

Air Access to Halifax: Summer Update 2008

Chris Ketchum, Chair

Air Subcommittee, Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee

The coming summer peak travel season sees a steady yet cautious level of air service to Nova Scotia, as all sectors involved in air transportation and other industries struggle with surging oil prices and their impact on operating costs.

At the time of writing in early June, total domestic seats into Nova Scotia are 3 percent above summer 2007 peak season levels. Air Canada Jazz is offering non-stop services similar to last summer with flights to Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa and Montréal. There is a slight decrease in total available seats.

Amongst low-cost domestic carriers, which are offering a total of 16 percent more seats than last summer, WestJet is serving Halifax Stanfield International Airport with non-stop flights from Calgary, Edmonton, Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa and Montréal. Sunwing Airlines has returned this summer with increased non-stop services between Toronto and Halifax. Finally, Porter Airlines is offering service between Halifax and Toronto's City Centre Airport with 3 flights per day, 2 through Ottawa and one flight per day through Québec City.

Between the US and Halifax, total seats to Halifax for summer 2008 are currently 14 percent below last year's levels. This reflects decreases in flights by some airlines from Boston, New York (La Guardia) and Chicago (O'Hare). Some carriers have replaced a portion of those lost seats. Transborder service to Halifax includes flights from Boston, New York (JFK and La Guardia), Newark, Chicago, Detroit and weekend services from Atlanta.

Summer 2008 peak season seats between Halifax and Europe are equal to last year's results. Air Canada is continuing daily non-stop service between Halifax and London (Heathrow), while Icelandair is operating 3 passenger flights to Reykjavik. Low-cost airlines will offer a variety of services throughout each week to destinations including London (Gatwick), Glasgow, Frankfurt and Paris.

On the air cargo side, Air Canada has cancelled its leased aircraft operation between Halifax and Zaragoza, Spain, a major European cargo distribution centre. Icelandair continues to operate weekly air cargo service to Reykjavik.

Pressures on operating costs are expected to continue. Fares will trend upwards due to additional fuel surcharges and new fees for various travel amenities. Further pressures could also potentially affect flight frequency based on the each airline's situations and cost/revenue options.

Despite all these challenges, Halifax continues to see strong air access in the summer of 2008.