

Minister Istchenko
Minister, C & TS

January 15, 2014

Aviation and Marine Services is broken. It cannot continue to function as it does.

From the outside the “why” is not clearly evident. But the “How” and the “Where” are apparent to those of us forced to deal with them. The past few years we have experienced example after example of illogical and inconsistent restrictions, and of unjustified and usually unnecessary regulation.

Runway 19 was an unnecessary, and possibly even a created issue. It was resolved at our last public meeting and agreed to by your managers. But, within hours the results of that meeting were discarded and the issue revived. So here we are again, pretending it is Transport Canada who are the cause even though, our discussions directly with Transport Canada revealed that they were NOT the source of any issue, it was clearly a YTG decision. So if we seem reluctant to accept promises or decisions today you can understand why.

The solution is not the simple change of one or two staff, nor the creation of another policy or rule. At this point in time the only way to achieve sanity is for the Minister to meet directly with the users once, or twice, every year to review the situation. Only when the entire bureaucracy knows that their actions will be reviewed and that they will be accountable will their actions be coordinated and sensible.

My most pressing question of you, and an example of the disfunction is my current lease for the hanger lot I lease from you (Lease WH-51-908). During the construction of the “Water and Sewer Project” you allowed the contractor to backfill all the excavations, including those on my lease, with contaminated soil from the White Pass Tank Farm. It was apparent to all of us, so on the collective lease holders initiative we sampled and had this fact confirmed this by independent laboratory, This in itself is outrageous. But the absurdity gets worse...

My lease has just expired and I need to renew it. Imagine my surprise to find the new lease had nine additional caveats, mostly dealing with my responsibility regarding contamination. One is that you will require me to engage an independent Engineering Company to confirm that the lease is clean from all contamination before I will be allowed to sell, or surrender it and vacate. There are additional insurance requirements and new obligations that can be described as being based on reality. The only caveat that disappeared in the new lease was the Governments obligation to notify me of rent increases!

Its impossible to make sense of this. I asked that you reconsider this and am now two months past expiry on my lease and still waiting to hear your decision about a new lease?

I'm on a roll now, I need to continue, with your indulgence, I reflect back to the past summer of being unable to access my aircraft or lease due to construction, (Construction that exceeded the promised completion date by 12 months), a summer of Notams used to close airstrips or reduce your maintenance costs by restricting airstrip use. IE Cousins was closed all summer but upon frequent inspection I found it was not for damage as we were told. The runway was in no worse, (nor better), condition than it has been regularly for twenty years. iE Pelly Crossing remained closed for "Muddy surfaces" most of the summer despite it drying out mid-season. IE Mule Creek was Notam'ed for a maximum aircraft wingspan rather than having it mowed. (Next year it might be Notam'ed for balloons only?) You have given away airstrips (like Sqanga and Magundy) and tried to give away more (like Cousins, to quote director Bill Blahitka at the last meeting with us; "at least twice a year we try to give Cousins airstrip to the City of Whitehorse but so far they have refused to accept it." Insightful?

And, I reflect back to the COPA National Fly-In two years ago where you Notam'ed Fort Selkirk closed rather than doing the maintenance. The controversy arrises when we observe that it was done at the very last minute, because according to one bureaucrat, it was too risky to use. I, and several others flew over that airstrip to check and found it to be in the same condition it had been in for years. To facilitate this same fly in you also prohibited any additional outhouses, water sources, or campfires. Two days before the event your staff removed the cook stove, the woodpile, the visitors guest book, and the picnic tables. During the event you changed your direction after the first day and eliminated refueling services, despite issuing permits to them and allowing them to establish facilities and begin sales.

Going back a bit further I recall example after example of illogical, often absurd restrictions. When we were about to begin construction on our hanger we were directed by the Airport Manager that we must not use the existing access to our lease, that instead we must use a new gate 38 (behind our lot), for access. Gate 39 was being removed permanently. We therefore relocated our building towards the front of our lease to allow access and parking. Five years later you have not maintained the road behind our leases at gate 38, making it impassable. All access is through the original gate. Unfortunately our hanger is now poorly located as there is 4 meters of unused lease behind the hanger and no room to park an aircraft in front.

I can present hours of examples of illogical or inconsistent mismanagement. Case after case of unwarranted regulation. If you want them I have them documented, but to what avail?

Sir; This is not about any of your staff. The disfunction is now systemic. Any change or rotation of staff will not resolve this. The labyrinth of policy based on erroneous assumptions now runs too deep. This absurdity will regenerate.

The only way for aviation in the Yukon to survive is a committee must be struck, that consists solely of several users and the Minister himself, and it must meet twice a year to measure progress and prevent further decline.

A review of your legislation and policies is required subsequently, but will be ineffective without this concurrent high level oversight.\.

Sincerely

J George Balmer
334-3555

3 Sage Place
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A5T9