

DATE: December 13, 2023

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Councillor Garth Frizzell, Chair, Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs

SUBJECT: Council Advocacy Options related to Pilot Shortages

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated December 13, 2023 from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs, titled, " Council Advocacy Options Related to Pilot Shortages"; and CONSIDERS the three (3) advocacy routes proposed.

PURPOSE:

This report is in response to Council's motion made September 25, 2023, at a regular council meeting requesting the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs identify advocacy opportunities for Council to address pilot shortages. A discussion on this matter was held on December 11, 2023, at committee and the following options were identified for consideration.

BACKGROUND:

With respect to the scope & timeline of the challenges experienced, local expertise (leadership within the Prince George Airport Authority) anticipates the shortage of qualified flight crew and maintenance technicians may continue for the next several years, barring significant changes to government policy and support. Among the challenges understood to be facing the aviation industry, which contribute to a shortage of qualified staff, include:

- Anecdotally, a significant number of pilots retired during the Covid-19 pandemic. This may be contributing to shortages in the sector as well as promoting faster career progression for pilots from regional providers into larger companies and higher volume routes.
- Wage and industry pressures are also noted to be driving pilots into larger routes, larger airlines, and international markets (USA), contributing to instability and shortages for regional air service providers.
- Generally, pilot training is expensive and lengthy.
- Training senior instructors, capable of mentoring other instructors, to create the training cadres needed to produce new pilots is also challenging given conditions in the industry.

Among the advocacy options Council may consider are two themes, training costs and immigration. As the mechanisms to address these items are generally provincial and federal tools, coordination with local MLAs and MPs may help inform the city's advocacy approach.

Offsetting the high cost of training

A 2022 survey by the Air Transport Association of Canada identified the high cost of training for its member flight schools and operators as the number one obstacle inhibiting students from entering or completing their training. To this end:

- 1) Reporting suggests that Transport Canada (TC) has begun discussions with Employment and Social Development Canada on improving and standardizing access to student grants and loans which, varies considerably by province.

Council could ask the Province to support this work with the alignment of its own grant and aid systems. If this option is pursued staff would look to industry / associations familiar with the topic to form a letter to be sent to relevant decision makers.

- 2) The City could work with the Prince George Airport Authority (if they are interested) to request TC provide an update from its work with the Air Transport Association of Canada, the Canadian Council of Aerospace and Aviation, and Employment and Social Development Canada to address barriers for Canadian students related to the general high cost of training.

As part of this request, the City could inquire if there are any lessons learned or innovative ways TC sees municipalities supporting the creation, recruitment, and retention of pilots and assess how those innovations may be applied in our region.

Immigration

- 3) Council could request support from local Members of Parliament to advocate to TC, Global Affairs Canada and Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada with a request to accelerate processing of those permits/visa applicants who hold pilot credentials and to develop targeted immigration programs that encourage foreign students to come to Canada for training and to remain here as flight instructors or commercial pilots employed by Canadian industry.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

It is assessed that advocating for the aviation industry supports the City's strategic pillar related to Economic Diversity and Growth Priorities. Specifically, building a strong resilient and diverse economy for Prince George.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

There are no financial considerations related to the advocacy options presented. Actions proposed are within the scope of administrations regular duties. It is assessed that capacity exists to complete any, or all, of the recommended actions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

Several challenges are contributing to pilot shortages, Council is asked to consider the advocacy options above to determine what, if any, action the municipality should take on this issue.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Councillor Garth Frizzell, Chair, Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs

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APPROVED:

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Meeting Date: 2024/01/08