



North Cariboo Airport Service Assent Vote - Communications Plan -

ISSUE/EVENT

As rural areas of the North Cariboo receive the economic and social benefits of the airport, the Cariboo Regional District is proposing a new tax for rural areas to support the Quesnel Regional Airport, which the City of Quesnel owns and operates.

GOAL

Goal: Equip and encourage residents to make an informed vote at the referendum for the proposed North Cariboo Airport Service.

Our goal is to effectively communicate with CRD residents in the North Cariboo and all key publics about the referendum to establish a contribution service for the Quesnel Regional Airport. Our main messages are “be informed” and “vote.” The communications plan is not designed to ensure that voter response is for or against the proposal; rather, it is designed to ensure that voters can make an informed decision on referendum day. Materials will present costs, benefits and other issues from a balanced perspective.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this communications plan are to build awareness and action towards achieving the organizational goals and objectives of establishing the North Cariboo Airport Service. Through our communications, we will also try to raise awareness about local governments and the need for residents to exercise their democratic rights, particularly considering this referendum will be held in conjunction with local government general elections.

- **Objective #1: Increase the level of awareness about the proposed North Cariboo Airport Service over the course of the communications plan.**
- **Objective #2: Increase voter participation compared to previous referendums for Electoral Area A, B, C and I.** In 2008, there were 1,339 voters for the referendum on multiple North Cariboo services (including an airport contribution service). In 2014, there were 1,223 voters for the North Cariboo HandyDart service, which was held in conjunction with local government elections.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Our target audiences in no particular order are:

- Taxpayers within Electoral Areas A, B, C and I
- Regular users of the airport
- Residents who don't use the airport
- Airport staff, contractors and commercial users of the airport
- CRD elected officials and staff
- City of Quesnel elected officials and staff

SWOT ANALYSIS

An analysis of the existing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats surrounding the referendum will help inform our communication strategies and key messages.

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The tax increase for this new service is low• Well known and utilized airport• Good support from elected officials	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential confusion with the general elections and a City of Quesnel referendum happening at the same time• Timing of information with summer and back to school• A previous referendum (10 years ago) on this topic failed; it was presented along with a suite of other proposed new functions, which may have complicated the public awareness of and benefits from the airport service
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Following the 2017 wildfires, there is public awareness around the value of the airport to provide emergency services• Higher profile with referendum taking place at the same time as the general elections• The airport allows the North Cariboo to remain attractive to industrial and commercial interests and improves its potential for economic development	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taxpayers not wanting to spend more on taxes as a result of the economy and unknown job loss potential• Public apathy• If there is an acclamation in any of the Electoral Areas, there may be lower voter turnout• People who do not use the airport may not see the value in the contribution service

KEY MESSAGES

See FAQ.

SPOKESPERSONS

All interview requests will flow through Emily Epp, CRD Manager of Communications. The appropriate CRD staff will act as spokespersons as required, such as the Chief Financial Officer, the Manager of Community Services and the Manager of Communications. Interviews on technical information may be directed to City of Quesnel staff, as the owners and operators of the airport. Additionally, the CRD Co-Chair of the North Cariboo Joint Committee may conduct general interviews about the referendum, with cognizance of the CRD's Election Communications Policy, which applies after July 20, 2018.

TACTICS/BUDGET

These tactics are in addition to the statutory requirements for advertising, etc. ahead of a referendum.

Internal Communications

Front counter staff in Quesnel need to have a working understanding of the project, as well as Quesnel Library staff since the panels will be on display in the library. Information will be shared with them and Managers will either meet with them in person or via phone to ensure they understand the proposed service and referendum.

Information Handouts

An initial FAQ has been developed with information on the proposed North Cariboo Airport Service – this has been posted on the CRD website, shared on social media and made available at the CRD

Quesnel Office. A second FAQ will be developed with additional information on the voting details for the referendum. This will also be posted on the CRD website and social media accounts and will be made available in paper form at the offices.

Mailers

A full-colour mail-out focused on the referendum details and process will be mailed to every home and business within Electoral Areas A, B, C and I. Efforts will be made to drop off paper copies at key community locations, like the fire hall, library, etc.

Regular Publications

An article about the upcoming referendum was included in the CRD's UpFront newsletter in June 2018 and Board Highlights. Additional articles highlighting the project will be included in the CRD's Board Highlights, as appropriate.

Website

The CRD website will be used with information updated regularly. Information about the referendum can be found on the Elections & Assent Voting page (<https://www.cariboord.ca/government/elections>) and the Airports page (<https://www.cariboord.ca/services/airports/airports-2>).

Ideally, the City of Quesnel page about the Quesnel airport will direct people to the CRD website for referendum details.

Information Displays

A couple information panels will be produced and displayed at the airport and library to provide project and referendum details.

Social Media

The CRD's Facebook page and Twitter feed will be utilized.

Email Blasts

Information updates will be emailed via the CRD's email distribution list as deemed necessary. People can subscribe or unsubscribe through the website or conventional email.

Media Relations

News releases will be sent to the media to announce important updates. Pitched articles will be used to highlight the importance of the airport and the services it provides to the North Cariboo, along with information about the referendum. A media tour of the airport will be arranged.

Advertising

Print, radio and Facebook advertising will be used leading up to the referendum to encourage residents to get out and vote. Advertising will be coordinated with the legislated referendum advertising to keep information consistent.

Airport Staff Meeting

CRD staff will attend an airport staff meeting to give a brief overview of the project and referendum to ensure all the staff members understand and have their questions answered. This will be important as they may get questions, particularly with the display panels set up at the airport.

Tactic	Estimated Cost	Final Cost
General Printing	Internal	\$0
Mailer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printing • Postage 	\$1,000	Postage: \$596.79 Printing: \$1,215.20 \$1,811.99
Social Media (using existing CRD & SCRC sites)	\$0	\$0
Advertising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print (referendum) • Radio ("Get Out and Vote") • Facebook ("Get Out and Vote") 	\$3,500	Print: \$949.46 <i>(split costs with admin; total was \$1,898.92)</i> Radio: \$1,735.02 Facebook: \$200 \$2,884.48
Display Panels (4-6)(referendum specific)	\$250	\$117.60
Staff Travel	\$150	\$275
Referendum Costs		
Contingency	\$300	
Total	\$5,300 plus other admin referendum costs	\$5,089.07 <i>(including full print costs: \$6,038.53)</i>

TIMELINE

Month	Week	Activities
July	9-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Cariboo Rural Caucus reviews communications plan • CRD Board passes resolution to go to assent vote and approves referendum question (Board Highlights)
	16-20	
	23-27	
	30-Aug. 3	
August	6-10	
	13-17	
	20-24	
	27-31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referendum mailer sent to all residents • Display panels set up at airport and library • FAQs made available at CRD offices and online
September	3-7	

	10-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pitched media stories sent to newspaper
	17-21	
	24-28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper notice of voting ad • Media tour
October	1-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook advertising leading up to general election • Newspaper notice of voting ad
	8-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio ads leading up to advance voting and general voting • Oct. 10 advance voting
	15-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oct. 15 advance voting • Oct. 20 general voting • Preliminary results announced after voting closes (news release)
	22-26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official results are released (news release)

Note, the original timeline was slightly delayed due to the wildfire season and work on the Interlakes fire truck referendum, so the details outlined in August and September were pushed back by one to two weeks.

EVALUATION

Objective	Measure
Increase the level of awareness about the proposed North Cariboo Airport Service over the course of the communications plan.	<p>There are a few measures that can be used to consider whether there was an increased level of awareness for the proposed service.</p> <p>WEBSITE On the CRD website, the Airports page (www.cariboord.ca/airports) was the hub for all information related to the referendum. Even when residents visited the elections/assent vote page, they were directed to this page for all details. Over the course of the communications plan (July 13 - Nov. 1, 2018), there were 1,275 unique pageviews. For the previous period (March - July 2018), there were only 153 unique pageviews. This was a 733% increase in engagement on this page. which indicates increased awareness of the project.</p> <p>FACEBOOK According to data from our CRD Corporate Facebook page, a typical post usually gets 71 post clicks and 19 reactions, comments or shares. Comparatively, our airport referendum posts had an average of 50 post clicks and 26 reactions, comments or shares.</p> <p>So, overall, we saw average engagement on Facebook related to the North Cariboo Airport referendum. While we saw lower clicks, which means that people clicked something in the post such as a link to more information, we saw higher reactions, comments or shares which indicates a higher level of engagement with the</p>

	<p>content. This indicates there was awareness and engagement with the project, but not necessarily more than average.</p> <p>Looking at other Facebook pages or groups where we do not collect statistics and the emails we received, there was considerable engagement online about the referendum. The fact that there were questions and contrasting opinions about the project indicates that, for those people, there was awareness and understanding about the referendum.</p> <p>Taking all these aspects into consideration, plus the voter turnout, it is fair to say the communications plan was successful in increasing awareness levels.</p>
<p>Increase voter participation compared to previous similar referendums (1,223 voters in 2014, and 1,339 in 2008).</p>	<p>The goal of increasing public awareness of the referendum is ultimately to create action – to encourage residents to vote.</p> <p>1,446 ballots were cast in the North Cariboo Airport Service referendum. This is an 18% increase in voter turnout compared to the 2014 referendum for Electoral Areas A, B, C and I, which was held on the North Cariboo HandyDart service in conjunction with local government elections.</p> <p>This shows that the communications plan met its goals of increasing awareness and action around the proposed service.</p>

If you consider the end goal of voter turnout and the total communications costs, you can assess the return on our investment (ROI). 1,446 ballots were cast in the referendum and the total communications costs were \$6,038.53. This means that for every person who voted in the referendum \$4.18 was spent in communication efforts.

The CRD does not yet have many ROI benchmarks to compare with. However, in 2018, the Interlakes Fire Truck Referendum saw an ROI of \$23.97 per voter and the South Cariboo Recreations Centre Expansion had an ROI of \$2.98 per voter (when only considering referendum communication costs).

ADDITIONAL NOTES

We heard from a small group of people that not everyone was made aware of the referendum and that they did not receive enough information about it. Further, some residents expressed concern with a lack of public meetings about the referendum.

The communications tactics in this plan were chosen strategically. Over the past decade, we have seen increasingly low turnout at public meetings, which have a high expense. We also have found that those who attend public meetings are usually informed and have already decided how they want to vote.

Through research, and particularly through our recent post-wildfire surveys, we have found that mailed flyers combined with online engagement, newspaper and radio advertising are effective ways to communicate with our residents. The above tactics were chosen to reach as broad of an audience as possible in a cost-effective way.

While the stats above and the increased voter turnout do indicate our communication tactics were successful, there is always room for improvement in future communication efforts.