

Come fly with them

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After more than a decade, scheduled passenger service may be on its way back to the Pembroke and Area Airport.

The ifs, hows and whens will all depend on the data generated by a survey that wraps up on Friday, Oct. 21, which hopes to determine how much, if any, demand there is in the local business community for service, and where that service would need to take them.

"What has to happen in order for us to attract scheduled service," explained Pembroke and Area Airport Commission chairman Allan Wren, "[is] there has to be some kind of meat and potatoes behind it. So we decided to commission a study, and part of that study is a survey of local businesses that quite possibly would use it, and that would become the base of somebody's business plan to set up scheduled service here.

"We'd be looking at everything, but what holds it all together on a regular basis are the business flights. So basically it's going to be the business traveller who would dictate where that scheduled service would go, and then everything else would piggyback on it. It's where people say their business takes them on a regular basis that would tell on the survey where that scheduled service would go to make it worthwhile." Eventually, Wren said, there would be a secondary survey released, designed to garner information from more individual travellers about which routes would most likely be of interest for private or tourist travel.

He went on to explain that the need for companies to establish a firm potential consumer base before beginning to set up a new route is relatively new, but has become the standard practice for expansion.

"It used to be that aviation [companies] would look at a route and they'd say 'I think we could make that one go' and they'd just set it up. More and more they're saying 'if you can show me that the traffic is there and I can make a business case for that, then I'm interested.'"

Once the survey period has wrapped up, all the raw data will be collected by LeighFisher, an Ottawa firm that will crunch all the numbers and assemble the data into a format that can be presented in an organized report to potentially interested airlines, if the results indicate a positive local response to passenger service at the airport.

Even if the data does not support the reintroduction of service, Wren says that the airport itself has enough jobs to keep it busy for the time being.

"The airport without a scheduled service is a very busy little airport," he says. "And a lot of people found out at Expo 150 that it is, and that it's a pretty neat facility, and pretty up to date. A scheduled service is not do or die for the airport, it's just another piece of the puzzle. You've got to be as diversified as you can to keep an airport running, and scheduled service is good to have, but it's not do or die."

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