

# BUSINESS

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## Seaplane docks ready for harbour

CARLA WILSON  
Times Colonist

New floating seaplane docks costing \$400,000 will be installed — weather permitting — in Victoria's harbour next week.

The docks are the first phase in a plan that would see a new, larger seaplane terminal built in the Inner Harbour.

The deteriorating existing docks will be removed, said Randy Wright, senior vice-president of Harbour Air and Westcoast Air. In their place, 200 feet of new docks will be installed in a rectangular configuration, allowing 12 planes to tie up, an increase from seven.

The new docks were built by Jormic Marine Construction of Sooke using pressure-treated lumber produced using environmentally friendly methods in Portland, Oregon, Wright said. Concrete pavers will cover the dock's surface.

Wright estimates the new docks will last at least 30 years. Costs are being shared between Harbour Air and its affiliate, Westcoast Air, and by Washington-based Kenmore Air, which will move its terminal from 1234 Wharf St.

A shared dock will create operational efficiencies and convenience for customers to help keep costs down, Wright said.

Six anchors weighing 25,000 pounds each were lowered into the water on Wednesday, he said. Buoys mark their location.

A crane and barge will be in the harbour next week to fit the anchors to the docks, providing seas remain calm.

Wright said talks are continuing with the city on a proposed floating terminal building for the three airlines. A development permit application will be going to the city, he said.

## Carmanah inks deal

Times Colonist

Carmanah Technologies signed a non-binding letter of agreement Thursday on a potential \$10-million contract for navigation lights on a major waterway in South America.

If the deal goes through, it would be one of the Victoria-based company's biggest single contracts in years.

The solar-power and light company did not provide details or locations for the potential deal, but said it will include the procurement and installation of buoys and solar lights. The agreement is subject to funding and technical specifications by all parties, which is expected to be completed within 30 days. The company noted there are no assurances that the deal will be completed.

## Construction on a high



BRUCE STOTESBURY, TIMES COLONIST

Construction crews installed an 84-metre crane — the highest in the region — on Thursday at the site of the Promontory condominium tower on the Songhees. The crane is owned by Campbell Construction and was last used for the Atrium Building downtown. The 21-storey, 177-unit Promontory is a project of Bosa Properties, which says it has already sold half the units. More than 150 people are expected to be working on the site over the next 16 months. When complete, Bosa expects more than 300 people to be living in the tower.

## WestJet regional service key for Victoria airport

JEFF BELL  
Times Colonist

Victoria International Airport officials may not have taken as splashy an approach as others in spreading their message, but YYJ is still very interested in being part of a new regional service being set up by WestJet.

Penticton, for instance, declared itself "WestJetville" on Thursday, the same day as the unveiling of the Bombardier Q400 turboprop planes that WestJet intends to use in smaller domestic markets, and compete with Air Canada. Nanaimo chimed in with a social-media campaign, while Brandon airport collected 10,000 signatures on a petition.

Geoff Dickson, president and CEO of the Victoria Airport Authority, said he has already been to Calgary to talk with members of the WestJet executive and had some of them here a few weeks ago to meet with the authority's board.

"That was a chance to

frame the opportunities in Victoria and to learn more about their strategy," Dickson said. "We're on it, definitely."

The Q400s that will fly in the new service can go places that WestJet's much-larger 737s cannot.

"It's for all intents and purposes a 70-seater," Dickson said of the Q400s. "What WestJet is looking at is 40 aircraft in total, and they would take their first delivery in 2013. It's going to take approximately five or six years to fill the entire order."

The planes are worth \$30 million each.

A few key decisions will determine how the new service unfolds, Dickson said. "The first decision point is they're going to establish two hubs, one in Calgary and one in Toronto, and the question is which one are they going to start first? Where they start dictates the pace of when they're coming to Victoria."

Dickson said the Q400 does more than just help WestJet target new routes.

"It helps make existing routes they're servicing more profitable," he said. "It also helps them kind of connect the dots, where they might be serving a couple of cities from different places but now they can actually fly city-to-city."

Dickson said two routes that come to mind where the Q400 could work well are Victoria-to-Prince George and Victoria-to-Kelowna. "And there's an opportunity to grow the overall market between Victoria and Vancouver, and to connect into all the large international banks of flights from places like Asia and Europe."

Flight options from Victoria could definitely expand, he said. "I would say it frees up their jets throughout the system for more longer-haul flying out of Victoria, so adding frequencies hopefully to Las Vegas, Phoenix, Mexico, Hawaii, and hopefully a new Los Angeles service."

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> Bellingham to expand, C4

## Hippo buses add weight to tourism

Experts want more attractions in Victoria but see positive signs

CARLA WILSON  
Times Colonist

Purple and yellow amphibious "hippo" buses are the newest attraction coming to Victoria, where the tourism sector is closely watching visitor numbers in the hope that modest improvements will continue.

Victoria Hippo Tour owner Geoffrey Lind is aiming to begin the land-and-sea service in late July.

Buses would set out from Belleville Street for a 40-minute land tour and enter the water via the James Bay Anglers Association's ramp on Dallas Road for another 40-minute return trip through the harbour to the waters in front of the Fairmont Empress Hotel, he said Thursday.

"Safety is our number one concern. Fun is number two," Lind said.

He is transporting three 40-foot-long, 40-passenger buses from Toronto, where he ran a similar business for 12 years. The adult rate will be \$39. The buses are "very quiet" and run on a mix of bio-diesel fuel, Lind said.

Mandy Farmer, chief executive of Victoria-based Accent Inns, said: "We do need more attractions as far as the tourism goes."

She pointed to events such as this month's Victoria International Cycling Festival, and cyclist Ryder Hesjedal's success at the Giro d'Italia and his local course as ways to increase cycling tourism.

Farmer also welcomed plans for a gallery featuring artist Robert Bateman's work in the CP Steamship Terminal building on the harbour.

Victoria's \$1-billion tourism industry has suffered from a drop in American visitors, is sensitive to weather and relies largely on last-minute arrivals from local markets.

"Right now in Victoria, our numbers are up, which is very positive," said Farmer, who forecast that increase will continue through the season. Occupancy has increased moderately, by less than 10 per cent, compared with last year, she said.

Chemistry consulting tourism specialist Frank Bourree, who tracks hotel rates and occupancy levels, said the tourism industry is showing signs of life.

"Things are going quite well. Some of the bigger hotels have struggled keeping up to their occupancy of last year. But overall the market is looking pretty good. We are within a per cent of last year."

Bourree was optimistic about the summer season. "The trends are going in the right direction now."

B.C. has experienced increases in U.S. visitor numbers four months in a



TIMES COLONIST

A tourist checks out rack cards at the Tourism Information Centre downtown.

row. He attributed it to the Winter Olympics 2010 in Whistler because benefits follow one to two years later. Americans and Canadians feel they deserve a holiday after the poor economic conditions, he said.

Tourism spending in Canada increased 0.9 per cent in the first quarter of this year thanks to spending by both Canadian and international visitors, Statistics Canada said Thursday.

It marked the 11th consecutive quarterly increase in tourism spending, the federal agency said.

Tourism spending by Canadians in this country rose 0.6 per cent in the first three months of the year, continuing a trend that started in the third quarter of 2009. Since the first quarter of 2002 to the first quarter of this year, tourism spending by Canadians at home has climbed by 47 per cent, Statistics Canada said.

As for foreign visitors, their spending rose by two per cent in the first quarter, as numbers of overnight travelers from the U.S. and overseas also increased.

At Five Star Whale Watching in Victoria, established in 1985, manager Jim Dale said fewer American visitors are seen and business has been hampered by poor weather.

"We have had significantly more wind this spring, which deters people from going out."

Dale has higher hopes for the rest of the tourist season, predicting that better weather is on its way and that whale watchers will be on the water into late October.

Randy Wright, vice-president of business development for Harbour Air, echoed Dale, saying: "We are hoping for some good weather and a late fall."

Passenger numbers for scheduled service have held steady, but poor weather this month has hurt sightseeing tour numbers, Wright said. cjwilson@timescolonist.com

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