

**Announcement of \$2 million for Comox Airport
Premier Gordon Campbell
March 26, 2004**

Check Against Delivery

We should take a moment to reflect on the history of your airport and what it's done. Forty-eight years ago, the Comox Valley airport opened its doors here on the Department of National Defence base. In 1956, there were just 4,100 people in Courtenay-Comox.

Today, there are eight times as many – and today, you're driving your own economy and opportunities. You're creating a diversified economy – in tourism, in forestry, in agriculture, in sport fishing and in golf resorts. You are now known as the gateway to British Columbia's growing and exciting resort on Mount Washington.

In 1956, the airport had 3,500 square feet. The building we're in today is 30,000 square feet. That reflects the openness of the region and our province; the way we open up to visitors and say, "You're welcome here. Come and visit Courtenay-Comox. Come and visit the North Island. Come and see what we have to offer."

When you're that welcoming, you're going to create opportunities, not just in your community now, but also for generations to come.

You should thank the leaders that have done that. You all know you have a great MLA here, Stan Hagen, who's been a leader in Courtenay-Comox for some time.

When I was travelling around the province prior to the last election, I said to people: send someone who will speak clearly and unequivocally on your behalf. Send someone who understands and has a passion for where you live. Send someone you know you can work with.

I can tell you: Stan Hagen speaks with a clear and strong voice on behalf of the Comox Valley and the North Island. You couldn't have sent a better MLA to Victoria. I want to thank you for that and say "thank you" to Stan for your work.

I'm also pleased that I'm here today with the Minister of Transportation, Kevin Falcon. If you've ever talked to Kevin and asked him if he's excited about what he's doing, you know he's exactly the kind of transportation minister you want. Transportation is more than just airports, but airports are a more and more critical part of our economic framework, of the framework for economic development for our communities. Kevin certainly understands that.

Your airport expansion is one of a number underway across the province. This marks a beginning for community airports in British Columbia, which are beginning to open our doors and our province wider to international visitors. We're beginning to say: "We're proud of where we live; we're proud of what we do. Come and let us share it with you."

I want to emphasize the exceptional contributions of Jim Brass, the mayor of Comox; Starr Winchester, the mayor of Courtenay; and Fred Bates, the mayor of Cumberland. This is a community-driven process. This was a community-driven project.

I also want to congratulate your commission, because I know how much time and effort people put into this kind of an initiative. That effort was critical to your success. It's because of that effort that the community has confidence in you. This is not confidence in us as a province. It's confidence in you as a commission and in your community as a whole, and I want to congratulate you for that.

I was here last year, just before your referendum. There was real excitement about this expansion.

Now that it's going forward, think about what can happen here. Passenger volumes are already skyrocketing at this airport, with over 166,000 passengers coming through every year. This airport is going to create a great impression of your community as the first vision for arriving visitors, and their last vision as they say goodbye.

Two-thirds of the travellers who come through here are headed to destinations outside the valley. So this airport contributes to the Comox-Strathcona regional district, to Campbell River, Gold River, Cumberland, Sayward, Tahsis and Zeballos.

Those communities have plans, too. They have plans to build on their successes and their assets, which adds to the excitement of this announcement.

Together, the airport commission and the regional district have contributed 65 per cent of the nearly \$8-million budget to make this project a reality.

I'm pleased to be here, on behalf of the MLAs of the North Island and the people of British Columbia, to pledge \$2 million for this expansion. It makes me feel good, because it completes your vision for your community and for your airport.

We are going to focus those resources specifically on supporting the capacity of the international customs area. You are going to welcome international visitors here, to this incredible part of the world, and this investment is going to provide additional benefits for Mount Washington, for the Crown Isle Golf Course, for the King Fisher Resort and Spa, for the Coast Westerly Hotel.

Those four facilities alone generate 1,000 local jobs. Tourism will generate thousands more jobs because of the initiative, the drive, the commitment, the energy and the vision of the people of the Comox Valley. I thank you all for that vision.

More broadly, this project will generate 800 new, direct jobs and \$22 million in new economic activity in your region. It will build on your great quality of life and great opportunities in aquaculture, forestry and energy development.

Again, to your leaders and your community: thank you. To the airport commission for your commitment: thank you. To the workers who have come here and created a quality project that the world will view and be part of: thank you. To the contractors and the people of the Comox Valley: thank you.

Thank you for your vision, your commitment, and your contribution to the province of British Columbia.