

# Red Deer Advocate

## Saskatoon airline looking at Red Deer route

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A Saskatoon-based airline is considering a Red Deer route.

Red Deer Airport Authority CEO RJ Steenstra said on Tuesday he has met once with West Wind Aviation representatives and a second meeting is planned.

“They’re certainly interested and it’s just a matter of timing and whether it makes business sense for them. We’ll support that in any way we can,” said Steenstra, after delivering a quarterly update to Red Deer County council.

To help build a case for a Red Deer connection, Steenstra has done some research showing the potential of the route.

Strengthening the business case is a recent study that showed a surprisingly strong relationship between Central Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The study showed there was a stronger relationship between this region and Saskatoon than to Fort McMurray, another direct business link assessed.

“There’s a strong case for (a Red Deer stop) and we’ll likely move into some more detail around demand for the route,” he said.

“And from there they can continue their process for assessing the viability of it.”

Among the study’s findings was that more than 200 businesses have some connection and relationship between Central Alberta and Regina, Saskatoon or Fort McMurray. Most businesses are in the manufacturing and oilfield services sectors.

Meanwhile, Northwestern Air Lease Ltd. is looking to extend its reach from Red Deer. Proposals for new passenger routes to Abbotsford and Fort St. John, B.C., are before Transport Canada.

The Fort Smith, N.W.T.-based airline offers twice-weekly service between Red Deer and Kelowna, B.C. Beginning in October, the airline also added twice-weekly flights to Fort McMurray.

The airport authority is also keeping a close eye on WestJet, which recently announced its regional carrier WestJet Encore will be headquartered in Calgary.

The spinoff airline is expected to start naming destinations in the new year.

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