

Airport takes off

2000
Vision
Nanaimo

Runway expansion expected to be complete by fall

n airport is like a bridge – something you build projecting the need for the next 50 to 100 years.

That's how Mike Hooper, Nanaimo Airport's president and CEO, views stretching the airport's runway to just over 2,011 metres from its existing 1,524 metres.

"Even in poor economic conditions we're still moving forward," said Hooper.

When complete in November, the runway will pave the way for a range of jet aircraft up to and including the Boeing 737, which seats more than 130 passengers and has a range exceeding 10,000 kilometres.

It's likely the smaller Bombardier CRJ-705 75-passenger jet, currently operated by Air Canada Jazz, will make the most scheduled flights to and from Nanaimo.

The type of "regional" range jets actually servicing Nanaimo will ultimately be market driven. The airport's passenger catchment area stretches from Qualicum to Cobble Hill and its business focus region encompasses western Canada and the Pacific Northwest.

Higher capacity, longer-range aircraft are sure to be needed as more passengers pass through the airport due to Vancouver Island's continued population and business growth. Passenger traffic could hit 334,000 annually by 2026.

"Because the market is growing so quickly in the area, we're really looking to get ready for that," said Hooper.

"Things like an airport or building a bridge are 50- to 100-year decisions. You're not doing this for next year, you're building for a 50- or 100-year term. That's what's happening with this decision."



Contractor Jakes Construction of Chilliwack, B.C., has mobilized portable offices and equipment for the \$9.1 million project, which broke ground in early April.

Jakes Construction is mostly hiring local sub-contractors, such as Hub City Paving and Raylec Power to supply construction materials and do the actual construction.

"It worked out well for us that there's a bit of an economic downturn because it affected our bid prices," said Hooper. "We're very pleased with the bid prices that came in."

Nanaimo Airport's reliability issue is also being addressed. Because the airport must often halt flights when the runway is obscured by fog and other foul weather conditions, new lighting, that will guide aircraft onto the runway during their final approach, and an instrument landing system are being installed.

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Quickfacts

- ◆ **IN 2006** Nanaimo Airport contributed to 584 jobs and generated gross revenues totalling \$41 million for the B.C. economy.
- ◆ **AN ECONOMIC** impact study by Jacob Consultancy forecasts with completion of the runway extension and infrastructure upgrades, Nanaimo Airport is expected to contribute to 857 jobs and generate \$59.4 million by 2011.
- ◆ **WITH HIGHER**-capacity jet aircraft, an estimated 204,000 passengers will pass through Nanaimo Airport in 2011 – up from 137,000 passengers for 2006.
- ◆ **THE AIRPORT** is expected to become a major economic driver for the Nanaimo region. A forecast for 2026 estimates it will generate \$122 million in total annual revenue and sustain 1,617 jobs.