

Yellowknife airport improvement fees could fund more parking, new terminal

Estimated fee of \$29 would be charged to travellers heading south out of territory

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A new parking lot with more spaces and a \$125 million to \$150 million new Yellowknife air terminal building are among the projects that could see funding from an airport improvement fee. (Sara Minogue/CBC)

The N.W.T. government says its new Yellowknife airport fees will come into effect this February, but what airport improvements will that money help pay for?

Russell Neudorf, the deputy minister of Transportation, hinted at some possible projects in a presentation to Yellowknife city councillors Monday.

Kiosks where people can print off their own boarding passes and baggage tags; a new parking lot with more spaces; and a \$125 million to \$150 million new air terminal building are among the projects that could see funding.

The improvements, Neudorf said, are meant to eliminate "bottlenecks" at the airport and to make services there more efficient.

Robert C. McLeod, the minister of Finance, announced the airport improvement initiative during his budget address last June, though he offered no details at the time on what improvements were sought.

In addition to introducing an airport improvement fee that air travellers using the Yellowknife airport will see listed on their ticket receipts, the department is increasing general terminal fees and landing fees. The latter fees are paid by the airlines but the increases to them are expected to be passed on to travellers.



Russell Neudorf, the deputy minister of Transportation, hinted at some possible projects that could be funded by an airport improvement fee in a presentation to Yellowknife city councillors Monday. (Guy Quenneville/CBC)

Neudorf estimated a passenger travelling south (outside of the territory) from Yellowknife could pay an extra \$29 once the new fees are introduced.

Neudorf defended the new fees, saying they're necessary at a time when money is tight at the territorial government.

"Capital funding is hard to obtain at certain times," said Neudorf. "We need to compete with hospitals, schools and other GNWT programs."

Julian Morse, a Yellowknife city councillor, said a longer Yellowknife runway — which would allow the airport to accommodate longer-haul international flights and attract a larger pool of tourists — should be at the top of the government's priority list.

"For people to be asked to invest this money, we should be expecting significant returns for it," said Morse.

"It's been a source of frustration to read continually about flights going in and out of Whitehorse from various European destinations. They've been made to make these investments and we haven't been able to," echoed fellow councillor Adrian Bell.

Neudorf says his department will release a draft business plan later this week. The report will outline \$30 million in investments the department would like to make to the airport over the next five years. Further consultations with some groups, including airlines, are expected, however.

A report released by the territorial government last year suggested investment in a new air terminal building at the airport would not happen until the year 2025 at the earliest.

Neudorf himself suggested that the security area at the airport — "another immediate source of frustration for a lot of people" — could also be a target for improvement.