

Executive Summary

The Purpose

This study examines the feasibility of creating and operating a two-year commercial pilot diploma program through the College of New Caledonia (the College) in the community of Vanderhoof, BC.

The goal of the proposed program is to cater to students who have an interest in northern aviation, and does not have the intention of competing with existing aviation diploma programs in BC. The proposed program seeks opportunities to partner with existing programs in order to best benefit the students of the north, and aviation as a whole.

Community and industry partners are in support of the proposed program as they implement collaborative economic diversification strategies to address the negative economic impacts from a decline in the forestry sector. At the onset of this study, a Steering Advisory Committee was established to provide input from the community on what type of program would be most beneficial to the region and meet the needs of the industry. Community and industry partners from municipal and regional governments, the local school district, the local chamber of commerce, local and regional aviation industry, local small business, and First Nations have helped guide this study and explore the potential benefits of operating a two-year commercial pilot diploma program in Vanderhoof, BC.

The proposed program will have direct benefits to the community and region in the form of employment opportunities, service and supply potential, and spin-off economic prospects. Likewise, the program has the potential to spur indirect benefits as it serves as a catalytic force in reinvigorating the cultural importance of aviation in the area, and increase aviation awareness and the number of visitors attracted to the region.

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The Need

Air services requiring a commercial pilot license are vital for serving remote areas in northern Canada, not only for passenger transport, but also for medevac, fire-fighting, cargo transport, and just-in-time-delivery services. Current global economic factors have produced a slowdown in air service but this is expected to be short-lived in the region, as the vast geography of the north ensures there will be a continuous need for individuals in possession of a commercial pilot's license to provide air services.

An aging work force of experienced pilots looking to retire, pilots seeking foreign prospects, and active recruiting by the military are creating new

another three to five years until they have an individual trained to the level of the pilot who recently left.

Exacerbating the problem are the dwindling number of commercial pilot training programs in operation in the north, the increasing desire of recruiters and insurance companies to hire pilots with a broader education, and the remote lifestyle of the north. Additionally, a gap is projected for the north in the supply and demand of professionals in the Natural and Applied Sciences, of which pilots are a subset, between 2007 and 2015 (Barry 2008).

The goal of the proposed program in Vanderhoof is to provide an opportunity for northern students to study and work in the north. In so doing, it is hoped the northern aviation industry can draw upon a pool of individuals who wish to remain and contribute to the industry in the region.

Northern Air Operator Survey

To assess the current need for commercial pilots in the north and gauge the outlook of those operating aviation businesses in northwest Canada, a survey was conducted of air operators listed on the Transport Canada Air Operator list in northern BC, the Yukon, southeast Alaska, western Northwest Territories, and northwest Alberta.

The Proposed Program

Community and industry partners serving on the Steering Advisory Committee for the proposed program stated it was important as a community to provide a program that reflected feedback from the Northern Air Operator Survey and where students could stay tied to a northern lifestyle, train in an uncongested air traffic space, and have the opportunity to fly in multiple weather conditions during four distinct seasons.

To ascertain essential program components that could be applied to a program in Vanderhoof, BC, key personnel from Selkirk College, the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) Aerospace Centre, Pacific Flight Club, the University of the Fraser Valley, Coastal Pacific Aviation, and Montair were interviewed. Components of these programs determined by community support partners to best suited to meet the needs of the north and align with the feedback from the Northern Air Operator Survey included:

- A program that accepts students without requiring they already possess a private pilot's license;
- A program designed to prepare students for real-world industry by providing skills and

Although comparable in some aspects, the proposed program at the College of New Caledonia is different than two-year aviation diploma programs offered by other post-secondary institutions in British Columbia and Alberta. The majority of these programs train students for work with large airlines and require the student to obtain a private pilot license prior to acceptance into their two-year curriculum (a cost that can range between \$8,500 and \$11,000 and is generally not eligible for tuition assistance).

The strength of the proposed program is in the choices available to the student. While the focus is to create pilots who possess the necessary skills to contribute to aviation in the north, the program does not limit the student to only that focus. The proposed program allows a northern student to train within an environment which he/she is familiar, while providing opportunities that reach far outside the region if that is where he/she wishes to go.

The Challenges

Challenges for the proposed program exist around keeping it sustainable, ensuring employment for its graduates, supporting students with suitable/affordable housing, and seeking funding from government and non-government sources for related community projects eligible for

The proposed program teaches skills useful in the aviation industry and transferable to other aspects of a pilot's life journey. The results of this study demonstrate a viable educational program opportunity with a proposed two-year commercial pilot diploma program at the College of New Caledonia - Vanderhoof campus. The College and its partners are committed to proceeding with this program in time for a May 2011 start date. The need for the proposed program is clear and supported by the community and industry.