



Runway extension takes off

Daily Courier file photo

Kelowna Airport's runway extension construction project will officially be kicked off today with a ground-breaking ceremony at 10 a.m.

\$8-million expansion project opens up Kelowna Airport to the world

By **STEVE MacNAULL**
The Daily Courier

This is the start of the most important improvement in Kelowna Airport's history.

Today at 10 a.m., a gaggle of dignitaries and executives will officially break ground for an \$8-million runway extension project.

The project will lengthen the runway from 7,300 to 8,900 feet so it can accommodate the take off and landing of wide-bodied long-haul jets.

It literally opens the world to Kelowna.

The extra 1,500 feet means a jet can take off in London, England, and land in Kelowna.

Airliners could also fly non-stop to Frankfurt, Germany, or Sydney, Australia.

In fact, those are the first three routes being discussed for ski charters.

"Initially, it will start likely as a weekly seasonal charter for skiers, but it will also mean people from the Okanagan can fly non-stop to Europe," said acting airport manager Sam Samaddar.

"Non-stops are so important to the growth and importance of an airport."

Big White and Silver Star ski resorts are also lobbying airlines to consider long-haul routes to bring skiers to Kelowna.

Longtime airport manager Roger Sellick stepped down from the post this month to concentrate on securing long-haul non-stops.

Sellick will retire on Oct. 31 and hopes to have big news by then.

Mayor Sharon Shepherd and Kelowna-Lake Country MP Ron Cannan will be at the kickoff ceremony this morning.

Planning and engineering work has already been done, so construction can start immediately for completion by the end of the year.

Extending the runway isn't as simple as putting down some more asphalt.

Up to 8,000 truckloads of granular material will be put down and compacted to make a base before the extra length can be paved and lit.

During the past 20 years, Kelowna Airport has grown from serving 300,000 passengers a year to 1.4 million in 2007.

It's now a regional hub with various airlines flying non-stop to 11 destinations — Toronto, Seattle, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria, Prince George, Las Vegas, Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta and Cancun.