



Lac La Biche County
welcoming by nature.

RECEIVED NOV 30 2011

November 25, 2011

Reeve Steve Upham
County of St. Paul No. 19
5015 - 49 Avenue
St. Paul, AB T0A 3A4

Dear Reeve Upham:

As you know, the City of Edmonton has decided to close its City Centre Airport. A master plan design is underway and land development is expected to begin in earnest in 2013. The province plans to reroute Medevac flights to Edmonton International Airport once closure occurs. There is considerable evidence this will negatively impact Medevac service and therefore the health and safety of patients from northern Alberta.

Transfer times from the International Airport to the Royal Alexandra or University of Alberta hospital are expected to be more than double the amount of time from the City Centre Airport (45 minutes vs. 15-20 minutes). This is expected to lower the response standard from one of the best in Canada to one of the worst.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support. Lac La Biche County Council has decided to continue to lobby for retention of the Medevac service standards that currently exist via the City Centre Airport. We believe it is possible to keep the same standards in place if northern communities, businesspeople, health professionals and residents affected by this change join together and lobby as a unified force. A multitude of voices from a multitude of sources conveying the same message is difficult to ignore.

We believe that:

- The Medevac service standards for northern communities must be maintained. Lives depend on it.
- Keeping the City Centre Airport open is the best option for maintaining the Medevac service standard.
- The province must find a suitable alternative before allowing the City Centre Airport to close.

It is hoped that your municipality will join with us and others to communicate to decision-makers our expectations regarding Medevac services. We have developed a communications strategy and have a number of tools and tactics that we plan to employ. The strategy is attached for your information.

.../2

We request that your Council support a 'retain Medevac service standards' lobbying campaign by sharing some of the costs and implementing some or all of the elements in the communications strategy within your own communities.

If your staff have other ideas about strategy or have questions about the attached document, please have them contact our Communications Manager, Shadia Amblie, at 780-623-6769 or shadia.amblie@laclabichecounty.com.

We are unable to determine at this time what the investment of each municipality might be but we are hopeful that of the dozens of northern municipalities we have written to, most if not all will decide to join the campaign. This will make the campaign tremendously effective and very economical for all concerned.

Please let me know if your Council is willing to fight with us to maintain the existing Medevac service standards. We have an ideal window of opportunity right now with a new Premier and Minister of Health and Wellness in place and a provincial election likely in the spring of 2012.

I hope to hear from you soon either by telephone or email. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Peter Kirylchuk
Mayor, Lac La Biche County
T: 780-623-7732
C: 780-404-5108
E-mail: peter.kirylchuk@laclabichecounty.com

Attachment

cc: Lac La Biche County Councillors



**Retaining Medevac Service Standards for Northern Albertans
Communications Plan
October 25, 2011**

BACKGROUND

In July 2009, Edmonton City Council decided to implement a phased closure of the Edmonton City Centre Airport. One of two runways was closed on August 3, 2010, resulting in rerouting some Medevac flights to the Edmonton International Airport (EIA). Eventually, the plan is for all Medevac flights to go to EIA, as Edmonton is committed to developing all of the airport lands. The remaining runway will remain open until the lands are needed. A master plan design is underway and land development is expected to begin in earnest in 2013.

The increased time to get to a patient to a hospital from EIA has resulted in significant concerns among rural communities and many in the medical community about the impact on patients, particularly those who are critically ill. On June 29, 2011 Lac La Biche County Council passed the following motion:

"That Lac La Biche County engage the services of Marcomm to communicate to the community the impact of the closure of the Edmonton municipal airport and to lobby to keep it open. Further, that letters be sent to AAMD&C, AUMA, the City of Edmonton, Premier Ed Stelmach MLA and other provincial political parties expressing the importance of the City Centre airport to provide primary medical care to the residents of Northern Alberta."*

This communications plan addresses the motion.

**Marcomm Works is an Edmonton communications consulting firm.*

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

- There is universal agreement by Lac La Biche County and many other northern communities, municipal and provincial officials, the medical community, all political parties, Envision Edmonton, and the public at large that patient safety not be compromised by the transfer of flights away from Edmonton City Centre Airport to other locations like the Edmonton International Airport.

- In contrast, there is very little appetite among City of Edmonton decision-makers to revive the debate about keeping the City Centre Airport open, even for Medevac flights. Edmonton City Council and Edmontonians have debated it for more than 15 years, with a number of surveys, motions, petitions and protests being made along the way.
- Envision Edmonton, despite a formidable investment of time and money during the past two years, has failed to stop plans to close City Centre Airport. However, it has not given up the fight, arguing among other things that Medevac services will be seriously undermined with the closure.
- The provincial government has indicated that determining what to do with the City Centre Airport is a municipal matter. Wild Rose Leader Danielle Smith is the only party leader to date who has said the province should intervene.
- Premier Ed Stelmach made a commitment that Medevac services would not be compromised as a result of transferring flights to the Edmonton International Airport. However, he chose not to get involved in the closure debate or decision. Rather, he commissioned the Health Quality Council of Alberta via Alberta Health and Wellness to review the safety implications for patients requiring Medevac services to and from the Edmonton International Airport. The report concluded that:
 - *"While there are specific groups of patients for who increased journey duration represents an increased threat to their well-being, it is difficult to determine the magnitude of this effect.*
 - *Since August 2010, both Alberta Health Services and Edmonton Regional Airports Authority have made changes to their structures and processes in an attempt to mitigate the problem posed by the closure of one runway at the Edmonton City Centre Airport. However, not all necessary structures and processes have been established at the Edmonton International Airport to mitigate potential patient safety concerns related to this relocation."*
- The Council made 17 recommendations, none of which commented on keeping the City Centre Airport open (it was beyond the scope of the report). However, ten recommendations spoke specifically of what needed to occur at the EIA to "support and guide the transition of Medevac services from the City Centre Airport to EIA."
- The province has accepted the report and has quietly implemented 5 of the first 7 recommendations. Terms of reference for a Transition Advisory Committee are being drafted. Plans are underway to build a special facility at EIA and provide other supports that will minimize transport delays.

- Transfer times from the International Airport to the Royal Alexandra or University of Alberta hospital are expected to be more than double the amount of time from the City Centre Airport (45 minutes vs. 15-20 minutes). This is expected to lower the response standard from one of the best in Canada to one of the worst.
- The Edmonton International Airport's diversion airport is Calgary. Such a diversion for such things as bad weather would further stretch the critical care time away from hospital.
- Responsibility and management of provincial air ambulance services was transferred to Alberta Health Services in April, 2010.
- The Edmonton Regional Airports Authority has jurisdiction over all airport operations in the Edmonton region and therefore influences such things as flight priorities.
- In 2009/2010, 3,059 patients were transported by fixed wing aircraft from various locations in Alberta to Edmonton. Of these, 7% (214) were deemed priority red which means "time critical, unstable, 'time-to-patient' or 'time-to-tertiary-care' is a pre-eminent factor for patient survival." The other 93% were stable or not urgent cases where time was not a factor in patient survival.
- During the same period, 473 patients were transported in a fixed wing aircraft from Lac La Biche to Edmonton. Of these, 11% (52) were deemed priority red. The other 89% were stable or not urgent cases.
- Lac La Biche doctor and pilot Richard Birkill believes it will be difficult to save the City Centre Airport. He proposes instead to lobby for Medevac flights to land at an alternative small airport that would have the necessary cardiac and specialized surgical supports in place.
 - In the Edmonton region, the best option in his opinion is Villeneuve Airport in northwest Edmonton. The runway could be easily extended to accommodate Medevac flights. Medical supports could be provided in an expansion of Sturgeon Hospital or in a new facility built next door to serve north Edmonton and communities north of the city. The Villeneuve Airport is operated by Edmonton Regional Airports Authority, the same organization that operates the Edmonton International Airport.

TARGET AUDIENCES

- The Premier, provincial elected and departmental officials in the Department of Health and Wellness
- Alberta Health Services
- The Edmonton Regional Airports Authority
- Health professionals involved in Medevac services such as doctors, nurses, paramedics and their associations with emergency service branches (i.e. AMA)
- Lac La Biche County residents
- City of Edmonton
- Lac La Biche-St. Paul MLA Ray Danyluk and other MLAs whose constituencies are impacted by northern Medevac services
- AAMD&C, AUMA and other organizations whose members are negatively impacted by the closure of the City Centre Airport.

CORE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

It's important Lac La Biche County communicate to those in a position to influence City Centre Airport plans about its expectations regarding Medevac services. That voice can be made much stronger by encouraging a broad base of northern communities, businesspeople and professionals to convey the same message. A multitude of voices from a multitude of sources is difficult to ignore.

But in lobbying for Medevac service standards to remain the same for northern residents, it's also important that politicians and other decision-makers hear from taxpayers, voters and residents. Grassroots involvement and opinion often succeeds in tipping the decision-making scales. People will be motivated to make their views known if they are educated and supported in doing so.

The core communications strategy will have three prongs:

1. Arm County residents with the knowledge and support they need to lobby those who can effect change. Key lobbying targets for residents will be the Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness.
2. Council to work with local physicians, businesspeople and other influential community leaders to communicate to decision-makers the need to maintain the same Medevac service standard as exists now.
3. Encourage other municipalities in the north and provincial associations like AAMD&C to follow Lac La Biche County's lead.

Throughout this process, local citizens will be made aware and kept advised of the County's efforts to protect and maintain Medevac service standards.

COMMUNICATIONS GOAL

Gain a commitment from decision-makers to maintain the existing Medevac service standard at the Edmonton City Centre Airport or at a suitable alternative.

COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

1. Position the current Medevac service standard at the Edmonton City Centre Airport as critical to the health and welfare of residents in Lac La Biche County and other northern communities.
2. Lobby decision-makers to protect and maintain the existing Medevac standard.
3. Raise awareness of the situation among Lac La Biche County residents and inform them of the County's efforts to keep the Medevac standard in place.
4. Motivate residents, industry and community leaders, and other northern municipalities to support Lac La Biche County's lobbying efforts.

KEY MESSAGES

- The Medevac service standard for northern communities must be maintained. Lives depend on it.
- Keeping the City Centre Airport open is the best option for maintaining the Medevac service standard.
- The province must find a suitable alternative before allowing the City Centre Airport to close.

TOOLS AND TACTICS

1. **Briefing package:** To include a backgrounder, PowerPoint, speaking notes, handouts/fact sheets, key messages, Q&As. This can be used for a variety of purposes: from face- to-face meeting support to on-line postings.
2. **Handbill:** an easy-to-understand information and motivation piece that outlines the situation and encourages the reader to take action. It will contain the Premier and Minister's offices contact information so people know where to direct an opinion.

The handbill would be mass produced and sent to every home and business in Lac La Biche County. Copies would also be dropped at strategic locations like reception areas, grocery stores, the Lac La Biche Airport and other places where visitors, residents and other gather.

3. **On-line and social media:** All print material, media materials, news and updates will be placed on-line. A special Facebook page will be created for the campaign for people to follow and contribute to.

4. **Advertising:** In addition to including content in the *County Connector* and the County's regular radio broadcast slot, posters and a 30-second radio spot would be produced as part of the campaign to raise awareness and encourage people to take action. The posters would be placed in strategic locations through Lac La Biche County. The radio spot would air on both local radio and two of Edmonton's most popular stations with reach into northern Alberta.
5. **Media relations:** This will include targeting both local and provincial media. To include a news conference to launch the campaign, news releases and story marketing to encourage coverage.
6. **Government relations:** letters/emails to key stakeholders and northern communities plus requests to meet the Premier, Minister of Health and Wellness, the government Operations Committee (Ray Danyluk, chair), rural caucus, and other key individuals/organizations.
7. **Tracking and evaluation** – Track progress of provincial government's Transition Advisory Committee, changes/developments regarding City Centre Airport, Medevac facilities/services, and response to the County's campaign. Evaluation will also include gathering feedback/intelligence from meetings/discussions with key decision-making officials. Take action as required until objectives are achieved.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

Alison Redford was elected the new leader of the Progressive Conservative Party on October 2, 2011 and became Alberta's new Premier on October 7. Many key cabinet positions changed as a result including the Minister of Health and Wellness (now Fred Horne) and Infrastructure Minister (now Jeff Johnson). A general election is expected in the spring or summer of 2012.

Medevac flights continue to fly into the City Centre Airport on its one remaining runway. It is expected that this runway will remain open for at least 2-3 more years. Given this timeframe, the campaign to protect and maintain Medevac service standards at the City Centre Airport or a suitable alternative can continue for some time.

However, to take advantage of the new Premier's eagerness to engage citizens in consultation about major changes, it is important that the lobby effort be in full swing before the next provincial election. Campaign launch would occur once all materials are in place but would avoid the Christmas season. Launch is anticipated to occur in January, 2012. The campaign will continue at least until the impact is evaluated in April 2012.

CRITICAL PATH

Task	Date
Approval of the communications plan	October, 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop materials Send letters to municipalities/community leaders encouraging involvement Coordinate launch details 	November/December
Launch campaign	January
Meet with Premier, Minister, rural caucus, other key stakeholders	December - February
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate impact Revise communications plan as required 	April, 2012

BUDGET

The following budget is based on a three month campaign.

A. Project management and consulting support	\$15,000
B. Materials development (writing, graphic design, printing)	30,000
C. Advertising	30,000
D. Distribution and disbursements	5,000
E. Evaluation	<u>5,000</u>
Total	\$85,000
Contingency (10%)	<u>8,500</u>
Total Project Cost	\$93,500

