

REGIONAL AIRPORT PROJECT

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

HELD: Tuesday, February 28, 2006 in the East Boardroom of the South West Centre for Entrepreneurial Development, located at 885 - 6th Avenue N.E., Swift Current, SK.

PRESENT: John H. Parker; Larry Kolskog; Terry Klassen; Teresa Cole; John Parry; Jeff Kurtz; Marty Salberg; Dianne Sletten; Marianne Hawkins; Sandra Blyth; Wayne Scott; Ted Anderson; Steve Burchi and Rob Slinger via conference phone; Leslie Hennig recording secretary.

1. Call to Order – John Parker

Parker called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m.

2. Survey Results

Parker reports that 306 surveys were issued by e-mail, fax and mail. 62 positive responses were received; 9 specifically declined the survey; there were 235 no responses. Approximately a 23% response rate was achieved, including the declined responses. There are 25 – 30 people and/or businesses that we would still like to contact. Survey results indicate that most respondents would be willing to pay around \$200 round trip for a flight from Swift Current to Regina or Saskatoon. Respondents feel that scheduled air service would allow people to do business out of town and be back later that same day.

The survey results indicate that there is a potential of 500 annual seats sold; the target is 1000, in order to be considered for senior government program funding.

Parker comments that he didn't get the responses he wanted or expected from the Energy sector; he will contact Terry New to possibly set up a focus group.

Parker would like to hire students from the Regional College to conduct a phone survey to maximize the results of the survey mail-out. The students would be paid \$2 per 25 calls each. Parker would need a general consensus from this group to move ahead with a phone survey.

Parry is skeptical of the usefulness of the survey, pointing out that the respondents may have a psychological barrier with the size of the plane – a 19 seater vs. a bush plane – and getting a good fix on the number of flights that would be wanted being dependant on the number of flights needed per day.

Kurtz suggests that an on-line survey may be a way to reach more people. Cole responds that an on-line survey would be a shorter version of the one that was sent out; Burchi dislikes such surveys because he believes that results get skewed. Parker, Cole, and Keleah Herron will gather information to see if it is beneficial to use this method.

Westwind Aviation and Trans West out of Prince Albert are interested in the results of the survey. Burchi requests a copy of the survey; Cole will forward one to him.

3. Building Issues

Scott reports that the airport building was constructed in 1939; it is estimated that the facility requires \$180,000 worth of improvements. The City owns the building – they probably would not be willing to renovate if the Regional Airport Committee is planning a new \$750,000 to \$1 million-dollar facility.

4. Customs Clearance

Scott gave a brief history of his efforts over the past few years to secure customs clearance at the Swift Current Airport. Requests for service with customs agents or the RCMP have been submitted to the Canada Border Service Agency in Regina – the requests were denied, as minimum requirements were not met. Kurtz received the same response from the Agency to his December 7, 2005 request for customs service. Parker will distribute Scott's report via email to all those in attendance.

5. Freight Service

Once proper air service is established at the airport, freight service may develop as a by-product. Scott reports that the airport currently handles small freight; the larger items are shipped via Purolator. Kurtz feels that the Energy sector would support the development of freight service, as the equipment and parts they require are needed in a timely fashion - waiting for freight to be delivered overnight by a courier truck causes them to lose valuable time and money.

6. Travel Bank

Burchi reports that Travel Bank is a relatively new concept that has been used with some success – it has not been used in Regina – in which a community goes to the airline with a guarantee of 'x' number of tickets purchased. This is an affirmation from the community to guarantee a level of usage to the carrier. The travel bank concept eliminates start up risk for carriers introducing service to a new area. Burchi asks Parker if the subject was brought up to any of the carriers that he has talked to. Parker states that he briefly discussed travel banks with Westwind Aviation several months ago.

Burchi says that you have to get a clear interest from a carrier first; the next step would be to garner commitment through the travel bank concept.

7. Access to Fuel

There is 24 hour fuel availability on an on-call basis at the Swift Current airport. Scott reports that the system North Battleford uses is even more efficient than the good one at Kindersley. The cost of running the system in North Battleford is approximately \$60,000 annually.

Airports that use the Visa honour system have suffered losses due to customer misuse.

Parker asks Scott to compile a report on the types and costs of fuel services that are available.

8. Obstacles

Parker talked with Harold Hugg from Highways & Transportation before this meeting, who stated that the airport issue is not a priority for the provincial government – their focus remains on highways and roads. Parker stressed that emphasis needs to be put on airport service, as it does have an impact on economic development. We have to raise our profile with the provincial government, and get to the Ministerial level to garner financial support for this project. Hugg is willing to set up a meeting with Minister Serby and the Transport Minister.

Salberg asks if we can obtain the numbers of Swift Current and area people that fly out of Saskatoon, Regina, Medicine Hat, and Calgary. Burchi replies that it is a struggle to get that information from carriers, as they are very protective of customer databases. An alternative would be to hire people to visit travel agencies to go through the tickets sold. Slinger adds that the basic data can be extrapolated from the numbers that are counted from the travel agencies. Burchi says this method is worth pursuing, but is time consuming and expensive.

9. Reaching All Sectors

To aid in building our case for a regional airport, it is important to put together reports on each sector to garner support in all areas. We should also target major players in the region, such as Swift Current, Shaunavon, and Maple Creek, where we could see the general public using air service.

Klassen, representing the Cypress Health Region, informed the group that an EMS Review has been completed for the whole region. Methods of transporting patients were reviewed; the Cypress Health Region utilizes Medi-vac services on a regular basis.

10. Raising the Money

It is difficult to approach communities and ask them for money – we need to develop creative ways to raise money for the project. Parker suggest a lottery concept where

5,000 tickets at \$100 each would be sold for a chance to win a trip. The lottery proceeds could then be used as a down payment to approach either a bank or government lending agency to obtain additional funding for the airport project.

11. Objectives

The South West Flying Club's focus is to look for ways to improve the travel experience into the airport – they want to make it attractive for people to come and use the facility. Kurtz explains that they ultimately want to achieve long-term service at the airport.

Parker sees the project unfolding by first providing an infrastructure for scheduled air service, followed by access to fuel and emergency services. Once these have been achieved, businesses and people will be attracted to using the service. The commitment remains to develop proper air service, so that the City and region will take pride in and support a regional airport.

Parry is pleased that scheduled air service is at the top of the priority list, and believes it will serve as an impetus for cosmetic improvements to the airport.

The requirements and needs of many groups will be considered under the big picture of the project: emergency services, tourists, clients, the Flying Club, hunters, and the general public.

12. Next Steps

The Regina Airport Authority is happy to guide our project forward. Burchi sees an interesting parallel to the Kelowna and Abbotsford airports, which are owned by the cities or municipalities. He also points out that making our regional airport a non-profit facility has its advantages.

The next step in the process is how to sell the idea and move it forward. Burchi advises the group to use the economic generator perspective for communities and region as the foundation for the project. Politicos “ears perk up” when they hear that an initiative will generate spin-off dollars and create jobs.

Parker adjourns the meeting at 3:00 p.m.