

CANADA'S AIRPORTS

Billions invested to meet growing demand for national and global connections

AIRPORT MANAGEMENT MODEL PROVES ITS WORTH

IN THE 27 YEARS SINCE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT began handing over management and operations of Canada's airports to not-for-profit, locally managed airport authorities, they have evolved from investment-starved facilities dependent on taxpayer subsidies to some of the world's most modern airports earning regular awards for performance and passenger satisfaction.

"Back before airports were transferred from the federal government, they were being operated at a significant loss to taxpayers," says Daniel-Robert Gooch, president of the Canadian Airports Council, the industry association that lobbies the federal government on issues that affect the business interests of Canada's airports.

"Now we've moved into a model where airport users are paying for the cost of airport infrastructure investments. Airports have invested more than \$27-billion of user fees into airport infrastructure to expand and improve facilities for travellers and support the tremendous growth in demand that we've seen over the last 30 years," he adds.

While investment in infrastructure has improved travellers' experiences and positioned Canada's airports for future expansion, Mr. Gooch says it has also helped them become some of the country's most energy

-efficient facilities to the point where 14 Canadian airports are now participating in the Airport Carbon Accreditation Program, an international program for airports to catalogue and reduce their carbon emissions.

After leaving the airport authorities to raise their own investment funds following the transfer of the facilities in the early 1990, the federal government has now started to play a bigger role in financing some aspects of airport infrastructure.

For example, the federal government is allowing the 21 major airports in the National Airports System to access the National Trade Corridors Fund, which has provided financing for cargo facilities at the Montreal, Winnipeg and Halifax airports. However, more needs to be done in other areas, says Mr. Gooch. "We need that approach to continue, but we also need more federal investment in infrastructure funding for small airports that were transferred from the federal government into municipal authorities or not for profit corporations," he says.

Airports with fewer than 525,000 passengers a year are eligible for the Airports Capital Assistance Program, which helps airports with low traffic volumes pay for safety- and security-related infrastructure.

"The problem is the funding for that program has been stuck at



As picturesque as it is practical, Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport has served the city for 80 years and is now Canada's ninth busiest airport, serving 2.8 million passengers annually and connecting the city regionally and globally. (See story page 2.) SUPPLIED

\$38.5-million a year for 20 years," says Mr. Gooch. "We would like to see it increased to at least \$95-million a year to account for a backlog of projects that just haven't been funded because of the program funding ceiling, as well as to account for inflation."

With strong growth in air travel expected to continue, there is also

increasing demand for investment in airport connectivity, particularly in the major urban centres, says Mr. Gooch.

One of the challenges is that the expansion of transit, which is typically a municipal function, has not kept pace with the development of the airports.

While airports are still not as

connected to transit as they could be, there have been "tremendous improvements" over the last 10 to 15 years, says Mr. Gooch, including the Canada Line in Vancouver, the UP Express in Toronto, the REM being built in Montreal, the LRT in Ottawa, and airports around the country working with transit officials to expand bus services.

INNOVATIVE APPROACH HELPS KEEP TRAVELLERS HAPPY

Joyce Carter, president and CEO of Halifax International Airport Authority (HIAA), operator of Halifax Stanfield International Airport, was delighted earlier this year when the airport was named 'The Most International Medium Airport in North America' by OAG, the leading global provider of travel data and insight. But she wasn't surprised.

With 20 international destinations on offer – well above the average of eight among the top 10 medium sized airports – Halifax Stanfield is perfectly positioned on Canada's East Coast to connect both business and leisure travellers with destinations in Europe

and the Eastern U.S.

But just as important, says Ms. Carter, is the airport's innovative approach to passenger service.

"We are not afraid to try something new," she says. "That's why, in concert with the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA), this year we launched a new concept for security screening for Halifax Stanfield, called CATSA Plus, in the Domestic / International pre-board screening checkpoint. This innovative concept combines the latest technology and processes and improves customer service and passenger flow, while enhancing security effectiveness."

This past summer, the airport also opened an international-to-domestic (ITD) facility, where passengers flying in from international or U.S. destinations on select flights, and connecting through Halifax, do not require to be re-screened.

Previously, all connecting passengers had to exit the secure area and, in some cases, collect their bags, recheck them at domestic check-in and go through security screening.

"Now, the arrival process is quite seamless for participating flights; bags are redirected to the connecting flight and passengers stay in the secure area once they clear through

the Canada Border Services Agency," says Ms. Carter. "These improved processes create a more efficient and enjoyable experience for our passengers."

The changes are in line with the airport's ongoing drive to improve processes and customer experience from curb to gate based on industry trends and technology advancements.

Ms. Carter says the changes have been well received by passengers.

"So far, the feedback on the CATSA Plus security screening system has been very positive. Also, our passengers and airline partners have commented on the benefits of the new ITD area for connecting passengers," she adds.

And further changes are on the way. The Canada Border Services Agency will soon introduce new facial recognition technology at the NEXUS kiosks at Halifax Stanfield, which will improve efficiency without compromising security.

In a regional economic context, Ms. Carter says Halifax Stanfield is one of the most critical pieces of transportation infrastructure in Atlantic Canada, having welcomed more than 4.3 million passengers and processed nearly 37,000 metric tonnes of cargo in 2018.

"We're a major economic generator valued at more than \$3.8-billion annually to the provincial economy, and we consistently rank among the



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best airports in the world," she says. "We're proud of our efforts to maximize efficiency in a period of growth while enhancing the customer experience."

SPEEDIER SCREENING COMING SOON

It's the bane of every airline passenger's life – security screening. No one questions its value in keeping the flying public safe, but everyone wishes it could be less of a challenge. And that's a wish that may eventually come true.

"We are working with government to completely modernize how security screening will be conducted in the future," says Daniel-Robert Gooch, president of the Canadian Airports Council (CAC), the industry association that lobbies the federal government on issues that affect the business interests of Canada's airports.

It's part of an ongoing dialogue with government on the restructuring of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA), the Crown corporation responsible for screening passengers, employees and baggage at Canada's airports.

Changes to CATSA may take a while, but in the meantime, CAC is working with government on shorter-term innovations such as facial verification in border processing, says Mr. Gooch.

"In the United States, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection service is rapidly expanding the facial

verification options for inbound and outbound international travellers," he says. "They're doing it because it improves not only the passenger processing experience and the speed with which travellers are being processed through various border processes, but also security because people with false documents are being much more quickly identified and taken out of the system."

While Canada is still at an early stage of adopting facial recognition technology, it will be part of the new TechNexus kiosks that are being launched starting with Vancouver, adds Mr. Gooch.

He points out that the biggest problem airports face with security screening is inadequate funding for CATSA. While passengers pay an air traveller security charge, the funds go into general revenue and CAC has to lobby government to get as much of that money back as possible for security screening.

"You can't properly staff an operation when you're not getting all the money you need to run it, and you can't plan for the long term or invest in innovation to make the system more efficient and a better experience for travellers," says Mr. Gooch.

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