

Airport marketing committee working with Delta airlines

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Delta Airlines, a U.S. carrier that offers flights to 481 destinations in 105 countries, may soon be offering flights from the Canadian Rockies International Airport (CRIA) to Salt Lake City, Utah. The Fly YXC Committee, the airport marketing committee, has been working together for the past two years on developing air service to the region.

"A large component of the airport expansion strategy includes marketing the new facility and the region and the committee recognized that it would take several years to ramp up the marketing efforts," said Phillip Elchitz, Managing Director of CRIA. "As a result of our strategy, in February the Fly YXC Committee travelled to meet with four major U.S. airlines. We travelled to Atlanta to meet with Delta Airlines, we travelled to Chicago to meet with United Airlines, we travelled to Denver to meet with Frontier Airlines, and we travelled to Seattle to meet with Alaska Horizon Airlines. While there was interest from all four airlines, Delta Airlines has made a formal offer to commence service into our region.

Two years of focused work and strategic planning is coming to fruition."

The committee is made up of the major resorts in

the East Kootenay region including Resorts of the Canadian Rockies, Panorama Intrawest, Havaday Developments Wildstone, Fairmont Hot Springs, St. Eugene Mission and Resort, Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, Copper Point, and representatives from Kootenay Rockies Tourism, the City of Cranbrook, and CRIA.

Delta Airlines would offer non-stop service between Cranbrook and Salt Lake City, one of the airline's major hubs, and Elchitz said they are targeting service to commence mid-December of 2008. Currently the only city Delta Airlines services in B.C. is Vancouver.

"The notion of Delta Airlines, one of the world's most branded and recognizable carriers, adding the Kootenay region into their network is remarkable," Elchitz said. "The new service will allow both recreational and business travellers from all four corners of the United States same day service into our region with a one stop connection in Salt Lake City."

One of the terms of the offer from Delta is a revenue guarantee.

"In the current environment, with high fuel prices, airlines look to partner with communities for new markets. What that means is that the airlines require the risk to be shared between themselves and

the community in the form of a revenue guarantee," Elchitz said. "The Kootenays is an unknown market to Delta Airlines and as a result they have requested a revenue guarantee as a component of commencing services."

A substantial percentage of the guarantee has been pledged by some of the resorts and developers in the region and now the committee is looking to acquire the balance through a support campaign involving businesses. Elchitz could not comment on the amount of the guarantee but it is expected that at the luncheon on Wednesday, April 2 Kent Myers will speak about it. Myers, President of AirPlanners, will be outlining the details of the Delta Airlines offer at a luncheon at the College of the Rockies. Contact the Cranbrook and District Chamber of Commerce at 426-5914 for more information tickets to the luncheon.

In addition to bringing people into the region, Delta Airlines would make it easier for people in the region to travel into the U.S.

"Having Delta allows for not just inbound service, but it really allows us to facilitate the outbound demand. We know that there are close to 30,000 people annually who drive to other airports to fly to the U.S. because of the poor connections into the

United States at this time," Elchitz said. "We want to make it more efficient for people in the region to fly to the United States. It's also very expensive, travelling to the U.S from the Canadian Rockies International Airport and from other airports within our region. Having a U.S. carrier flying direct will significantly lower the airfares."

As for the possibility of other airlines also coming to CRIA, Elchitz said those plans are still being made.

"The committee is continuing to work on Canadian eastbound opportunities for direct flights from Toronto," he said. "We recognize this is one component of an overall strategy, which includes north/south and east/west travel. That ongoing marketing for east/west travel includes the two major airlines in Canada."