

## Imaginary Industrial Expansion destroys a Real Airport in Nova Scotia

In Nova Scotia, the Kings Municipal Council has directed the county airport (Waterville Airport, CCW3) to stop operation after 30 September 2014.

The Waterville Airport (Kings County Airport) has a single 3500 ft paved runway (10-28) and is in the heart of the agricultural Annapolis Valley 15 km west of the county seat of Kentville. The airport has a long history, starting as an auxiliary landing strip for a World War II training centre in Greenwood, N.S. After the war it reverted to farm fields for short while before being revitalized as a private airport. This changed ownership several times before it was purchased by Kings County in 1975. Operations were handled by the County for many years before management was delegated to Waterville Airport Cooperative Ltd. (WACL) which currently run the airport.

The airport has a flight school (Greenwood Flight Centre), several repair facilities, sky-diving activity and a search and rescue group. Each summer a dozen Air Cadets are trained at the airport to get their power license. There are ten private hangers, one commercial hanger, and the terminal building at the airport. 31 light aircraft operate out of the airport and most pilots belong to the Annapolis Valley Flying Association (AVFA) and COPA flight 147. It is the home of the core members of Scotia Eagles (EAA chapter 1051) and is well placed to be central for the regional nature of the EAA chapter. Young Eagle flights are sponsored from Waterville. It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> busiest civil airport in the province.

The stated reason for the closure is to allow for the *possible* expansion of the neighboring Michelin tire plant. Yet, as of the date of the motion passed by the Council, Michelin had not announced any expansion plans in Nova Scotia. In fact the company recently closed one of its tire plants in Granton, Nova Scotia, eliminating 500 jobs. In June 2013, during a public session before the Kings County Council, a representative of Michelin Tire stated that they had no plans to expand their Waterville tire plant. The reasons for the sudden airport closure are not known since several important council meetings discussing the airport were closed to the public.

The Waterville Michelin plant has abundant land around its plant but if they were to expand, they want to build to the north on the land of the Municipal Airport. This would take half of the runway and put a building under the western approach rendering the airport unusable.

How did all this happen and why?

### Events Leading the Decision

- In 2012 the Michelin Tire company invested \$346 Million in its North American plants but none in any of the three in Nova Scotia. All of Michelin plants

have to compete against the others to get money for expansion. The New Democratic provincial government wanted jobs for Nova Scotia.

- So in May 2012, the province paid for a \$100,000 study looking at moving the Waterville airport knowing that the plant wanted any possible future expansion to occur on the airport land.
- Progress in expansion at the Waterville airport stopped. Plans for three hangers to be built were canceled due to the uncertainty of the future of the airport.
- By January 2013, the engineering and airport cost study was finished and submitted to the province but it was kept secret until May 2013. The study estimates a \$12 Million cost to build a new airport and mentioned several possible sites. An alternative move to Canadian Force Base (CFB) Greenwood, 20 km to the west, would cost less but still be about \$7 Million.
- Meanwhile in April 2013, Michelin invested \$750 Million building a new plant in South Carolina.
- In June 2013, the Kings County Council formally agreed to make the airport land available to Michelin if it needs it. At the same time Michelin stated that it had no plans to expand the Waterville plant.
- Fall 2013, MOK inquired into the possibility of a civilian airport at CFB Greenwood which is currently closed to civilian air traffic. The Waterville Airport Cooperative agreed to the airport move but preferably not at Greenwood but in the county closer to Halifax. The NDP government is defeated in a provincial election and replaced with a Liberal one.
- February 2014, new Liberal provincial government urged the MOK to quickly make the airport property easily available to Michelin.
- March 2014, after a closed session, the council of MOK voted 10 to 1 to close the Waterville airport after 30 Sept 2014. There still is no commitment by Michelin for expansion here.

### Outlook:

During all this period, aviators communicated with the MOK council, agreeing and understanding the desire for economic development and, in turn, getting promises to look at building new or moving the airport. But the province has not commit any money to this and the MOK does not have the funds to support creating a new airport. Currently the airport returns about a \$1 million annually to the local economy with contributions of \$50,000 per year from Kings County.

The province is demanding that any new airport show that it is economic self sustaining or in their word, show a "positive business case". To justify the closure, the warden of the MOK council, Brothers, says "We can't stifle a chance for economic growth. If we wait to move the airport first, which could be one or two years down the road, we may miss an opportunity with Michelin. By making the land

available now, we are showing that Kings County is open for business and eager to grow.”

Already, the owner of the flight training centre at the airport said that he can not survive a delay for new facilities. Hanger owners will be required remove the buildings at their own cost. There will be little aviation left to move to another airport. It is very unlikely, that a new \$12 million airport can sustain itself after the existing aviation businesses have been driven away or disappeared.

The aviation community is, to say the least, very upset about the situation. This will not only effect aviation in Kings County but the whole region. Pilots move around from airport to airport and supported each other during fly-ins, breakfasts, flight training, socializing and other activities. The AVFA is assembling task groups to plan, lobby, and work to keep aviation alive and active in the Annapolis Valley. They have a big job ahead of themselves.

Link to provincial study for the airport move:  
(<http://novascotia.ca/econ/docs/Waterville-FinalReport.pdf>)  
Annapolis Valley Flying Association: (<http://www.avfa.ca>)

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