

## Laurie Brown Airport passenger count decline has steadied out and solid year predicted

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PASSENGER COUNTS remain down but it looks as if things have steadied out, says the manager of the Northwest Regional Airport here.

September's figure of 9,777 people either arriving or leaving is down from Sept. 2007's 10,444 – a drop of 667 – and that's about consistent with monthly declines since early summer, says Laurie Brown.

“So I still think we're going to end the year with about 118,000 people,” said Brown. That would be a drop of about 4,000 people from 2007's recording setting figure of 122,070 people.

Despite that drop, 2008 would still go down as the second-busiest year at the airport in the past 11 years and be just the third year passenger traffic topped six figures over that same time period.

Brown's satisfied with the prediction given the state of air travel in other parts of the country and world.

He's even suggesting there could be an uptick if, as anticipated, Rio Tinto Alcan's board of directors finally gives approval at the end of the month for a \$2 billion-plus Kitimat aluminum smelter rebuild project.

“Even so the airlines here are registering pretty good load factors – they're pretty full,” Brown said.

He added that passenger counts have to be examined in light of Pacific Coastal Airlines stopping its Vancouver-Terrace service in mid March citing the inability to make any money.

“They did about 1,000 passengers a month,” Brown noted.

He said it's also significant that while Air Canada Jazz eliminated five per cent of its flights on average across the country, it didn't touch its Vancouver-Terrace service.

“Their numbers here are pretty solid,” said Brown. “In the spring they were talking about a fourth flight for the summer but when they did cuts elsewhere, they decided to keep what they have. Otherwise they would have made Hawkair that much more profitable.”

The airport's passenger count soared in 2007 to 122,070, 12,000 more than 2006's 105,086.

In part that increase was due to Pacific Coastal's service start in March 2006, an increase in mineral exploration north of Terrace and preparations for Rio Tinto Alcan's pending smelter rebuild.

That kind of increase in traffic has been matched by additions and renovations at the airport, resulting in a larger baggage collection space and a larger waiting room.