

News Release

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Year in review at YLW

2009 passenger numbers at Kelowna International Airport (YLW) ended well ahead of the national average with only a slight decrease from 2008's record breaking levels.

Nationally, passenger numbers at Canadian airports are expected to be down approximately 6 percent; at Kelowna International Airport (YLW), passenger numbers reached 1,367,631 which is only 1.6 percent below the 2008 year end numbers of 1,389,883.

"We started the year off at almost minus nine per cent," explains Airport Director Sam Samaddar. "With everything that has happened including adverse weather conditions, the challenging economy, the West Kelowna fires, to end the year only 1.6 per cent behind 2008's record-breaking numbers is pretty good."

To help ensure it provides a first-rate customer experience, YLW has been participating in an independent national customer satisfaction survey since 2003. The survey benchmarks YLW against other Canadian airports of similar size.

In the annual survey, YLW passengers awarded the airport a solid 4.45 overall satisfaction score out of a possible 5, identical to the 2008 score. YLW passengers continue to express a strong level of satisfaction with the airport's facilities and services, resulting in 95 per cent of passengers being very satisfied or satisfied. Safety and security, cleanliness, and roadway/directional signage continue to meet or exceed passenger expectations. "This is valuable information to have," says Samaddar. "It helps us measure the success of changes and programs we have implemented, and we can use this information in planning new expansions and service delivery improvements. For example food, beverage and retail services at YLW received increased marks from passengers in 2009 as a direct result of the introduction of Tim Hortons, WhiteSpot and additional retail services in 2008".

Air service retention and growth continued at YLW in 2009. WestJet increased its non-stop flights to Calgary and Edmonton and added a scheduled service to Mexico, while Air Canada increased the number of seats in and out of YLW by using larger aircraft. Okanagan residents reaped the benefits of more sun destination charter flights as the number of seats to Mexico doubled during the winter season.

Over 5000 residents came out to watch the world's second largest fixed-wing aircraft land at Kelowna International. The Antonov AN-124 flew non-stop from Russia to deliver three helicopters to Kelowna Flightcraft for aerospace maintenance. The operation of this super-sized aircraft was made possible due to the runway extension in 2008.

Another accomplishment for 2009 was the approval from Kelowna City Council of the "Drive to 1.6 Million Passengers" program. In order to meet the demands of an expected increase in passenger numbers to 1.6 million by 2015, the airport has implemented a phased approach to construction, with each phase triggered as passenger traffic demands.

The Drive to 1.6 Million program includes an interim customs facility to be constructed this summer, while other elements will take place between 2011 and 2016, including the runway overlay, relocating and upgrading of utilities, upgrading of the outbound baggage system, improvements to the Highway 97 intersection, further development of aircraft parking facilities and a large aircraft taxiway, an expansion to the Terminal Concourse, and renovations to the existing arrivals area. The cost estimate for these projects is \$50.5 million, to be paid for through the Airport Improvement Fee (AIF).

"We are pleased with 2009," says Samaddar. "Our staff, tenants and stakeholder groups have accomplished a great deal this past year. We expect 2010 will bring with it new challenges, but we are using this year as our year to plan and prepare for the next phases of the Drive to 1.6 Million Passengers program."

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