

Passenger air service resumes at Red Deer Regional Airport

By [Harley Richards - Red Deer Advocate](#)

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Travellers aboard Northwestern Air Lease's flight to Kelowna from Red Deer early Friday morning might have been surprised by some of the passengers accompanying them.

Red Deer MP Earl Dreeshen, Red Deer North MLA Mary Anne Jablonski, and City of Red Deer and Red Deer County mayors Morris Flewwelling and Jim Wood were among the dignitaries who boarded the Jetstream aircraft. They made the round-trip flight to help celebrate the return of scheduled passenger air service to Red Deer Airport.

"This is real important to this area," said Wood, during a ceremony prior to takeoff.

The significance of the Springbrook-based airport regaining regular passenger service was reinforced by RJ Steenstra, CEO of the Red Deer Airport Authority, when he spoke later with reporters.

"It's absolutely critical, not only for the airport but for businesses and the community and citizens of Central Alberta."

Several regional carriers have offered scheduled service from Red Deer during the past eight years. But each fell victim to low passenger counts, with Swanberg Air Inc. the last to pull out in September 2011.

Fort Smith, N.W.T.-based Northwestern Air provided passenger service here from December 2006 to July 2010. It continued to fly out of the airport on a charter basis, and last fall announced plans to provide twice-weekly flights to and from Kelowna.

That schedule consists of service Fridays and Sundays, with one-way fares — including fees and taxes — starting at \$228.90.

Steenstra said it's up to area residents to ensure this continues.

"The community has to use it. Aircraft can be repositioned very quickly to areas that are more profitable."

Friday morning, five paid passengers were booked on the flight.

If the new route does prove successful, said Steenstra, more frequent flights and larger planes could result.

Terry Harrold, president of Northwestern Air, expressed optimism that the Red Deer-Kelowna route will succeed.

"Quite a few people, I think, have connections between the two cities."

Northwestern Air recently confirmed that it will also fly from Red Deer to Dawson Creek, via Edmonton, and back again, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays — beginning May 14.

"We're looking at going further west," Harrold added on Friday.

Although nothing has yet been arranged, he said Abbotsford is a possibility, as are connections to Victoria.

Steenstra said the airport authority is pushing for such additions routes. It's also seeking carriers to fly local passengers to northern destinations like Fort McMurray, and south to Lethbridge.

"We'll be looking forward to future announcements in the next year or so," said Steenstra.

In Kelowna on Friday morning, local MP Ron Cannan, MLA Ben Stewart and Mayor Walter Gray were on hand to greet the Red Deer delegation when they landed.

Northwestern Air's website, where booking information can be found, is at www.nwal.ca.

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