

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

City of Campbell River's Economic Development Newsletter



Businesses Featured:

- **TEAAM Aeromedical**
- **PAL Aerospace**
- **49 North Helicopters**
- **Campbell River Skydive Centre**

Spotlight on YBL

Campbell River Airport is a 10-minute drive from waterfront in downtown Campbell River. The airport is a designated Port of Entry with a 6,500-foot runway and two parallel taxi ways. The recently-upgraded terminal building has a sleek, modern look and features the Fuel Up Café, as well as Budget Rent a Car and National Car Rental outlets. The airport's central Vancouver Island location puts it within 1.5 hour's flight time from any point on the island within 1.5 hours. It's also close to the narrows between the mainland and the island, offering a significant advantage for small airplanes and helicopters.

YBL - The Municipal Airport of Campbell River

WORDS BY ANDREW FINDLAY

When it comes to airports, location matters in a big way. Back in the early 1950s, enterprising local citizens realized that Campbell River's central Vancouver Island location and proximity to dozens of islands requiring air support made for a strong business case to build an airstrip. They were right. In 1959, the first plane landed at Campbell River Airport (YBL.)

Today YBL is serviced by three regional airlines, Pacific Coastal Airlines, Central Mountain, and Cascadia Air the most recent airline to add Campbell River to its schedule. There are multiple flights daily to Vancouver, meaning both business and leisure travelers are well connected, whether it's a meeting on Howe Street or an international flight connection for a mid-winter tropical getaway.

There's also regular service between YBL and other regional airports, including Pitt Meadows and Abbotsford in the Lower Mainland, with connection to the Okanagan Valley, Kamloops, Prince George and other BC destinations.

But YBL is more than an airport; it's a hub of business and entrepreneurship. In recent years the airport has attracted some high-profile tenants including TEAAM Aeromedical, The Squamish-based organization is an innovative non-profit that provides emergency care, rescue, and transport for mountain and other challenging environments. TEAAM CEO Miles Randall said it was an easy choice selecting Campbell River as the site of its fourth base.

"From Campbell River airport we can stage helicopter rescue missions anywhere on Vancouver Island and the coast," Randall says. "Campbell River airport also allows us to interface with our fixed wing medevac capabilities, whether we are transitioning a helicopter rescue to a fixed wing aircraft for rapid transport to a hospital or launching an international repatriation."

PAL Aerospace is another new arrival at YBL. This Canadian leader in aircraft engineering and maintenance, data collection, fixed wing search and rescue, and special missions opened a base in Campbell River in 2020. Its new 12,000 square foot hangar and adjacent 6,000 square feet of office and warehouse space was custom built to support a multi-year, \$128 million surveillance contract with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to provide a fleet of four retrofitted De Havilland Dash-8. These aircraft are the eyes in the sky looking for illegal fishing, and central to the federal government's FASE (Fisheries Aerial Surveillance Enforcement) program. DFO used to rely on a Beechcraft King Air, which could only fly for four hours before refueling. One of PAL's high tech Dash-8s is now based in Campbell River; it not only doubles the flight time between refueling, but also delivers state-of-the-art camera and radar equipment with the capability of providing 24-7 coverage along the coast.



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Given the city's proximity to the Coast Mountains and dozens of smaller islands, fishing lodges, and remote communities, Campbell River has become a buzzing centre of helicopter and floatplane activity. 49 North Helicopters is another YBL-based success story. This growing helicopter company provides flight training, forest fire suppression support, crew transport, among other services. 49 North has also capitalized on YBL's location to become a tourism innovator, especially in the adventure sector with its array of custom heli-skiing, flight seeing tours and other heli-accessed adventures. One of 49 North's more popular niche offerings are helicopter wedding vows, customized for the adventurous individuals wanting to do something extraordinary for the big pop-the-question moment - like, for example, landing with their beloved next to a turquoise-coloured alpine lake.

Rob MacNeill, co-owner of the Campbell River Skydive Centre, knows a thing or two about adventure and adrenaline. Since opening two years ago, MacNeill and his team have welcomed hundreds of experienced and first-time jumpers to the sky diving centre at YBL. In August, 2021, the centre hosted the first annual River City Skydive Festival, which included an artisans market, classic cars, live music, helicopter rides, and "a lot of skydiving," says MacNeill.

"Our goal at the centre is to promote skydiving in a safe and enjoyable way. We work with all ages from 16 to 85," MacNeill says. "The airport staff have been amazing, supporting us at every step as we have grown. I couldn't ask for a better place to operate out of."

Community spirit, collaboration and vision helped to establish Campbell River Airport. More than 60 years later, YBL has become key to the city's increasingly diverse economy. And it's also a critical piece of transportation infrastructure; like the hub of a wheel, its spokes reach out to remote communities, islands, and regional airports connecting the city and changing lives.

For more information please contact:

Rose Klukas, Manager of Economic Development
City of Campbell River
invest@campbellriver.ca

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