

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 709-18(3): COMMUNICATION OF YELLOWKNIFE AIRPORT BOARDING DELAYS

May 23, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My statement earlier today outlined the sequence of providing airline passengers with crucial information regarding flight check-in times at the Yellowknife Airport. I have given the Minister advance warning of questions today, so I wonder if he could first tell me: how far in advance did the Yellowknife managers know about the renovations in the baggage area, and how long were they told the renovations would take to complete? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the notes here. Thank you to the Member for giving us the heads-up on this. I am going to take the opportunity to actually let the public know what we are actually doing out there. These renovations are part of a larger project. The whole baggage-screening recapitalization, which is funded by CATSA, which is the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, the funding was approved in December of 2018. The contract for the building modifications included the renovations to the oversized screening area, to level 2 and level 3 screening areas. For those of you who do not know, that is located behind the check-in counters. Currently, the contractor is working to complete the first phase. This required temporary shutdown of baggage-handling systems to check baggage for flights. The public communication about the impact to the travelling public began prior to the project starting, and it was communicated that the public should arrive 90 minutes in advance for a few weeks until the end of May. We have been working closely with the contractor to have this first phase finished as soon as possible, and we are on target to have it completed by the end of May.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. The funding came through in December, and the news release from the department went out on May the 10th, 10 days after the work was already started. I think the Minister would agree that it's a pretty big deal missing your flight because you arrived too late at the airport, and I understand the Minister has some personal experience with this, so I hope that we would all agree that a comprehensive multimedia awareness campaign alerting the public to these facts is very important to convey to air travellers in Yellowknife. Can the Minister explain why there was no comprehensive communications campaign about the need to come to the airport at least 30 minutes in advance of the 60-minute check-in time?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: I think the House will be very surprised with what we have done here. There were several communications tactics used to notify the public in advance, and I will be very specific: radio ads ran from April 24th to May 10th, that is radio ads; there were two newspaper ads, April 24th and May 3rd; posters were distributed to local businesses within the community, alerting the traveling public about the situation; several tweets were issued in the days leading up to the start of

construction; and a public announcement was issued later to confirm the status and estimated completion dates.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that detailed information. I guess I missed the ad on April 24th, but the news release from the department, not everybody tweets, not everybody has access to the Internet. The news release only went out on May 10th, 10 days after the work was already started. Can the Minister tell us when this work is going to be completed at the airport and how many people have missed their flights as a result of this work?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: As I said, currently, phase 1 is scheduled to be completed by end of May. That is phase 1, and we will be notifying the public when we are doing the other stuff. Neither the Yellowknife airport nor the Department of Infrastructure has received any complaints on this matter. We are not aware of any flights being delayed or any passengers who have missed their flights. Travellers have cooperated and have been arriving early to avoid congestion. We have been monitoring the passenger flow, and the interim system has been functioning well.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. Final oral question. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that information. I mentioned that there is no notice of the extra time for check-in on the Yellowknife Airport Authority website, and there does not seem to be much collaboration with airline partners as there is no information that I can find on their websites about the need for an early check-in. Can the Minister tell us how the department would improve its communications next time around regarding planned construction delays at the Yellowknife airport?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: As I have said, this is only the first stage of a larger CATSA project. We can take some lessons learned from this. Even the email that I sent out to all Members stating what was going on there, we will make sure that that gets out there before we start these things. I have to double check, though, for the Member, but I think, when you actually book your ticket, they actually notify you, the airlines notify you what's going on at the airport. I will have to check into that, but I have been informed, I think, that is the possibility of what's going on when you book your ticket.

You know, communications has always been an issue in this Legislative Assembly, and we have continued to strive to make things better. We realize not everybody is on Twitter or on Facebook or reads the newspaper, which makes things difficult, but we will try to do our best to communicate well in advance of what we can do coming up with the next CATSA projects. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.