

## **MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE**

### **AIRPORT TAXI FEES**

**May 28, 2021**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Mahsi, Monsieur le President. Further on the theme of the pandemic, we all know that COVID 19 has had impacts on small businesses and questions persist about how this government can help operators get through the hard times. The taxi industry is a prime example and I have a specific ask for how this government can help.

With the collapse of the tourism industry and discouragement of nonessential travel, the volume of airline traffic has dramatically shrunk. Air Canada is out of Yellowknife market entirely. WestJet is on reduced service passenger volumes and other air carriers are way down as well.

In response to my questions, the infrastructure minister has reported that the number of passengers transiting the Yellowknife airport is down a whopping 73 percent for fiscal year 2020 21 over the previous year or before the pandemic.

The impact on Yellowknife taxi business has been harsh. One operator, Aurora Taxi, reports losing fully half of its drivers since the beginning of the pandemic. It's estimated that each of the three major taxi companies operating in Yellowknife have lost up to 40 percent of their drivers. Some drivers who used to make their living working only at the airport have left the business entirely.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Infrastructure Department offered some relief to these operators from the airport taxi stand licence. That's the fee paid by companies for the right to operate regular service from taxi stands at airports. For the first eight months of the pandemic up until the end of 2020, these fees were waived in recognition of the loss of the value of the business.

Although business has not gone back up, the Infrastructure department reinstated the full \$1,500 per month fee on January 1st, 2021. Those fees need to be rolled back or prorated. With passenger volume down by almost three quarters, it only makes sense that the cost of taxi stand licence be reduced or prorated pending a return to regular business. While we're all looking forward to the release of the updated Emerging Stronger economic recovery plan, some businesses still need immediate relief before they can recover.

I will have questions for the Minister of Infrastructure on how we can adjust our airport taxi stand licence fees to better reflect the current ability for small business, namely taxi operators, to make a living. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.