

FEATURE Regina and Winnipeg airports gear for large-scale expansion as passenger levels soar to record levels

LIFT OFF

JOE RALKO/ GEOFF KIRBYSON

WESTERN INVESTOR

A \$20 million facelift at the **Regina International Airport** is paying dividends for the community and the not-for-profit corporation that has a 60-year lease to operate it.

Completed over a 23-month period, the project doubled the public space of the airport terminal building to meet the passenger projections for the next 20 years.

The Regina project was implemented using capital reserves generated from operating surpluses and the collection of airport improvement fees. It was done without subsidy or direct contribution from any level of government – and the **Regina Airport Authority (RAA)** emerged from the project debt free.

The new Airport now has significantly expanded international and domestic arrivals baggage capabilities and has doubled the space for passenger waiting. That area now includes a business centre, airline lounge facilities and two new food and beverage concessions.

Unique architectural elements of the airport terminal include a functioning sundial, a winged roof and integration of design themes celebrating the region's aviation history.

Established in 1999, the Regina Airport Authority, Inc. is evolving rapidly into an aggressive business-oriented organization with an eye for economic growth.

Earlier this year, the RAA released an independent economic impact study, which revealed its reach and breadth on the Regina and district economic map.

"We want this report to serve as an opportunity for the community to understand the importance of their airport as an economic engine," said **Rob Slinger**, chief executive officer of the Airport Authority. "The reality is that we are a business and one with significant

economic impact on Regina and surrounding communities."

For example, in 2005, the Regina International Airport generated \$350 million of GDP activity, which is more than five per cent of Regina's total GDP, he said. "An average, full Boeing 737 landing and taking off at the Regina International Airport supports 18 person months of employment," he told *Western Investor* in an interview.

The study was conducted by **Rick Erickson**, an international airport economist and owner of Calgary-based **RP Erickson & Associates**. The report documented the 2005 economic activity generated by some 53 firms or agencies operating at the Regina International Airport.

The Erickson report concluded that in 2005,

"Nobody anticipated this kind of growth"

the direct impact of the Airport was 3,064 full-time equivalent workers, of which 743 work at the airport, generating \$72 million in labour income. It said the airport is one of the top 10 centres of employment in the Regina area.

Tops in Canada

In addition, the Regina airport generated \$137 million in taxes (federal – \$68.7 million, provincial – \$49.6 million, and Regina area municipal governments – \$18.7 million), the report said.

Yet even a casual visit to the busy Airport shows what is going on.



Winnipeg's new \$572 million air terminal is the largest capital project in Manitoba history. Right: First arrivals enter the Regina International Airport after a \$20 million facelift – done without any government money.



The Regina airport saw the highest overall aircraft traffic increase of any airport in Canada through 2005, a **Statistics Canada** data released in February concluded. The traffic increase, which is the number of aircraft arriving and departing at the airport, coincided with the increase in passenger traffic of 2005.

Statistics Canada said that overall itinerant movement was up at the nation's airports in 2005, but the largest increase of 14.6 per cent was at the Regina International Airport. The total number of passengers through the airport in 2005 was 826,506, setting a new record, and was a 13.5 per cent increase over the 2004 passenger traffic.

It's clear the Regina Airport Authority is changing how it does business.

A major focus of the RAA planning is diversifying the airport's revenue sources through land development and leasing, as well as adding new service providers and features that focus on the total airport customer experience.

"Last year was really just the beginning of the vision that the staff and RAA board have for our airport," Slinger. "We anticipate building on our successes and adding even more features and customer services throughout the coming years."

Roland Properties, Inc. and the **Sakimay First Nation** will build and manage a new service mall on a triangular strip of land between Regina Avenue and Tudor Drive at the main driveway into the Airport.

The Gateway Centre mall will include a gas bar, convenience store and car wash, plus space for new developments like a coffee shop and fast food restaurant. Construction is to be completed by next spring.

Global air links to the Regina Airport are provided by **Air Canada Jazz**, **WestJet**, **Northwest Airlines**, **Skyservice**, **Air Transat**, **Transwest Air**, **Air Express** and **Purolator**. There are 190 direct flights per week from Regina to Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto and Minneapolis, and to winter sun destinations in Mexico and the Caribbean.

Winnipeg

The president and CEO of the **Winnipeg Airports Authority** is convinced that its half-billion-dollar new terminal project is an absolute necessity.

Traffic at Winnipeg International was up 8.5 per cent on a year-over-year basis in September. Please see *Flexible*, page B10

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