potential investors. Its role in facilitating emergency services, such as medevac and wildfire management, is also paramount, given the remote nature of the region. Sundre Airport's appeal is further amplified by its proximity to numerous recreational amenities, including golf courses, camping facilities, dining experiences, all surrounded by the great outdoors.

Regional airports, like Olds-Didsbury and Sundre, are more than just runways; they are connections that enable economic growth, support essential services, and enhance the quality of life for Albertans.

Both Olds-Didsbury and Sundre Airport offer lots for purchase, with more information available, at www.mvcecdev.com.

The Olds-Didsbury Airport supports a range of services, including fuel, maintenance, and flight training.

ELEVATING OPPORTUNITIES AT THE WETASKIWIN REGIONAL AIRPORT

Spanning 90 acres of municipally owned land, the Wetaskiwin Regional Airport is complemented by a strong network of private developments and aviation-focused businesses.

For over half a century, the Wetaskiwin Regional Airport has been a cornerstone of aviation in rural Alberta. As one of the few remaining certified airports in the region, it continues to be a vital hub for aviation enthusiasts, businesses, and industry professionals. With a rich history and significant untapped potential, Wetaskiwin is positioning itself as an emerging leader in aviation-related economic development.

A THRIVING AVIATION ECOSYSTEM

Spanning 90 acres of municipally owned land, the airport is complemented by a strong network of private developments and aviation-focused businesses. Flight training schools, aerial agricultural operations, aircraft maintenance, and restoration services all contribute to a dynamic aviation community. The airport's economic footprint is impressive, generating an estimated $2.8 million in direct labour earnings and contributing $1.7 million in regional gross domestic product.

STRATEGIC BUSINESS ADVANTAGES

Beyond aviation, Wetaskiwin's diverse economy supports industries such as metal fabrication (serving oil and gas), agribusiness, and logistics. Businesses looking for cost-effective, efficient air access will find Wetaskiwin a compelling alternative to larger, more congested urban airports.

Key advantages include:

- ***24/7 access:*** Operate on your schedule with unrestricted availability.
- ***No landing or runway fees:*** A cost-effective option for frequent users.
- ***Convenient amenities:*** Public-use aircraft tie-downs, plug-ins, and hangar space options.
- ***Uncongested airspace:*** Operating outside the controlled airspace of Edmonton International Airport allows for streamlined operations.

SKYPORT PROPERTIES: A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR AVIATORS

Wetaskiwin isn't just a business-friendly destination—it's also a community for aviation enthusiasts. Skyport Properties, a one-of-a-kind development at the airport, offers 90 freehold lots in three phases for aviation-related uses. Whether you're a hobbyist or a commercial operator, Skyport blends personal passion with business opportunity, creating a thriving aviation community.

Wetaskiwin isn't just a business-friendly destination—it's also a community for aviation enthusiasts.

YOUR NEXT BUSINESS DESTINATION

For companies considering expansion or entrepreneurs seeking a strategic location, the Wetaskiwin Regional Airport presents a unique value proposition. With its robust aviation ecosystem, business-friendly policies, and ample room for growth, Wetaskiwin is more than just a place to land—it's a launchpad for success.

Discover how Wetaskiwin can support your next venture. Contact us today to explore the opportunities awaiting at the Wetaskiwin Regional Airport.

For more information, contact
Vern May – Economic Development Manager
City of Wetaskiwin 780-360-4727
vern.may@wetaskiwin.ca.

With its robust aviation ecosystem, business-friendly policies, and ample room for growth, Wetaskiwin is more than just a place to land—it's a launchpad for success.

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Since the establishment of the Wetaskiwin Regional Airport in 1974, Wetaskiwin has been home to a growing aviation sector, offering opportunities for a variety of industries that support aviation and logistics companies. A certified airport with no landing or runway fees, the airport features a newly paved taxiway, apron and Certified AGN II runway (3,888’ x 100’).

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AIRPORT QUICK FACTS:

- No landing or runway fees
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- More than 10,000 aircraft movements per year
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Construction of Distant Early Warning Line in far north brought a flurry of activity to Slave Lake landing strip in 1951-52 when American helicopters made use of it as a fuelling stop.

THE SLAKE LAKE AIRPORT CELEBRATES 60TH ANNIVERSARY

In 1965 the Slave Lake Airport was constructed with funds made available by the Northern Development Council, the same year the Town of Slave Lake was incorporated. The airport was operated by Alberta Transportation until 1995 when they "handed" over airports to the municipalities. From there, the Slave Lake Airport Services Commission was born with the Town of Slave Lake and the MD of Lesser Slave River as its members.

Previous to the airport's current location, the airport was located in the same area as our senior housing Vanderwell Lodge and elementary school CJ Schurter, which locals indicate was in the 1950's to early 1960's. Growth of the town required it to be moved further out. Still located in town, it is now fully surrounded by the industrial park, residential housing, and the lake. In 2010, Transport Canada required the airport to become certified due to being located in a buildup area.

The main purpose of the airport was to support forestry wildfire fighting. With its strategic location, it has become one of forestry's main locations. The airport also supports an air ambulance base, general aviation, charters, and the oil and gas industry. On average, the airport sees between 7,500 to 10,000 movements annually, with a good majority of the movements for essential services such as air

ambulance and wildfire fighting.

The airport is operated by two full-time and one casual employee, reporting to a board which comprises of three town councilors, three MD councilors, and one director at large. The airport remains a separate entity from the Town and MD, keeping all the revenue the airport receives with the airport.

Over the years the airport has been successful in securing grants to keep it up to standard. In 2016, the airport received an ACP grant to refurbish the airfield lighting, becoming the first airport in Canada with 100 per cent LED lighting and also the first airport in Canada to meet lighting requirements under the new TP 312 fifth-edition regulations. In 2018, it secured a CAP grant to resurface the runway, and in 2023, received another ACP grant to conduct an airport master plan. In 2025, it was awarded a Drought and Flood grant to protect the shoreline from further erosion, which was threatening the runway safety area.

To celebrate the success of the airport and 60 years of operation, the airport is holding a fly-in event promoted by Alberta Air Tours and will include a static display of forestry wildfire tankers, helicopters, and air ambulance. The airport has also invited 4 Wings Cold Lake and a refurbished Second World War Canso aircraft. The event will also showcase local musical artists and kid's activities.

This event will be a great opportunity for aviation enthusiasts, forestry and air ambulance personnel, and the general public to get together and reminisce the history of the airport and the future of it.

Above: Slave Lake in the early '60s, where the airport ended up being built.

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