



POLICY UPDATE

News and views from the Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce September 16, 1998

Halifax Airport Gets A Fair Deal

Congratulations! The Halifax International Airport Authority (HIAA) and Transport Canada have reached a fair deal to transfer control of the Halifax airport to the local community.

The agreement has come after more than two years of hard work by the HIAA, Transport Canada, the Chamber and other community organizations and individuals representing the interests of metropolitan Halifax.

The Chamber was involved in the negotiation process from the beginning by establishing the HIAA to oversee the airport transfer negotiation process. The Chamber appointed three representatives to the HIAA board - Dick Crawford, Don Mills and Roy Rideout - all of whom have worked tirelessly on behalf of the local business community.

Halifax International is the last of Canada's eight major international airports to be transferred to local control. Community cooperation was critical in turning this issue into a priority at the federal level.

The Chamber's community partners, without whose efforts this deal would not have been reached, include the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia and The Hotel Association of Nova Scotia.

In June 1998, the three organizations delivered a united message in Ottawa and Halifax - a billboard campaign that simply stated "We Want a Fair

Deal for Halifax International Airport" - to remind the decision makers that Halifax was not seeking special treatment.

The Chamber also met with Premier Russell MacLellan, federal Transportation Minister David Collenette, Senator Alasdair Graham, members of Parliament, members of all three provincial parties, Mayor Walter Fitzgerald, and other key stakeholders to discuss the issues surrounding the airport. The Chamber would like to recognize and thank all of these players for their personal involvement in helping the HIAA and the federal government reach the agreement.

The fair deal that has been secured by the HIAA will benefit all HRM residents and businesses, directly and indirectly. Halifax International Airport is a huge contributor to the provincial economy, generating more than 9,500 direct and indirect jobs and a yearly payroll of \$246 million. It also acts as a significant entry point to support the province's \$1 billion annual tourism industry, which continues to grow.

Tourism statistics recently released by the provincial government show that more than 44,300 visitors to Nova Scotia entered by air in June 1998. Statistics on international air arrivals through Halifax International indicate a 52 per cent rise over 1997.

These encouraging numbers point to the need for funding for airport infrastructure improvements to meet emerging tourist expectations and evolving business needs. Halifax International is a hub for Atlantic Canada. It currently handles twice the capacity of any airport serving a North American city of a similar size.

The HIAA was seeking a fair deal that:

- 1) Places Halifax International on a level playing field, in terms of infrastructure investment, with similar airports like Ottawa and Winnipeg,
- 2) Protects the community from hidden liabilities for historical environmental or other issues, and,
- 3) Is financable, in that it:
 - a) Creates a community-based operation that can support investment over the long term,
 - b) Allows the HIAA to implement fair, reasonable and competitive charges, and
 - c) Allows for future growth.

Looks like we've got a deal - a credit to both sides.

Editor's Note: As members, your solid support behind this issue made a difference to this initiative and our community's future. Thank you!