

# The COPA Guide to Public Airports

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*Wetaskiwin AB*

## Introduction

Where would aviation be without airports? Airports are the “home” of aviation right across the country – home to airplanes, pilots, AMEs and AMOs and home to flying clubs, COPA Flights and many other people, businesses and organizations. Airports are where aviation happens. Aviation wouldn’t exist without them.

COPA regularly gets requests from airport operators and also from municipalities for information and advice on running public airports. This may seem odd since COPA is an association of airplane owners and pilots, and not of airport operators, but it is appropriate for several reasons.

Firstly, our members spend a lot of time at airports and have a lot of information on what makes a good airport. Secondly, many of our local chapters, the COPA Flights, are involved in managing or operating airports and aerodromes. In fact several of our Flights own airports. Thirdly, some of the most successful public airports in Canada are run by professional airport managers who are also pilots and active members of COPA. The Association has a lot of expertise in its ranks and these members have not been shy about passing on the secrets of their success over the years. This book has been written with a lot of input from that third group.

## Scope Of This Guide

This COPA Guide is designed to give you some basic information about successful airports – what makes them successful, how they can be best run and managed to attract and keep all sectors of aviation. It collects much of the wisdom and expertise from some of the best airport managers and some of the most successful airports in Canada.

This COPA Guide is **not** designed to tell you everything you need to know to run an airport. That is a huge subject, covering everything from the CARs to snow plow maintenance and it is best covered in various specialized (and much thicker) books than this!

Suggestions for improvements to this COPA Guide are welcome! COPA updates and rewrites its COPA Guides on a regular basis to keep them up to date and relevant. Send your suggestions for improvements to [benefits@copanational.org](mailto:benefits@copanational.org).

## **NOTE**

**This guide contains information of a general nature only. It should not be considered a definitive document on airports or federal jurisdiction. Use of this guide does not make COPA responsible for legal action taken against you. Individual circumstances involving aerodromes and the law vary greatly. For information that applies to your individual circumstances consult an [aviation lawyer](#).**

**Note on Links:** [Blue links](#) in this COPA Guide will lead you to external webpages and places within the Guide itself. [Green links](#) will take to you pages in the “Members Only” section of the COPA website. Your membership number and last name all in capital letters are required for access to these pages.

## **Successful Airports**

Successful airports are easy to spot. They have air traffic – people use them a lot. This doesn’t mean that they necessarily have scheduled air service, although that is a nice addition to any airport.

Successful airports also tend to have services – fuel, aircraft storage and maintenance may all be available. Successful airports do not have to be big to succeed.

Successful airports are a boon to the communities that they serve because they are transportation infrastructure, just like highways, roads, and sidewalks.

Perhaps we should start out by defining what is meant by “a successful airport”. In surveying airport operators there are a wide variety of opinions on this subject. Most airport operators agree that the key element is that a successful airport provides the services needed in its community. This can take many forms:

- ✓ A facility to allow medevac flights to take sick and injured members of the community to distant hospitals
- ✓ A facility to bring forest fire-fighting aircraft into the community when they are needed
- ✓ A facility to bring business and commerce into the community
- ✓ A facility for courier operations – for moving mail and packages into and out of the communities, including banking support services
- ✓ A facility to bring tourists and visitors to the community to spend their money visiting the local sights, staying in local hotels and eating in local restaurants and thereby greatly contributing to the local tax base through those businesses
- ✓ A port-in-the-storm for aircraft in need of a place to land when the weather deteriorates
- ✓ A base for agricultural aviation to provide crop spraying, pest control and other services to farmers and residents
- ✓ A base for flight training so that people can learn to fly in their own community
- ✓ A base for charter operations to carry people and goods in and out of the community
- ✓ A needed adjunct for an industrial park, providing just in time delivery for manufacturing and to delivery company executives with a minimum of delay.
- ✓ A facility for population evacuation in the event of a natural disaster in the area
- ✓ A facility to bring in disaster and relief supplies when a natural disaster strikes the area
- ✓ A facility for scheduled airline service to bring business into the community and goods and services out
- ✓ A base for Search and Rescue (SAR) operations to be carried out from – both for Canadian Forces SAR aircraft and CASARA resources
- ✓ A recreational facility for local residents to use and for pilots to fly from

- ✓ A focal point for community gatherings and events
- ✓ A destination for school field trips, Scouts, Cubs and Air Cadets
- ✓ Your community's link to the outside world!

## Airports Are *Not* Big Business!

Airports are transportation infrastructure, but in some communities in Canada there have been attempts to treat them as if they are “Big Business” in themselves.

The difference is important. Communities that believe that their airport is “Big Business” have different expectations. These often include:

- ✓ The airport should be self-supporting financially, just like a commercial shopping mall, factory or shoe store
- ✓ That the airport should be taxed as a commercial venture based on its occupied space and land footprint, including the runways, taxiways and in-field space
- ✓ That the airport should bring goods, services, visitors and commerce into the community at no cost to the community

Often this belief has been brought about because many local airports were originally built, run and paid for by the federal government. Then, with the Transport Canada [National Airports Policy](#) of the early 1990s, these facilities were transferred to the local community for a nominal amount.

The local municipal government often accepted the airport from the federal government only with the understanding in the community that the airport would not cost local taxpayers anything and that local taxes would not rise as a result. In the case of some small number of airports this could be done, but a [recent federal government small airports study](#) found that in the majority of cases this was a false expectation and many of these transferred airports are suffering because of a lack of financial support.

More enlightened communities realize that airports are not “Big Business”, they are transportation infrastructure and need to be treated like any other form of transportation infrastructure – roads, sidewalks and highways. Nobody expects roads and sidewalks to be self-supporting!

The role of all transportation infrastructure is to act as economic generators and bring business into your community – they are not “Big Business” themselves!

There are effective ways to generate revenue from airports and some smaller airports can be self-supporting even without airline service. We will discuss some ways

that enlightened communities and successful airports do generate revenue in a progressive fashion from airports [later in this guide](#).

## The Economic Impact of Airports

Studies done have shown that even modest-size airports can be huge economic generators in their communities. [The COPA website has six complete studies](#) that illustrate how much business and prosperity airports can and do bring to a community.

You can use these studies in your community to show the enormous positive impact of smaller airports and how the benefits greatly outweigh the costs to a community.

One of these studies looks at Calgary airports and shows that in 1997, the Calgary area corporate and general aviation communities contributed:

- ✓ 1534 full-time jobs
- ✓ \$69.2 million in annual labour income
- ✓ \$176.5 million in operations & maintenance expenditures
- ✓ \$36.8 million in annual tax base, including \$3.1 million paid in municipal taxes
- ✓ \$310.4 million in gross revenue activity

When indirect and induced forms of economic activity are included, this sector contributed:

- ✓ 4938 full-time jobs
- ✓ \$207.5 million in annual labour income
- ✓ \$337.9 million in value-added GDP activity

The study of the Nelson BC airport shows that in 2001 even this small-sized community airport has a total economic output of \$10.7M, 41 fulltime jobs and total employment income of \$1.7M.

The study of Springbank Airport near Calgary, done in 2004, shows that even this smaller airport had a total economic impact of \$100M on the local area.

The 2007 study of the Oshawa Airport illustrates how far too often municipalities focus on only what they are putting into an airport and not what is coming back to the community. In Oshawa's case, local government City puts in about \$140,000 last year. City councillors were very surprised to learn that the airport generated \$2 million in taxes alone and the total financial impact was almost \$58 million. Not a bad return on investment.

These studies clearly show that airports are not “Big Business”, but that they do contribute greatly to the community, like any other form of transportation infrastructure.

## The *National Airports Policy*

Transport Canada introduced the [\*National Airports Policy\*](#) in July 1994. The fundamental tenets of the policy were that:

- ✓ TC is not going to run airports anymore
- ✓ Local communities are best positioned to run airports.

The policy states:

“Locally-owned and operated airports are able to function in a more commercial and cost-efficient manner, are more responsive to local needs and are better able to match levels of service to local demands.”

[Research done by TC](#) since the policy was adopted has shown that the main effect of the policy has been “municipal downloading”. The money that TC used to put into airports across Canada now has to come from local taxpayers instead. The policy has clearly been a disaster for many smaller airports because local government has to find a way to fund the shortfall.

The *National Airports Policy* was introduced by then Transport Minister Doug Young. In January 2003 the *Globe and Mail* quoted Young, as saying that he regretted handing control of Canada's airports over to the regional agencies. He is quoted as saying that the *National Airports Policy* was the worst decision of his career.

From COPA’s perspective, traveling across Canada and dealing with complaints from members and airport managers alike, it is clear that the *National Airports Policy* has been a failure for most airports. Municipalities, aviation businesses, pilots and local citizens have to find solutions, but after several years of trying, options are running out. In fact, the transition funding received from the feds as an enticement to taking over the airports has run out at most of the airports, thereby exacerbating the problems. It is not all bad news though, because some communities have found models that work, others clearly haven’t.

Perhaps one of the largest problems created by the *National Airports Policy* is that it has left the future of many airports around the country in the hands of local politicians and municipal officials who often have little experience or expertise in aviation and running airports and who start from the premise that airports are “Big Business” and must therefore pay for themselves. In addition, decisions are being made without considering the effects on the surrounding airports or indeed how the decision affects the national transportation infrastructure.

## Transportation Infrastructure Comparisons

So how do municipalities treat airports and how should they treat airports?

As mentioned, airports are transportation infrastructure, just like roads, highways and sidewalks. In most cases airports should not be treated as “special cases”, they should be treated like other similar infrastructure.

In assessing how to fund your local public airport these are useful questions to ask:

- ✓ How is other transportation infrastructure treated in your community? Is it a community resource or a business?
- ✓ Who or what agency is responsible for the planning and maintenance of other transportation infrastructure in your community, like roads, highways, and sidewalks?
- ✓ How are other forms of transportation infrastructure funded in your community? Are roads, highways, and sidewalks funded from taxes or from user fees or a combination of both?
- ✓ Would your community consider having private companies run the roads, highways and sidewalks and charge user fees to break even or make a profit?
- ✓ What would be the impact on your community if there were fees to use your roads, highways or sidewalks?

Does the model used currently for funding roads, highways, sidewalks and other transportation infrastructure work in your community? Does it attract businesses to locate in your community or drive business away? Does it attract residents to your community where they buy homes and pay taxes? Does it attract visitors and tourists to your community?

## The Question of Fees

The question of fees is one that seems to polarize the airport management community. There is no doubt that operators of large (over 12,500 lbs) commercial aircraft expect to pay fees at airports. All airlines build these fees into their ticket structure and essentially charge the airport fees back to the members of your community who fly with them. That is expected.

When dealing with the subject of landing fees on small private aircraft airport managers have been divided until recently. Some airports have conducted experiments over the last few years to see if they can raise money by charging fees on private aircraft, while others have avoided that course of action.

The following article shows the results of these experiments by one of the first airports to introduce a landing fee on small private aircraft.

## Sault Airport and Landing Fees

Some years ago the Sault Ste Marie airport introduced a \$12.50 landing fee for all piston-engined aircraft, regardless of weight. The fee quickly drove away light aircraft traffic in large numbers as Canadian and visiting US private pilots found much cheaper alternative airports. At the time of the imposition of the fee COPA appealed to the airport authority to drop the fee but the airport authority left the landing fee in place.

Over the years many meetings were held between COPA and the airport authority to address the problem of the landing fee and the loss of business that resulted.

In December 2004 the President of the Sault Ste. Marie Airport Development Corporation, Doug Lawson, announced a change in policy for the airport. He announced that the landing fee for all piston aircraft below 2000 kg (4416 lbs) was reduced to \$8 and would be waived entirely if the aircraft buys any fuel at all.

Lawson confirmed that the airport wants to bring back the volume of light aircraft traffic that they used to have at this geographically important airport.

Lawson also stated that it has become clear in the last few years that landing fees for small private aircraft are no longer viable as sources of airport revenue across Canada. He noted that they have the effect of reducing net revenue at airports, not increasing it.

The move is part of a larger plan to rationalize fees to better reflect costs at the airport and includes fees for parking as well. Parking fees for piston aircraft under 2000 kg are now \$8 per night with the first 6 hours free.

Lawson confirmed that discussions with COPA over the years about the fees at Sault Ste Marie played a key role in the new fee structure.

Lawson expressed hope that the increased traffic that the new fee structure brings would also bring a demand for more aviation services at Sault Ste Marie. This could result in more choices for aircraft fuelling, maintenance and hangarage, if demand warrants.

COPA wishes to congratulate the Sault Ste. Marie Airport Development Corporation on its foresight in establishing this progressive fee schedule. Pilots are encouraged to make use of the airport and show the Development Corporation that the decision to lower fees was the right one to make.

As this Guide went to press, it was still too early to see the results of the revised fee structure but COPA is confident that traffic will return to the airport as the word spreads that they are GA-friendly in the Sault.

Complete information on the airport, including complete fee schedules, can be found at [www.saultairport.com](http://www.saultairport.com) or on COPA's [Places to Fly](#).

## Hamilton Airport and Landing Fees

This letter from COPA President Kevin Psutka shows a typical situation when a landing fee is imposed on small private aircraft at a regional airport:

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1 December 1998

File: 2.10.5(kp98125)

Mr. G. R. Hutchison  
Managing Director  
Hamilton International Airport  
9300 Airport Road  
Mount Hope, ON  
L0R 1W0

Dear Mr. Hutchison:

At our meeting earlier this year, we discussed the potential impact of your landing fee on private aviation. I stated that private aircraft pilots are sensitive to landing fees and that a \$12 fee would dissuade a significant number from visiting your airport and the community. We disagreed regarding the affect that the fee would have on movements at your airport but we did agree that we would see over time whether a \$12.00 landing fee would be accepted by the flying community, as reflected in the movement statistics.

I recently received a statistical report, current to the end of August 1998, from Transport Canada for all airports with towers in Canada. Of particular interest are the private aircraft itinerant movements; flights that typically generate revenue for the airport in aircraft services and food sales as well as revenue for the community from taxis, car rentals, hotel accommodations and other expenditures when pilots and their passengers visit the community for business or pleasure. I graphed a comparison of private aircraft itinerant movements for 1997 and 1998 nationally (Figure 1), at Hamilton (Figure 2) and I also looked at the performance of neighbouring airports at Kitchener (Figure 3) and London (Figure 4) to see how the region is performing.

Private aircraft itinerant movements across Canada are up over 1% overall from 1997. Neighbouring airports at Kitchener and London are experiencing a more positive trend with increases of 14% and 16% respectively. At Hamilton, the year started out well with a healthy improvement over 1997 but by March, about the time that your fee was introduced, a significant decline began in comparison with 1997. Is it coincidental that the decline coincides with the introduction of a landing fee?

Private pilots are electing to go elsewhere. As a result, your airport and the local community are losing significant business. Our research indicates that occupants of itinerant private aircraft spend on average \$200 in fuel and food purchases on a stopover at an airport and over \$450 when staying long enough to visit the local community. Even if one looks at this conservatively and assumes that had the fee not been in place the performance at Hamilton would have been the same from March until August 1998 as in 1997, and if one assumes conservatively that \$300 is spent per itinerant aircraft, Hamilton airport and the community has given up at least \$323,000 in revenue between March and August of 1998. If Hamilton had experienced the same growth in movements as London from March to August, that would represent an additional \$268,000 in revenue to the airport and community. This is in comparison to an estimated \$66,900 taken in from landing fees from itinerant private aircraft during the period of March to August.

From the letters that COPA continues to receive, the fee is still capturing pilots who do not know about it until they receive a bill some time after the flight. They are unanimously saying that they will not return to your airport both because of the fee itself and the fact that it is imposed with no advance notice as would be available, for example, through a notice in the Canada Flight Supplement. So, you can expect that as the word spreads and pilots learn by experience of your fee, private aircraft itinerant movements will continue to decrease at Hamilton despite that fact that nationally, and more so regionally, the movement trend is up.

I believe that it is short-sighted to focus on a landing fee to raise revenue. Your airport has lost aircraft services revenue, and the region has lost taxi fares, car rentals, hotel accommodation, restaurant and other revenue from business and tourist pilots far in excess of the landing fee revenue. I believe that the statistics prove my assertion earlier this year that private pilots are very sensitive to landing fees. I urge you to consider the statistics that illustrate clearly that a landing fee is hurting Hamilton Airport and the community it serves. Rethink the fee and decide in favour of supporting a healthy Canadian private aviation. By copy of this letter I am also urging your Regional government to consider the net affect that your landing fee is having on the community.

Yours truly,

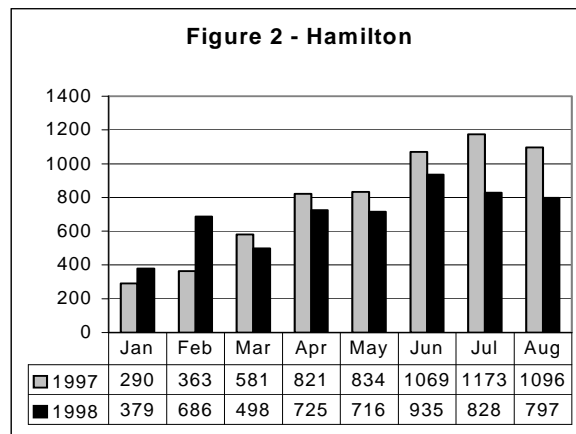
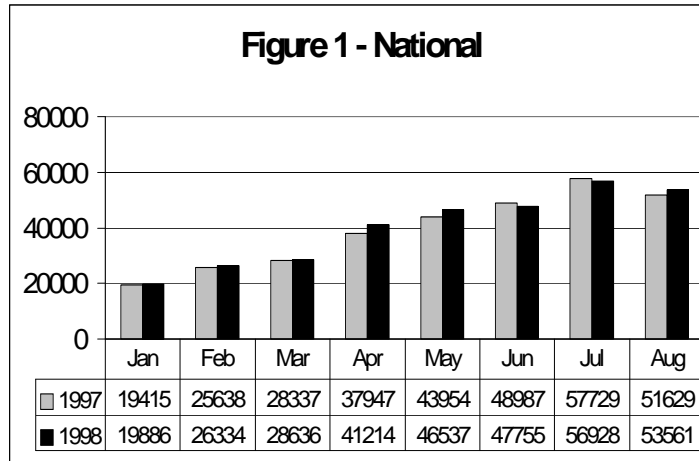
Kevin Psutka  
President and CEO

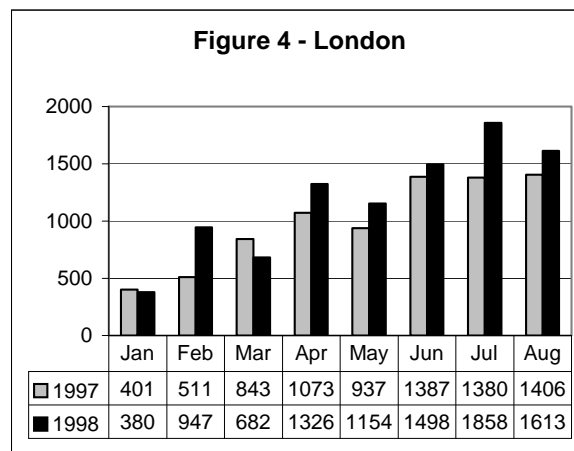
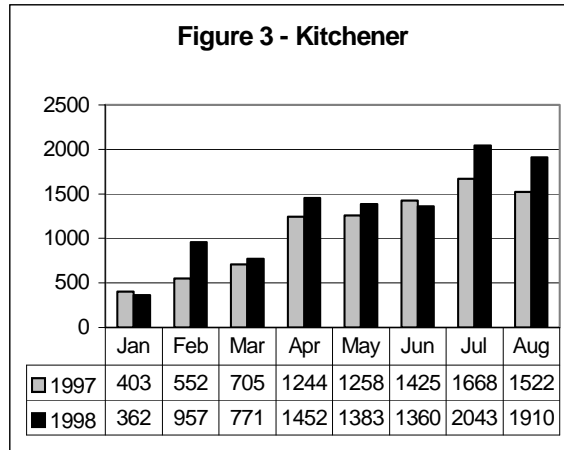
Attachment: Private Aircraft Itinerant Movements

Cc: Mr. Terry Cooke, Chairman, Region of Hamilton-Wentworth  
Mr. Eric Grove, COPA Flight 19  
President, Airport Managers Council of Ontario  
President, Canadian Airports Council  
The Honourable David Collenette, Minister of Transport  
Mr. Art LaFlamme, Director General Civil Aviation  
COPA Board of Directors

# Private Aircraft Itinerant Movements

(statistics provided by Transport Canada Civil Aviation Statistics Group)






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More information about Hamilton Airport can be found on COPA's [Places to Fly](#).

## Edmonton City Centre Eliminates Landing Fees for Small Private Aircraft

Edmonton City Centre Airport eliminated their landing fees and landed seat fees on small private aircraft on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, noting that they were moving to different economic model. In this case that involved enhancing airport land lease revenues by encouraging light aircraft to fly in and use the businesses leasing land on the field, rather than charging fees to the light aircraft which chase them away and watching land lease values drop to zero as a result.

Their press release says:

“Small, privately registered aircraft using Edmonton City Centre Airport (ECCA) get a break on landed seat fees and aircraft landing fees starting Jan. 1, 2006.

The landed seat fee of \$15 per seat will not apply to privately registered aircraft with six seats or fewer. Aircraft landing fees will not apply to privately registered aircraft with four seats or fewer.

“We have eliminated these fees to enhance access to Edmonton City Centre Airport, which is a key facility for small, private aircraft in the Edmonton region,” says Edmonton Airports (EA) President and CEO Reg Milley, who marked his first year with EA on Feb. 1, 2006.

The elimination of the landed seat fee and aircraft landing fees for small, private aircraft is also expected to enhance the business environment for the 90 businesses located at ECCA.”

For details on all 2006 ECCA fees, [visit their website](#) or see COPA’s [Places to Fly](#).

## Kapuskasing Airport Drops Landing Fee

The Town of Kapuskasing has joined a number of Canadian municipalities that have removed landing fees on private aircraft using their airport. The landing fee on private aircraft had been \$18.46.

Airport Manager Yvan Brousseau said the matter was raised by local pilot Peter Barbour of COPA Flight 120 Kapuskasing. Brousseau looked at the fees charged by the other airports in the area and then discussed the issue with the Mayor, who approved the new fee structure.

Effective September 1, 2006 landing fees at Kapuskasing Airport are only applicable to jet and turboprop aircraft only as is the minimum parking fee of \$14.50.

Kapuskasing Airport joins Sault Ste Marie and Edmonton City Centre Airport in recently removing their landing fees on private aircraft. With the vast majority of airports in Canada not charging landing fees to private aircraft those few that do have found that their private aircraft traffic levels have dropped off to near zero in the face of the competition. Those that do eliminate the landing fees find that their revenues from fuel sales, land leases to aviation companies, money spent by visiting pilots in the community and other revenues more than make up for the few landing fees they collected.

Peter Barbour and COPA Flight 120 used information from this COPA Guide to help convince the municipality to remove the fees. Updated information about the [Kapuskasing Airport](#) can now be found on COPA’s Places to Fly, including Peter Barbour’s photos of the airport and its facilities.



*Oshawa ON, during the Canadian Aviation Expo 2002*

## The 21st Century Reality About Fees on Small Private Aircraft

Here are what airport managers who have been through the local debates and experiments with landing fees on small private aircraft have told COPA:

1. Ultimately the decision to have landing and other fees should be a business decision made by the airport operator, based on good market research. Airports do have a right to collect fees if they decide it is the best course of action to do so.
2. If the airport has fees they must be widely advertised so that consumers can make a choice as to where to fly. Ensure that any fees you have are clearly posted on the airport website, indicated in the *Canada Flight Supplement* and on the airport's [user-editable page in Places to Fly](#). Legal opinions indicate that unadvertised, unexpected fees are uncollectible under Canadian law.
3. In principle, private aircraft should be charged the same fees that private automobiles are charged in the community. If cars pay tolls to use the municipal streets in the community then it is appropriate to charge private aircraft the same fees. If cars are not charged fees then private airplanes should not be charged fees.
4. Canadian pilots are very sensitive to fees and will avoid them by going elsewhere whenever possible.

5. The vast majority of places to land in Canada do not have landing fees on small private aircraft and so any airport that does charge a fee can easily be avoided.
6. US pilots **HATE** fees and usually express deep moral opposition to them. They will avoid any community that has landing fees of any amount, so imposing fees will drive flying US tourists away in droves.
7. In the US pilots pay a tax on aviation fuel which goes toward funding local airports. In Canada pilots also pay a tax on aviation fuel but it goes into federal government general revenue and not toward funding local airports. This is a major reason pilots consider landing fees for small aircraft to be unacceptable.
8. A community can easily lose \$500 in hotels, meals, taxicabs and fuel sales all for a \$4 landing fee. That is a lot of support to local business and a lot of tax money that could be contributed to the community, all lost for a landing fee.
9. The end result of imposing fees on private aircraft is almost always a drastic drop in traffic. Airports like Hamilton have seen a huge reduction in GA movements due to a \$12 fee. Consequently any GA service industries (fuel dealers, avionics shops) at the airport will go out of business and the employment they provide in the community will be lost, along with the airport lease payments they were making and the taxes paid on homes, etc. The negative ripple effect of fees far outweighs the meagre income they provide.

One of Canada's more out-spoken airport managers had this to say about the issue:

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“Fees on General Aviation aircraft are a cop-out and do the whole airport industry a disservice. It just shows a lack of creativity. Anyone can slap a landing fee on small airplanes and think they have solved the problem of running an airport, but it doesn't work in the long run.”

- Brett Binnie, Wetaskiwin Airport Manager, 12 September 2002

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It is not hard to see why many airport CEOs have pronounced that the concept of charging landing fees on small private aircraft has been a failure in Canada.

## How Airports Can Be Funded

So if charging fees on small private aircraft has so clearly failed in Canada does this mean that local taxpayers must pick up the bill for the local airport or else close it?

The answer is clearly “not at all!” There are several models of very successful community airports in Canada that operate on a break-even basis without drawing on the non-airport taxpayers.

After looking at what hasn’t worked, the next section of this Guide will look at what has worked and why it has worked at small airports around Canada.

## Successful Models

There are lots of small and regional airports that have found successful funding formulas in Canada and manage to break-even each year. The managers of these airports are clear where their success lies:

- ✓ Maximize business use of the airport, including commercial lots sold or leased to those businesses that have an advantage in being at the airport, such as:
  - Manufacturing operations that need “just in time parts delivery”
  - Shipping operations that need access to transportation to ship their products to markets quickly
  - Business that have corporate flight departments based at the airport
- ✓ Maximize the location of uses on or near the airport that are not noise-sensitive, such as:
  - Cemeteries
  - Golf courses
  - Race tracks
  - Amusement parks
  - Manufacturing operations
- ✓ Ensure that visiting aircraft are not expected to pay for the airport, as that just chases business away. Every effort should be made to generate revenue from on-airport leases and other local sources so that there would be no need to charge fees to visiting aircraft. Attracting visiting aircraft will pay off in sales to on-airport businesses and in the local economy. The airport truly is an economic generator.
- ✓ Sell hangar lots so that owners can build their own hangars on the airport. Leasing hangar lots can be acceptable if the lease period is long enough, but selling lots generates more stability at the airport and brings more aircraft owners there than leasing lots.
- ✓ Avoid “vesting clauses” whereby buildings put up on leased land are forfeited at the end of the lease period. Vesting kills investment.

- ✓ If fees are needed to make up shortfalls then the reliance should be on fuel pumpage charges and not “annoyance fees” such as car parking fees, aircraft parking fees and similar fees. Pilots are much less resistant to fuel fees and they are fairer – bigger aircraft burn more gas and therefore pay more.
- ✓ Attract airline and larger aircraft that are less sensitive to fees. Although it does add to the viability of a small airport, one economic reality is that airlines often appear and disappear quickly these days. The cost of constructing facilities, such as a new terminal for an airline start-up may not be recuperated if the airline doesn’t last long. Airline pull-outs from places such as Sault Ste Marie and Sudbury in recent years have produced big costs for those airports for little return. Often the small private owners end up being asked to pay, through increased fees, for the under-used airline facilities – facilities that they do not need or want.

## Tax Applications

The key to the success of many small airports has been in the application of property taxes.

A municipality can quickly sabotage its airport by how it collects and disburses property taxes. The worst model is where property owners on the airport pay taxes on their hangars and buildings to the city as well as land lease payments to the airport authority. In return for the taxes paid to the city, however, no services are provided. The municipality collects the taxes and expects the airport to be supported by the lease payments. The tax money is used elsewhere. If this model were applied to a residential area of the city it would result in a revolt – it would amount to “pay your taxes and then fix your own road in front of your house!”

In this model essentially the municipality is using the airport as a “cash cow” to generate free tax money where the city provides no services in return and then complains that the airport is not self-sustaining from its lease payments. In marketing circles, this concept is one that is applied to an entity that you do not want for the long term. You milk it for everything you can get, not re-investing for the future and not expecting it to be retained in the long term.

In contrast, airports such as [Wetaskiwin](#), Alberta offer a much better model for the application of taxes in a small airport environment. The City Council there committed to ensuring that “all taxes earned within the airport fence stay inside the airport fence”. This policy, combined with the selling (and not leasing) of hangar lots at the airport, has resulted in substantial growth and sufficient tax revenue, which is reinvested in the airport, to make it a viable, sustainable, long term entity.

Some municipalities are reluctant to consider selling property and applying taxes directly back to the airport, but it should be emphasized that without this tax structure and

the sale of hangar lots, the hangars would have never been built in the first place and therefore the tax revenue would be “lost” to the city. In this manner, airports can be self-sustaining and the community gets all the economic benefits of the airport at no cost to tax payers outside the airport fence.

Even at airports where the sale of hangar lots is not possible and leased lots are the only alternative, the same tax model can be applied.

This model has proven itself at several locations across Canada, such as Wetaskiwin and Hanover, ON. The result is usually a self-sustaining airport and a well-served community.

## Creative Ways to Raise Funds For An Airport

Even with “inside the fence tax policies” some airports need extra revenue to make ends meet. For those airports that do not have all their tax money re-invested in the airport they really need other sources of revenue.

Beyond fees, land sales and leases, many airports have found creative ways to fund the airport. Here are some that have been noted as working:

- ✓ Rent out the airport a couple of weekends a year for car or motorcycle racing. Some pilots may object to this, but if done right the revenue generated from this can sustain the airport for a long time with little flying time lost.
- ✓ Lease space to a restaurant on the airport. Airport restaurants attract fly-in visitors, often in substantial numbers. The result is that pumpage fees from fuel sales will contribute to the airport bottom line along with the lease of space to the restaurant. One of the keys here is to strongly promote the restaurant to let people know it is there! If there isn't the volume of business to make a commercial restaurant viable then in some cases local volunteers have run restaurants on limited hours as airport fund raisers.
- ✓ Hotels typically pay commissions for bookings from travel agents and other organizations. Develop a relationship with your local hoteliers and collect commissions for the airport coffers from pilots and other travellers referred.
- ✓ Often, smaller airports are located far from the communities they serve. Transportation between the airport and local businesses can be a problem for visiting pilots. Many airports have a courtesy car pilots can use for the price of a donation to cover the cost of maintaining and running the car itself.
- ✓ Some airports have a rack of bicycles that are lent out. These are usually obtained from the local police service and are former “stolen property” that the owners did not claim. This way they can be put back to good use in the community!

- ✓ Offer the airport facilities for community events, such as picnics, sporting events, school field trips, Air Cadets, Scouts and other meetings. This will get members of the community to visit the local airport and bring revenue to keep your restaurant operating. Intangibly it will build support for the airport as a community resource and it may help introduce people to aviation – future customers for the airport.
- ✓ Run regular fly-in events to attract pilots to fly into the airport. This will generate fuel pumpage and also restaurant revenue and perhaps hotel commissions.
- ✓ Organize special flying events to bring pilots to your community. The list can include safety seminars, poker rallies, or fly-in golf tournaments.
- ✓ If possible, earmark unused airport land for non-aviation uses that will generate revenue for the airport. Many airports have set up golf courses or other similar recreational facilities on airport land. These generate direct revenues for the airport and can also bring in more pilots to visit and buy gas, etc. If nothing else the space can be leased for hay crops.

There are probably an infinite number of ways that an airport can add to the bottom line by being a bit creative. If these ideas look like they show that the airport is an integral part of the community then that is the aim!

The good news is that the airport manager or staff don't necessarily have to do it all themselves. See the section on [Volunteers](#) for some thoughts on how to engage others to help out.

## Airport Governance

Airport governance is a complex subject. There are as many governance models as there are public airports in Canada. They range from the privately owned/one person operation, to complex municipal government organizations, to the large airport authorities that run the major airports in Canada.

Experience in many communities has clearly shown that some models **don't** work well:

- ✗ A separate airport authority made up of appointees, none of whom have a background in aviation – this one is pretty intuitive as to why it doesn't work, but it is strangely one of the most common situations at municipally-owned airports in Canada.
- ✗ A separate airport authority made up of appointees, all of whom are pilots. Why this is a problem is a lot less intuitive. The problem with this type of board is that while it often has lots of enthusiasm it tends to lack community depth and support as well as airport management experience.

- ✘ No airport board and the responsibility for the airport given to a municipal department with other priorities such as “Public Works” or “Parks and Recreation”. The airport usually ends up neglected under this scenario.

The most successful airports seem to have governance set up along these lines:

- ✓ A separate governing airport authority, reporting to the municipal council, comprised of representatives of everyone in the community who has a stake in the success of the airport, such as :
  - The Chamber of Commerce
  - Commercial aviation businesses on the field
  - Private pilots
  - Flight training schools or flying club
  - Local hotel, car rental facility and restaurant owners
  - Municipal council
  - Citizens and homeowners
- ✓ A second choice would be to have the municipality run the airport directly without a governing board, but to have an advisory group consisting of the above-mentioned people.

## Airport Management

Most public airports have an airport manager. This person may be full-time or part-time and may be a paid employee or an unpaid volunteer. In some cases this person is a municipal employee who wears many hats. They might also be a public works manager or have some other function within the local government.

All of those scenarios have produced airport managers who can do their job effectively – depending on the size of the airport, the amount of work that needs doing and what other help is available!

The key requirements that seem to be found in any successful airport manager are

- ✓ **Aviation knowledge** – is it a coincidence that most the successful small airports in Canada are managed by individuals who know aviation well, believe in the value of aviation and are pilots?
- ✓ **Enthusiasm for the job** – The job is often a fine balancing act and this requires real enthusiasm to prevent getting discouraged.
- ✓ **Creativity** – a successful airport requires the ability to “think outside the box” on a regular basis!

- ✓ **Good Communication Skills** – a successful airport manager requires the ability to communicate well with the members of the public, pilots, politicians, the media, local businesses and schools and anyone who is affected by the airport itself

While professional airport management training is a definite asset, many of the country's more successful small public airports are run by people who just have the above characteristics along with good community support.

## The Role of COPA Flights and Other Volunteers

Many of the most successful small airports in Canada make effective use of volunteers. In many cases these volunteers are organized as local chapters of COPA, the COPA Flights. The COPA website has [a complete list of the COPA Flights](#) as well as [a book on how to organize and run a COPA Flight](#).

There are numerous examples of COPA flights that actually run local airports on behalf of the municipality that owns the airport. The Flight gathers volunteers and then assigns jobs that need to be done by the volunteers available. COPA Flights in this role take on all the work from airport planning to grass cutting, access road maintenance to dispensing fuel. It has proven an effective model for a small community to get an operational airport using local volunteer labour. This model operates at locations such as [Bancroft](#), [Smiths Falls](#) and [Westport](#) and has been very successful.

Another model features a professional airport manager and has a cadre of volunteer assistants organized as a COPA Flight. In this model the airport manager plans and directs the work, but much of the labour is done by the volunteers. This enables one manager to have seven-day-a-week coverage at the airport without having to work absurdly long hours. This model has been in use at airports such as Wiarton, where the [Friends of the Airport \(FOTA\)/COPA Flight 68](#) have provided tens of thousands of hours of volunteer assistance to the airport manager at no cost to the airport or the municipality.

Both of these are proven models that work well. Consider what organized volunteers in your community can do!

## Community Owned Versus Privately Owned

Over the years there has been much controversy about whether airports are best run as public or private facilities. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches.

The main advantage to airports being publicly owned is that they benefit the community and in this ownership model the citizens of the local community have a direct investment in the facility. If airports are privately owned public use of them is usually on

a cost-recovery basis and only those people who directly use the airport contribute to it even though the whole community benefits from its presence.

The main drawback to public ownership is that the airport may be competing for public money with other programs and projects, such as the need to build a new bridge or funding for after-school care programs and parks. It may not have an advocate on City Council to support it.

The main advantage of private ownership is that the facility can be quickly responsive to local needs and not subject to budget competition with other local municipal priorities. It is also more resistant to anti-airport pressures, due to its federal jurisdiction protection. A municipality cannot close, restrict or regulate a privately-owned airport by zoning or any other means.

The biggest drawback to private ownership is that the airport may not be run in a manner that benefits the community. Excessive fees at an airport will drive away flying visitors and that costs the local businesses money – no hotel stays, no restaurant meals, no cab fares, but the owners of those downtown businesses can't necessarily influence a privately-run airport.

Whether a local airport is publicly or privately owned it strongly benefits the local community by bringing business and visitors into the community and thus bringing investment and prosperity. All communities need to have an involvement of some sort in these facilities to ensure that they remain available to the community and are not bought up and closed, to be developed into housing and other non-aviation uses.

## Local Opposition to the Airport

NIMBY is a well known acronym and stands for *Not In My Back Yard*. It refers to residents who raise objections to the existence of the airport itself. Often, these same people are also against the location in their neighborhoods of half-way houses, garbage dumps, gas stations, truck routes, construction sites, day care centres, schools, parking lots, immigrant settlement projects, shops and many other facilities that don't fit into their plans for their neighbourhood.

With regard to airports, their concerns usually centre around two primary areas:

- ✓ Noise
- ✓ Safety

It is becoming increasingly common for some local residents to complain every time an airplane flies overhead, especially if it has just taken off or is landing at the nearby airport. These residents may then phone the airport to complain to the manager. If no satisfaction is reached, determined residents may then take their complaints to local politicians, the media, their Members of Parliament and so on. These people think that it is reasonable to expect peace and quiet at all times and airplanes flying are a source of

annoyance to them. Most pilots are quite noise-conscious, contrary to what some people think, and generally abide by noise-abatement procedures as published in the CFS.

However, there are some residents who will not be satisfied until the airport is closed, all the airplanes are driven away and the sought-after peace and quiet achieved. Of course after that they will go after the boats on the nearby lake or the neighbour's lawnmower as the next source of noise.

The main problem is often that many of these residents don't really see the value of their local airport. To them, the airport is just a source of noise. Airport managers can go far in educating these people by having such things as "open house" events or "barbecues". Nothing helps to build community support more effectively than to demonstrate how the local airport is a valuable addition to the community.

A second concern, as expressed by those who wholeheartedly object to the airport's existence, is the issue of safety. Too many media stories sensationalize aircraft accidents and this leads many to conclude that flying is dangerous. To then see aircraft flying over the local playground or neighbourhood can lead many to feel that the safety of their community is at a high risk because a plane "can just crash" – just as they read about in the newspaper or saw on TV last night.

Airport managers can address this concern through public education about the risks the light aircraft generate. Provide accurate information on what happens when an aircraft engine fails, how often it is likely to occur and what pilots do to keep the risks as low as possible. Educating the members of the media should be a high priority as well.

Many people who are opposed to airports have irrational fears about aircraft and airports. A few years ago one woman opposed a small airport because she was certain they were planning to pave the runway with depleted uranium. No amount of engineering information or reassurance could convince her that the conspiracy she believed in did not exist.

Another major airport in Canada has a local resident who regularly complains about contrails over his house. The contrails are not even caused by aircraft landing in Canada, but he believes that he should not have to look at contrails in the sky.

Dealing with people who have irrational complaints about airports is more difficult. They usually are not satisfied, no matter what is done. In many cases these people can only be left to complain to the press until the press gets tired of them as well.

## Dealing with Noise Complaints

Dealing with nose complaints can be difficult. These usually start with a neighbour of the airport who doesn't like the noise of the airplanes, even though he starts up his lawn mower at 0700 hrs on a Sunday morning.

The best way to deal with noise complaints at a public airport is to have a noise committee to deal with complaints. They assess the complaint for validity and see whether reasonable action can be taken without adversely affecting aviation.

Some neighbours aren't interested in being reasonable - they just want the airplanes gone. In some cases they will appeal to the Minister of Transport as the responsible authority for aviation in Canada.

In the past TC did not have a process for dealing with these complaints and some aerodromes became subject to Minister's orders restricting flying. This process was far too random, subject to political interference and did not account for the needs of aviation and so TC established a formal process to address noise complaints.

The process starts with [CAR 601.18](#) which allows the Minister to make orders restricting aircraft. To ask the Minister to make an order a complainant must complete the first seven steps of the eight step process. The steps are:

1. A description of the problem;
2. Parties consulted. This list shall include all regular owners and operators using the airport, as well as the Air Transport Association of Canada;
3. Alternatives, procedures/restrictions considered;
4. Proposed action and justification;
5. Estimated cost and revenue impairment to all regular owners and operators. This information will be requested from all regular owners and operators using the airport, owners and operators who have indicated their intention to use the airport, and any other owner or operator who may be affected by the proposal. Costs must be submitted within 90 days of being requested;
6. Estimated cost to the airport operators of the proposed action;
7. Forecast noise exposure impact of the proposed action;
8. Decision reported to the public and to the affected owners and operators, as well as the Air Transport Association of Canada.

Needless to say this process ensures that the complainant prove their case and then find a workable compromise. Complete details can be found on the [TC website](#).

## Federal Jurisdiction Over Airports

Under [The Constitution Act 1867](#) all matters involving "Aeronautics" in Canada fall under the sole jurisdiction of the federal government.

In the case of privately owned land aerodromes there is a long history of court cases, starting in the 1920s, which show that municipalities and provinces cannot pass laws that affect them.

There are many court cases that have established the extent of the federal jurisdiction in the case of aerodromes, airports and aeronautics. One of the most important decisions in this area is the famous case of [\*Johannesson V. West St Paul \(1952\)\*](#). In this case a municipal zoning by-law prohibiting the establishment of airports or aerodromes within a municipality was struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Some of these key aviation cases in this area include:

- ✓ [\*Orangeville Airport Ltd V. Town of Caledon et al \(1975\)\*](#)
- ✓ [\*Venchiarutti V. Longhurst and Longhurst \(1992\)\*](#)
- ✓ [\*Greater Toronto Airports Authority V. The City of Mississauga \(1998\)\*](#)
- ✓ [\*Greater Toronto Airports Authority V. The City of Mississauga Appeal \(2000\)\*](#)
- ✓ [\*Mullaney V. Red Deer County \(1999\)\*](#)
- ✓ [\*Regional District of Comox-Strathcona V. Hansen \(2005\) \[The Cortez Island Case\]\*](#)

Federal jurisdiction has a huge impact where private aerodromes are concerned. The [\*COPA Guide to Private Aerodromes\*](#) contains a lot more information on this subject and is recommended reading for anyone interested in privately-owned aerodromes.

Federal jurisdiction has a completely different impact when the aerodrome is owned by a municipal or provincial government. In these cases, because the municipal or provincial government owns the property, they can regulate it, including requiring building permits for construction on the property. After all, they own it!

Some municipalities have used federal jurisdiction to their advantage to accomplish special projects on the airport lands, even though they own it and are not bound by federal jurisdiction.

In some cases the municipality has constructed hangars and other aeronautical buildings without building permits as a means of making the construction more cost effective for the municipality. This has also enabled the municipality to carry out construction outside the normal parameters of the local by-laws or building codes to construct buildings with closer than the normal side-clearances or lot setbacks, for example.

Even in the case of a municipal or provincially-owned airport, federal jurisdiction can be a useful factor to consider.

## Transport Canada and Over Regulation

There is one thing that all airport managers and most municipal officials involved with airports agree on – certified airports in Canada are over-regulated by Transport Canada compared to other forms of transportation infrastructure. The CAR that governs airports, [CAR 302](#), is a long and very detailed document. Combined with *TP312 – TC Aerodromes Standards and Recommended Practices* which includes 200 pages of standards and other new regulatory requirements on their way through the regulatory process, it all adds up to a very high burden of regulation on airports. Many airport managers have stated that it is a “micro-management” blueprint that allows TC to control every aspect of what goes on at airports in Canada.

In days past there were fewer objections to TC over-regulation because a large number of local and larger airports were owned or financially supported by TC, so they were largely regulating themselves. Since the advent of the *National Airports Policy* in July 1994, TC has been divesting itself of airports and, except for the small amount of money available for those airports that have scheduled commercial air service from the Airports Capital Assistance Program (ACAP), TC has also stopped funding airports as well. All of this adds up to a lot of resentment amongst airport operators that TC is still over-regulating airports while contributing little in the way of positive benefit.

## Airports That Are Not Airports?

Not all community airports are actually “airports”. Many of them are “registered aerodromes” instead.

The difference between those two categories is growing in importance over time. At one time virtually all public airports in Canada were “certified airports”. Since the 1980s Transport Canada has imposed a huge burden of administration and regulatory compliance on these certified airports. This has made retaining certification an expensive proposition. In 2002 TC announced that most of the current 725 certified airports in Canada would no longer be certified, as TC did not have the staff to inspect and regulate that many airports. The new policy stated that the only certified airports would be those that fit one of the following criteria:

- ✓ Scheduled CAR 704 or 705 service (commuter or airline operations operating aircraft with 10 seats or more).
- ✓ Located within a “built-up area” of a city or town.
- ✓ Where certification is “in the public interest”.
- ✓ Where the airport wants to remain certified and is willing to pay for that status.

TC has indicated that the costs to voluntarily retain certified status would be prohibitively high and that they expect that the number of certified sites in Canada will drop to about 90. Under this TC plan most small airports in Canada will become “registered aerodromes”.

In most cases the impacts of this move are actually positive:

- ✓ Listing in the Canada Flight supplement is retained
- ✓ The requirement to comply with the onerous [CAR 302](#) regulations and TP 312 standards disappears and are replaced with the simplified rules of [CAR 301](#).
- ✓ The requirement for an Airport Operations Manual, Winter Maintenance Plan, Wildlife Plan and other regulatory plans disappears.
- ✓ The requirement to comply with signage and other costly regulations disappears.
- ✓ TC generally does not do inspections or audits of registered aerodromes.

There are, of course, disadvantages to a certified airport becoming a registered aerodrome. These include:

- ✓ Registered Aerodromes cannot have scheduled CAR 704 commuter or 705 or airline service. If an airport becomes a registered aerodrome then it must regain its status as a certified airport before scheduled service is started. TC has indicated that this would probably take a long period of time and would not be conducive to quick airline start-ups or resumption of airline service.
- ✓ Insurance costs may be different for registered aerodromes.
- ✓ Some private jet aircraft, particularly of US registry, may be restricted from operating into non-certified airports by their aircraft insurance.

It is likely that in time these last two objections can be overcome by the education of insurance companies as to the new realities of airport certification in Canada.

Becoming a registered aerodrome instead of a certified airport can be one way of dealing with TC over-regulation, as long as your airport does not have scheduled service or plan to have it in the future.

## Airport Associations

So what else can be done about the TC over-regulation of airports?

The most positive thing airport operators, public and private, can do is join and support the associations that advocate for airports and represent you on the *CARAC Part III Airports and Aerodromes Technical Committee* where the rules are made.

Associations that specifically advocate for airports include:

- ✓ Airport Management Conference of Ontario (AMCO) [www.amco.on.ca](http://www.amco.on.ca)
- ✓ Atlantic Canada Airports Association [www.acairports.ca](http://www.acairports.ca)
- ✓ Aviation Alberta [www.aviationalberta.com](http://www.aviationalberta.com)
- ✓ British Columbia Aviation Council [www.bcaviation.org](http://www.bcaviation.org)
- ✓ Canadian Airports Council [www.cacairports.ca](http://www.cacairports.ca)
- ✓ Manitoba Aviation Council [www.manitobaaviationcouncil.ca](http://www.manitobaaviationcouncil.ca)
- ✓ Ontario Community Airports Group Cooperative [airport@halhinet.on.ca](mailto:airport@halhinet.on.ca)
- ✓ Regional Community Airports Coalition of Canada [www.rcacc.ca](http://www.rcacc.ca)
- ✓ Saskatchewan Aviation Council [www.saskaviationcouncil.ca](http://www.saskaviationcouncil.ca)

Supporting these organizations is a good way of giving airports a stronger voice in Canada.

## Promoting Your Airport to the Flying Public

Getting the word out that your airport is there and open for business can be a challenge! These days the most effective approach seems to be a multifaceted information campaign, including:

- ✓ Sending press releases to the aviation and general press (including local radio and TV) about activities at your airport
- ✓ Building your own airport website so that pilots can find information about the airport
- ✓ Listing your airport and keeping the information up to date on COPA's [Places to Fly](#) interactive user-editable database.
- ✓ Organizing events that will draw pilots to the airport and give you an excuse to issue news releases!

## Promoting Your Airport to Your Own Community

Promoting the use of your airport to the flying public can be the easy part! Convincing the public in your own community that they need an airport and that it

materially contributes to the community can be more difficult. Sometimes that need to demonstrate the value of your local airport is found at the municipal council level as well, when councilors and city staff don't see the value of their airport.

COPA has a new pamphlet entitled *Your Community Airport – An Aviation Gateway* that can be used to show the members of your community, including your municipal government officials what the value of your airport is. You can [download this pamphlet for printing](#) or you can request professionally printed paper copies from [benefits@copanational.org](mailto:benefits@copanational.org).

## The Future of Airports in Canada

Do airports have a future in Canada? Sometimes it seems in doubt.

On one side there are the regulatory pressures imposed by TC and local citizens' groups who want the local airport closed. Airlines in Canada have had a recent period of instability where many have gone out of business, while the remaining ones have shrunk their service and abandoned some routes. Airports that build terminals or renovate old buildings to accommodate airlines have found themselves without airline service a few months after the large investment in infrastructure. Local property developers are pressuring City Council to sell them the airport lands so they can make a lot of money building houses on it. There is never enough airport staff or enough revenue to get the job done. It is enough to discourage many airport managers!

The good news is that TC stats show that the number of small, private aircraft in Canada is way up. The number of pilots and small aircraft flying hours are also up. The growth is beyond that expected from the increase in the Canadian population. Canadians are increasingly interested in flying and owning their own aircraft to travel in.

There are many successful smaller airports in Canada that are serving their communities by bringing business, services and visitors into town. By using methods and models that have proven successful in other parts of Canada more small public airports can share the same success that is seen in places like Wetaskiwin, Hanover, Smiths Falls, Westport and Wiarton.

As the most successful small airport managers have shown a combination of these factors helps enormously:

- ✓ Know your flying customers and what they need
- ✓ Make good use of volunteers
- ✓ Market your airport to your own community to build support and do this on an on-going basis
- ✓ Find effective partnerships to promote and grow the airport.
- ✓ Support those organizations that support airports

The experiences of the successful smaller airports in Canada show that airports can thrive and help to bring business and prosperity to your community.

# Appendix A - An Article About Support For Community Airports

## Community Airports Add Value

By Bob Kirkby

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Canada the vast majority of cities and towns in Canada were located along a railway line. There was a very good reason. Trains brought people, food, supplies, clothing, mail and much more to our Canadian communities. They facilitated commerce. Communities without rail service were isolated. Every community not on a line longed for the day when they would be large enough to justify a railway line and train station of their own.

The first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the automotive transportation mode beginning to complement the railways and extend their reach. Isolated communities became less isolated and roads became the great connectors. Communities now sought roads or road improvements to connect them to this developing transportation network. The rate of expansion and development of our country took a leap forward.

By 1930 aircraft designs had progressed beyond those early 2 seaters to aircraft that could readily carry up to 10 passengers or equivalent cargo. Yet another mode of transportation had emerged, one with very different infrastructure requirements. Isolated communities no longer required hundreds of miles of rail or road development to become connected. All they required were simple level fields of grass as a minimum, or a mile of pavement for the more prosperous. The rate of expansion and development of our country took a giant leap forward.

### A Network Evolves

In the 30's and 40' towns and communities scrambled to build airfields to attract any type of air service they could. A town or city with an airport was considered progressive and forward-thinking. For our northern communities an airfield became a necessity. Although aircraft could carry only a fraction of the load a train or truck could, their point-to-point speed was outstanding and their infrastructure requirements were miniscule in comparison.

For the next 60 years airfields or airports were constructed across this land by the federal government, provincial governments, municipal governments, private companies and private citizens. By 1990 there were about 750 airports and airstrips across Canada plus a large number of waterdromes and seaplane bases.

### The Network Breaks

In 1994 Transport Canada dealt a severe blow to aviation in this country with the introduction of its infamous National Airports Policy (NAP). The NAP created a National Airports System (NAS) of only 26 airports across Canada which Transport Canada considered important enough to warrant continued support to some degree, although operational support was not part of the plan. Local municipalities were asked to form airport authorities to operate the airports while Transport would collect huge rents. At that time Transport Canada owned and operated 110 non-NAS airports which it dropped on local municipalities through a 10-year divestiture program. The airports were turned over to the local municipalities on the understanding that Transport Canada would provide varying degrees of financial assistance in return for the municipality operating the airport for a minimum of 10 years. After 10 years the municipality would be on its own to do as it chose.

The severe blow to aviation was in fact the signal sent by the federal government with the introduction of the NAP. We heard loud and clear that our government considered only large air carrier supporting airports to be important to our national transportation network. It had no further interest in whether or not the remaining 700+ airports continued to form part of this network.

The government has defended its policy and even tried to assert that they are supporting smaller airports through the Airport Capital Assistance Program, but in reality the annual allocation is a fraction of what is needed to maintain the crumbling infrastructure, let alone enhance it, and the qualification criteria for funding remain narrowly focused on airports with scheduled air service. The vast majority of airports serving such important functions as medevac, charter flights, flight training and supply of goods and services to many remote communities are left with no source of funding to ensure a future.

In July, 1994, after 60 years of heady expansion our Canadian transportation infrastructure began to decline.

## **The New Reality**

Since divestiture, Transport Canada has maintained that airports owned and operated locally should be self-sustaining. Ten years later our local governments are discovering they are spending tax dollars to operate community airports without a clear understanding of the benefits to their communities.

In 2002 the provincial transportation departments collaborated on a study to assess the financial health of small airports in Canada. Twenty-six representative small airports were selected and the study was conducted by Sypher-Mueller International. The report, issued in September 2002, concluded that only four were likely able to meet operating expenses and cover long-term capital costs. Nine were likely able to meet operating expenses but were not likely to be able to cover capital costs. Fully half (13) were determine to be unable to meet both operating expenses and capital costs.

In July, 2004 Transport Canada released the results of its own study on Regional and Small Airports in which 66 small airports were surveyed. This study concluded that 48% of the airports studied were operating at a deficit. It also determined that those airports operating with a surplus were only able to cover 25% of their capital expenditure requirements.

Both studies reached essentially the same conclusions. Half of the community airports in Canada are unable to cover annual operating and maintenance costs, let alone capital costs, without government assistance.

So now we've come full circle. From the days when our national airport network was considered of great value to the citizens of Canada and was happily supported by the federal government, to today, when the federal government has washed its hands of small airports and other levels of government are faced with justifying the value of maintaining a link to the network for their sub-set of citizens.

### **The Value of Airports**

Strange as it may seem this is not an airport operators' problem. The Transport Canada Small Airport Study report stated, "In most cases there is no apparent problem with the airport operation per se, it is simply a lack of users to support the level of facilities and services maintained." In other words there are insufficient users to completely foot the bill on their own.

This is over-simplified. Small airports can not be run on a cost-recovery basis any more than roads can. Unfortunately Transport Canada has perpetrated the notion that if an airport cannot break even on its own there must not be a need for it. This notion has distorted the perception and thinking of local governments which are responsible for these airports. The fact is that airports add value far beyond that which can be measured by the income statement.

Airports bring commerce to a community through visitors and tourism, courier service, flight training and charters. They facilitate social services like medevac, emergency response to natural disasters, and non-emergency medical flights by volunteer organizations such as Hope Air and Angel Flight. They provide venues for community events like pancake breakfasts, Young Eagles flights, even air shows.

There have been a few airport economic impact studies conducted in the past couple of years. The most recent, and most comprehensive of these was undertaken by RP Erickson & Associated for Aviation Alberta, Alberta Infrastructure & Transportation, and Alberta Economic Development. This study specifically focused on small airports in Alberta and the final report, released in May 2005, contains some startling results. Here are some highlights from the report.

Twelve representative airports were chosen for the study and these were divided into four tiers based on the amount of aviation activity at each. Extensive on-site surveys

of all airport related business and community officials were conducted to gather data for the year 2003.

The Tier I airports are regional air carrier nodes with a large GA and a flight training presence. On average they provided 300 direct full-time job equivalents (FTEs), a labour income of nearly \$15 million, and a total economic impact of over \$45 million. They all operate at a deficit for their annual operating and maintenance costs and the average municipal subsidy is \$77,000 per annum. None have the financial resources to fund their estimated capital requirements for the next 10 years.

Tier II airports may have scheduled air services, have a significant GA presences and may have flight training services. On average each provided 30 direct FTEs, a labour income of nearly \$2 million, and a total economic impact of over \$7 million. All operate at a deficit, with an average municipal subsidy of \$21,000 per annum.

Tier III airports do not have scheduled air services and have a reduced GA presence. However, they still provide economic benefits to the communities they serve. On average each provided 9 direct FTEs, a labour income of nearly \$500,000, and a total annual economic impact of nearly \$2 million. All operate at a deficit and receive average municipal subsidies of \$45,000.

Tier IV airports are grass strips with a limited base of GA and no on-site aviation services. Since these airports have no on-site aviation services or commercial businesses there was no measurable economic activity attached to the airports directly. Their operating and maintenance costs are minimal, often provided by volunteers, and the benefits they provide to the communities are largely social.

Tier I and Tier II airports provide 300 to 500 times as much in total economic benefit to their communities as they cost in subsidies. Even the Tier III airports, without air carrier services, give back up to 40 times the economic benefit to their communities as they cost. These numbers clearly demonstrate an exceptional return on investment to their communities without even considering the social benefits the airports provide. So why then are airport operators across the country increasingly being told to break even or perish by their municipal owners?

### **Putting It Back Together**

The root cause of the current problem is a narrow minded attitude that airports are not public infrastructure. Airports are clearly economic engines for their communities. They are used by the public when needed for medevac, emergency response, disaster recovery, and social events like Young Eagles flying, air shows, airport days, pancake breakfasts and more. They are used by the traveling public either as paying passengers or as private aviation travelers. Yet few town councils or municipal governments accept the fact that airports are transportation infrastructure serving their communities as do roads, sidewalks, parking lots, parks, pathways, etc. Municipalities need to recognize the

economic and social value of airports, even small grass strips, to the citizens of their communities. They need to budget tax dollars to provide the modest financial support needed to sustain their community airports.

As an aviation community we need to dispel the myth that small airports are only of value to GA pilots and aircraft owners. Governments and communities need to understand that GA pilots and aircraft owners are a tremendous source of volunteers to not only support the airport but provide direct social benefits to the community. GA pilots everywhere need to get involved in educating the municipal authorities responsible for their airports. Use the tools we now have available to convince the municipality their airport is a very valuable community asset to be promoted and supported.

On the COPA web site you will find the following tools: the *COPA Guide to Public Airports*, the [Aviation Alberta Socio-economic Impact Study](#), the [Nelson BC Airport Study](#), the [Calgary International Airport Socio-economic Study](#) and the new [COPA Community Airport Brochure](#) (also available in printed version by contacting the COPA office).

Promoting airports for tourism is very important and often ignored. Make sure your local airport is listed in the “[Places To Fly](#)” section of the COPA web site. You can add it or update it yourself! Then let the municipality know you’re doing it. Send them a link to the page for your airport. Help them realize that promoting the airport will increase traffic and tourism and the overall derived benefits.

The network is broken and it’s up to us to fix it. COPA will continue to work at the national level to effect a change of attitude in the federal government toward smaller airports. But it will also take an effort at the local level, led by local interests, to keep our local airports and to rebuild our national transportation network. Make sure the people in charge have the facts before that golf course developer comes calling!

## Appendix B – A Letter Showing Support for a Community Airport

This is a great letter responding to a municipal government proposal to shut down their airport, from the owner of a GA business on that airport. It can be used as an example of the best things to say in a situation like this.



Brant Aero, Box 274 150 Aviation Ave. Hangar #2 Brantford,  
Ontario Canada N3T 5M8

*Quality Avionics since 1972*

Phone: (519) 753-7022

Fax: (519) 758-0530 E-mail: [pat@brantaero.com](mailto:pat@brantaero.com)

Attention: Jim Quinn

Jan. 20, 2006

Re: Hangar #2 and Brantford Airport

Dear Mr. Quinn:

We recently heard some rather disturbing news regarding the fact that the City of Brantford is looking at the impact of shutting down the Brantford Municipal airport. I find this very disconcerting, and certainly unsettling as to the future of Brant Aero and their employees.

We would like to take this opportunity to provide you with some insight as to our thoughts on airports in general, and more specifically, the Brantford airport.

Our company came to Brantford in 1972, and has been here ever since. The airport itself has not changed significantly in that time. The surrounding airports have grown considerably. I believe this is primarily due to the fact that the city is unable, or unwilling to make a substantial investment and commitment in the airport.

Airports form an integral part of the basic infrastructure of the “road” system in Canada. Where would we be without airports? Certainly not nearly as advanced as we are now. This country, as well as most industrialized nations, relies very heavily on the airport structure.

We presently employ 16 people and are in a growing stage. Many live in Brantford with their families. Our customer base is well over 1500. This may seem small in relation to normal statistics, but considering there are only about 25,000 registered aircraft in

Canada, it is substantial. A good number of the customers fly into Brantford to have their aircraft serviced. While here they often spend several days in town, helping our local economy. Many will come and spend the day, going to the casino and eating at local restaurants, including the one located at the airport.

These people are not all recreational flyers. Many are business people, using the airport as a strategic stopping off point for their business travels. Today, more than ever, it is becoming increasingly apparent that private flying is a much more cost-effective tool, as opposed to the airlines with all the security and congestion. We are constantly using the Brantford airport as a marketing tool for not only Canada, but also the United States, to encourage customers to come to our facility.

The City of Brantford's industrial base is growing at a phenomenal rate, and ripe for the Brantford airport to poise itself for increased usage.

But the airport must be looked at, not as a rich man's play ground, but an economic necessity. Just as cars use roads to go from point A to point B, airports are "roads" for aircraft at point A and point B.

Whether it is for a family vacation, a business trip, hauling freight or passengers, it is a basic part of the infrastructure of Canada.

Brant Aero and most of the facilities at the Brantford airport support the United Way Air Show. In the past we have hosted the Gretzky Tennis Classic charity event, as our facility was one of the few large enough to accommodate it. We are regularly supporting the local secondary school co-op programs, and several students have continued their careers in aviation because of this. Some are employed at our facility, and helping to support the local economy. We have trained numerous groups of foreign students for several months at a time, which undoubtedly supported the local economy as well. Just as Brantford Flight Centre trains pilots; we train avionics and maintenance technicians. Brantford, and all of Canada, requires facilities and airports like ours in order to encourage the young people of Canada to pursue aviation careers. Canada must have a way to recruit these young people to continue supplying our military, commercial, and general aviation industries.

We must emphasize that the Brantford airport cannot be expected to support itself without financial assistance any more than any of our nation's highways. I can tell you that in my travels to the United States, I am always amazed at the size, quality, and condition of airports, even though there may only be 10,000 or 15,000 people living in the county. They are, almost without exception using it as a business attraction tool for their county and will spare no expense in meeting that goal. Their airports are roads.

If you have any questions, or would to discuss any of these matters further, please feel free to contact either Bud, or myself.

Sincerely,

Patrick G. Field  
Sec. Treas.

# THE LINDSAY POST

18 January, 2008

## **Lindsay airport will help attract and retain medical professionals**

I wish to offer a few reflections on the importance of our airport to our local medical professional group.

Our airport is a valuable resource for our medical community for several different reasons. These include professional activities and development, patient care and leisure activity opportunities.

General aviation as a hobby is by no means limited to privileged professionals. Most of my flying colleagues are folks of average means. That being said, quite a large number of doctors, dentists, veterinarians and allied health professionals have pursued aviation as a leisure activity in our community over the years. I have been involved in our hospital program which brings medical students to Lindsay every year, and one highlight of their experience has often been going for an airplane ride to view our beautiful city from the air. More than one prospective doctor has told me they would not consider a community that did not have a municipal airport. Thus, I believe our airport is important for attracting and retaining medical and allied medical personnel.

Being a pilot and having this local resource has allowed me greater access to professional work opportunities in communities such as Sudbury, Ottawa, downtown Toronto and northern Ontario. It has also facilitated my involvement in professional development courses and workshops in Ottawa, Kingston, London, and Sault Ste. Marie. One of our local dentists, who is not a pilot, was able to effectively function as President of the provincial Dental Association by accessing booked charter flights out of Lindsay for travel around our province with minimal disruption to his local professional practice.

I understand a representative from Ross Memorial will be speaking to you tonight, but I would like to also comment on the importance of the air ambulance service to our medical staff and the patients they serve. Helicopter transfers of ill patients are important but limited in terms of distances and weather

capabilities.

In this era of limited critical care bed resources, often the closest appropriate hospital for an ill patient is Ottawa, Kingston, or Buffalo. It is very important for patient care and physician professional satisfaction to have the option of fixed- wing aircraft transportation when helicopter transfer is either impossible due to weather or impractical due to

distance.

The existence of a well-maintained, active municipal airport in our community will help to attract and retain medical professionals and sends a clear message that our City of Kawartha Lakes is vibrant, progressive and growing. Closure of this resource, in my humble opinion, sends out the opposite message, with negative effect.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Konyer, MD

*Article ID# 862452*

# THE LINDSAY POST

18 January, 2008

## **Giant Tiger supports Lindsay airport**

Regarding the public meeting with respect to the future of the Lindsay Airport, I have flown into the Lindsay Airport many times over the past fifteen years. The main purpose of our flights has been to assess the market for a potential Giant Tiger store. We have also looked to the communities around Lindsay for future store locations.

There have been other reasons for our visits which led us to Buckhorn, Bobcaygeon, Fenelon Falls and Port Perry to name a few places we have visited by car and by boat. Lindsay is a central point for tourism and business and the entire area continues to grow in importance.

From our point of view, the convenience of flying into Lindsay is a major benefit as it is so efficient. We recently bought our plane instead of leasing it because of the future economic benefits.

We also use our plane frequently in the United States and have noted how many more communities in the U.S.A. have airports as compared to Canada. I believe progressive towns like Lindsay should be proud to have such an attractive, efficient airport.

If the Lindsay Airport closes, it may take a number of years to replace it.

Gordon Reid

Chairman & C.E.O.

Giant Tiger Stores Limited

*Article ID# 862449*

## Appendix C – The Results of Successful Airport Support

### **Brantford City Councillors Hear Loud and Clear - Keep Your Airport!**

By Ross Poulsen

A packed Town Hall meeting was held on May 24 at the Brantford Civic Centre to discuss the future of the airport.

About 400 attended the public forum where local citizens and businesses made presentations to show City Council the real need to keep the Brantford Airport as an essential service to the city.

Leading up to the meeting, a local newspaper conducted a telephone poll to the question "Does Brantford need an airport?" The tally was about 2,300 calls with 99 per cent in favour. An internet poll to the same question resulted in 82 per cent saying yes. The packed auditorium certainly illustrated the concern and strong support for the airport. Kevin Psutka, president/CEO of COPA, said he has seen this same debate in many communities across Canada. However, when properly-conducted economic impact studies are done, as was recently the case in Oshawa, the value of the airport to the community always stands out.

"Airports really are an essential service to any community and definitely should be supported and developed," he said.

Several presenters commented on the fact the city has commissioned several airport studies over the past 25 years and they all led to the same conclusion. The airport is an essential service and needs to be supported.

So they questioned why the city would now consider closing the airport in light of this consistent advice.

They also questioned the city's categorization of the airport on its priority list. Category 5 is, "Like to do if possible." Presenters pointed out that if any other part of the transportation infrastructure were in this category, it would be like saying, bridge repairs will only be done if they can get to it sometime.

Provincial Schools Transportation Co-ordinator John Grochot for the Ottawa - Carlton District School Board co-ordinates travel every week for blind children from all over the province to the W. Ross MacDonald School for the blind in Brantford.

On Friday and Sunday nights, they utilize three Jetstreams and a King Air 200 to move not just the blind children to Brantford but others who are deaf or who have learning disabilities to other centres.

Travel by air to and from the Brantford Airport permits the children to spend more time with their parents on weekends and in many cases is the only practical way they can go home each weekend, said Grochot.

Ted Davies, a commercial and industrial real estate broker from Mississauga said, when corporations are looking to re-locate or build new plants there are many options available, but if the community has an airport it is already one point ahead in the corporate decision versus those communities that do not have an airport.

Gary Surette, chair of the Brantford United Way, said one in five people in Brantford benefit in some way from the many services of the United Way. Every year, 20,000-30,000 attend the Brant United Way Airshow to kick off their yearly campaign. The airport is essential to them and to the overall transportation network.

Pat Field from Brant Aero said his business has been at the airport for 35 years. He said his business alone has a direct and indirect economic impact of more than \$5 million a year in the area. He expressed the difficulty he is now having in being able to attract additional high-quality technical people to relocate due to the “uncertainty” that City Council has created at the airport. Field also submitted to City Council a petition to Save the Brantford Airport with more than 1,600 signatures.

Another case was made by a past president of a multi-billion dollar corporation who expounded on the merits of corporate aircraft as an essential business tool and that businesses gravitate to cities and towns who have airports.

Of the city councillors who attended the meeting, two councillors walked out after the first two presentations.

In conclusion, the meeting highlighted the need for city council to read (and study) the previous airport studies, consider the presenters' comments from the meeting, which were recorded, talk to other communities about how they have developed their airports and listen to people in-the-know about aviation.

Psutka noted this was perhaps the best organized group of presenters he has seen. “I would like to thank everyone who took the time and effort to attend and present their views as well as for the many emails, surveys and petitions that have been submitted or conducted to date. This effort will pay off; to preserve Brantford Airport and general aviation.”

# THE LINDSAY POST

15 January, 2008

Local News

## 'Keep Lindsay airport' public urges

Posted By John Chambers

More than 100 people crammed into the Victoria Room at city hall Monday night for the Lindsay Airport Task Force public meeting. Outside of the standing-room only gathering, more people lined the hall to get within earshot of the much-hyped meeting.

Task force chair and Ward 16 councillor Dave Marsh opened the meeting by acknowledging that there will be further public meetings on the matter, adding the task force has not made any decisions regarding the airport's future.

"It is a contentious issues and it effects all of us," he said, "not just today but in the future."

Kevin Psutka, president of the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association told task force members that as the Greater Toronto Area continues to grow, the City of Kawartha Lakes and the Lindsay-based airport will continue to play an increasingly important role.

"This airport is well positioned to serve the Kawartha Lakes," he said. "For this airport the time is now to invest in the future."

Psutka pointed out the Build Canada fund is just one source the city could tap into to receive up to 50 percent funding for infrastructure upgrades at the facility.

Stephen Wilcox, airport manager, Total Aviation and Airport Solutions for the City of Oshawa stressed that airports need to be viewed as infrastructure - just as roads and bridges are viewed by municipal councils.

"Airports operate as a component of infrastructure," he said. "The airport is not here for the 15 or 20 people that keep their planes here; the airport is here for the 75,000 residents of Kawartha Lakes as a component of infrastructure."

Wilcox pointed out that the task force needs to look at not only the employment created at the airport but the employment created as a result of the airport.

Wilcox agreed the airport could be more efficient and suggested with 160 acres at the Lindsay airport, consideration could be given to selling a portion of the land for either aviation-based development or employment lands.

Gayle Jones, general manager of the Lindsay and District Chamber of Commerce said a recent study showed the Chamber's 610 members believe the airport is vital to the local economy.

The majority of our members see the airport as an important and necessary piece of infrastructure to our business community," she said. "The airport is an essential piece of the City's infrastructure supporting 45 jobs and contributing approximately \$5.5 million per year to the local economy."

Also speaking in support of the airport was local lawyer Dan Cornell, Bruno Luzak and local vet Kerstin Kelly.

During the two-hour meeting one local woman spoke out against the airport continuing in its current shape.

The task force plans to have a second public meeting in April before making recommendations to city council early this summer.

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