



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Town of Gander and region react to Air Canada withdrawing essential air services from Gander International Airport

(Gander, NL – January 18, 2021)

The recent announcement of Air Canada's withdrawal of air services from Gander International Airport comes with great disappointment and concern to the Town of Gander and the entire Central Region of Newfoundland. Combined with the devastating effects of Air Canada's withdrawal from Goose Bay and further reductions in St. John's, we are witnessing an unravelling of our national fabric, as Newfoundland and Labrador becomes increasingly isolated.

While aware of Air Canada's mandate to serve its shareholders and their demands for financial prudence, Council must highlight the socio-economic contributions these services offer to the residents of Central Newfoundland. On January 23rd we will be effectively cut off from the rest of the world.

Being an island, air service is an essential service necessary to maintain connection and equal status within the nation of Canada. As such, The Government of Canada must acknowledge its role in partnering with the communities, provinces, and air carriers to ensure that a basic level of service is maintained. Canada is the only G7 country that has not acknowledged this fact in the form of federal aid to their airline sector. Canada is the 2nd largest country in the world with a diverse and sparse population that depends on air travel. This is most evident for rural and remote communities, such as Newfoundland and Labrador.

The impacts of this decision will be far reaching. The provincial economy is interwoven with that of Canada and the world. Air travel allows world class talent to call Newfoundland and Labrador home, while making real contributions to the world economy. The logistics of this lifestyle become exponentially more complicated without the national infrastructure provided by Air Canada. For the thousands of Newfoundland and Labrador's rotational workers, packing up their families and leaving home may be the only viable option.

Furthermore, our local businesses and service providers depend on air carriers to move supplies and human resources in a timely manner. The tourism sector, and its huge economic impact is an obvious victim of this situation. However, it is one of many sectors facing devastating outcomes. For example, rural communities rely on health care workers, doctors and skilled people that often utilize air travel. The services provided at Gander International Airport are an integrated part of our community that cannot be replaced. Reasonable access to the outside world factors in the decisions of businesses and individuals to locate in rural and northern locations. These services are desperately needed to remain sustainable.

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has created challenges for all members of society. The Government of Canada and Prime Minister Trudeau have taken unprecedented steps to mitigate the impacts on many individuals, communities, and sectors throughout Canada. However, providing Federal aid to support the aviation sector has not been part of the response to date. We are now witnessing the loss of essential services to rural, remote, and northern parts of the nation. The Town of Gander calls on the Government of Canada to act now. The departure of this nation building service will be irreversible and must be resolved.

This is the most consequential news Gander has received in generations!

Quotes:

“The Town of Gander came into existence because of the aviation sector, which continues to be at the core of the local and regional economy and lifestyle. The loss of air service connection with the outside world isolates the region, its people, and its businesses and is an existential threat on many levels. If the Government of Canada is serious about its obligation to support the survival and sustainability of rural, remote, and northern parts of the country, it must follow the lead of all G7 partners and act with urgency to secure a support package for the aviation sector that protects fundamental national connectivity for all citizens.”

Mayor Farwell, Town of Gander

“We anticipate a negative impact on the timeliness and the ability of health care workers to get to the communities when and where their services are needed most.”

Andrée Robichaud, CEO of Central Health

“As you can see all sectors of business are affected by this suspension of services causing major concerns for our Chamber and the business communities we represent. We urge the Federal Government to provide support and a fair deal to the struggling national airlines.”

Sheldon Handcock, Chair, Gander and Area Chamber of Commerce

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