
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health
BC Ambulance Service

NEW CONTRACTS BOOST B.C. AIR AMBULANCE PROGRAM

VICTORIA – The British Columbia Ambulance Service (BCAS) has identified three B.C. companies as the successful proponents to provide fixed-wing aircraft services for its air ambulance program following a competitive solicitation process.

“Once finalized, these contracts will enhance the BC Ambulance Service air ambulance program as they add a fixed-wing aircraft dedicated to routine medical transfers seven days a week, providing improved support for health authorities,” said Health Minister George Abbott. “This will free up the remaining five aircraft stationed in Kelowna, Prince George and Vancouver to provide essential emergency air ambulance service benefiting patients throughout British Columbia.”

Contract negotiations will begin next week with:

- Northern Thunderbird Air Inc. – one turboprop aircraft based in Prince George
- Helijet International Inc. – one jet aircraft based in Vancouver
- Carson Air Ltd. – four turboprop aircraft (one airplane based in Kelowna and three based in Vancouver)

“These agreements will ensure safe, reliable, and efficient air ambulance services over the next three years,” said Fred Platteel, chief executive officer of the BC Ambulance Service. “Meanwhile, the BCAS is continuing with its ongoing analysis of the air ambulance program as we keep pace with changing patient care needs, aviation technologies, and training.”

The proponent aircraft feature enhanced electronic safety equipment that exceeds Transport Canada’s certification requirements and are upgraded and modernized in comparison to the fleet in use today. The BCAS is requiring additional training for pilots to further ensure the safety of patients, paramedics and the crew.

In total, seven bids were reviewed by a five-person committee comprised of provincial air ambulance program and purchasing staff, with additional contract expertise provided by aviation and aircraft business specialists. The competitive solicitation process took place over a four-month period.

In 2001/02, BCAS air ambulance transported 7,031 patients at a cost of \$3,324 per patient. The projected number for 2006/07 is 8,300 patient transfers at a cost of \$4,500 per patient, representing a 35 per cent cost increase over the past five years. Increasing call volumes, labour costs, rising fuel prices and meeting and exceeding industry safety standards account for the bulk of the cost increase.

The estimated cost of operating the BCAS Air Ambulance Program for 2000/01 was \$20 million and for 2006/07 the estimated cost is \$38 million.

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