

February 6, 2013

Prepare for take-off

Usually when we think of air traffic in Alberta, we think of the big international airports like those in Edmonton and Calgary. We may even think of the airport in Fort McMurray which is now the third-busiest in the province. However, dotted throughout Alberta are smaller regional airports, and they also play an important role in the economy.

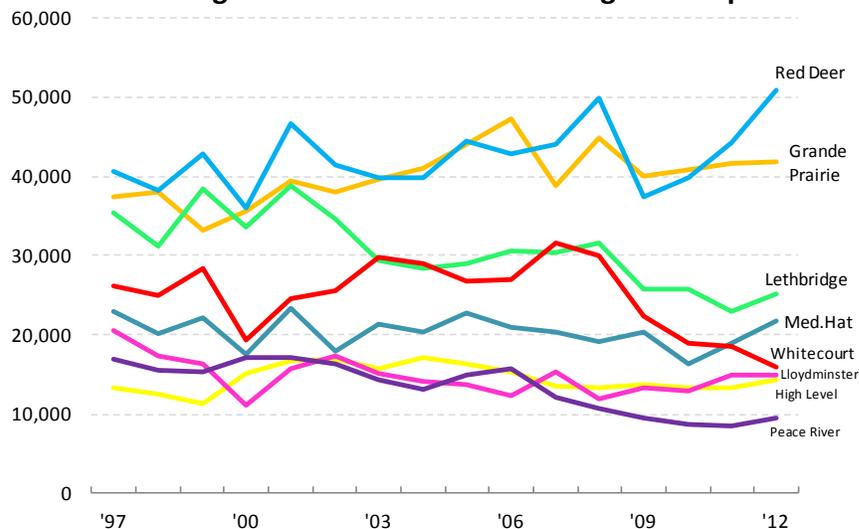
Looking at the trend since 1997, some of these regional airports in the province are increasing air traffic. Some, however, are holding steady, while still others are in decline.

The busiest regional airport in the province is Red Deer, with a total of 50,886 flights in 2012. Not only does it now handle the most air traffic, it has grown faster than any other—up 25 per cent since 1997. Much of this increase is

no doubt due to the growth in population and economic activity in Red Deer over the past 15 years. It is now one of the most important industrial service hubs in the province. Grande Prairie and High Level have also experienced an increase in the number of aircraft movements.

On the other hand, certain airports have declined in the volume of flights, notably Peace River (-44 per cent), Whitecourt (-39 per cent), and Lethbridge (-29 per cent). It could be that these airports are either attracting larger planes (thereby reducing the overall number of aircraft movements), or simply that air transportation in these centers is becoming less competitive with car or truck transportation.

Flight Movements at Alberta Regional Airports*



Source: Statistics Canada, The Daily, Feb. 5, 2012 and CANSIM table 401-0014
* - NAV Canada flight service stations (i.e., w/out NAV Canada tower)