



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations and Victoria Airport Authority Enter into Friendship Agreement

Victoria, BC (February 4, 2026) – Four W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations — BOKEĆEN (Pauquachin), W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), STÁUTW (Tsayout), and W̱SÍ,KEM (Tseycum) — and the Victoria Airport Authority (VAA), operators of Victoria International Airport (YYJ), have entered into a new Friendship Agreement that establishes a long-term, collaborative relationship based on respect (ÁTOL), cooperation (ĆÁINEUEL), and partnership (HIWESTEL).

The Agreement reflects the long-standing relationship between the W̱SÁNEĆ people and the lands within which Victoria International Airport is situated. It recognizes a shared commitment to reconciliation and to building a constructive, long-term partnership. The Agreement acknowledges the W̱SÁNEĆ Nations' Aboriginal and Treaty rights affirmed under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and underscores the importance of respectful relationships and ongoing dialogue between the W̱SÁNEĆ Nations and the Victoria Airport Authority. Recognizing YYJ's role as a key regional transportation hub and economic driver, the Agreement represents an incremental but significant step toward a renewed relationship guided by Indigenous rights and a strong commitment to collaboration.

"On behalf of our four W̱SÁNEĆ Chiefs, we see this Friendship Agreement as an important step toward restoring our relationship to our territory," says W̱SÁNEĆ leadership. "The lands where the airport now stands have always been an important part of our homeland, and our responsibilities to this place continue. This Agreement creates space for our people to benefit from opportunities on our own lands and ensures that our voices are included in decisions that affect our territory and future generations."

Developed over several years of dialogue and relationship-building, the Friendship Agreement sets out a framework to guide how the W̱SÁNEĆ Nations and VAA will work together on matters related to airport operations, future development, and shared interests. It is forward-looking in nature and establishes processes through which greater clarity and operational detail will be advanced collaboratively over time.

As part of the Agreement, VAA will make annual economic contributions to the signatories based on airport revenues. These contributions include new, dedicated funding for education training, scholarships, and internships to increase employment for W̱SÁNEĆ members at the airport, as well as support for new business opportunities. The Agreement also addresses a range of shared focus areas, including communication and engagement, culture and placemaking, and environmental stewardship.

“This Friendship Agreement reflects the leadership and commitment shown by the W̱SÁNEĆ Nations and by our organization. It provides a practical framework for how we will work together as YYJ continues to evolve. We are proud of the progress made to date and look forward to building on this partnership in the years ahead,” says Elizabeth Brown, President and CEO of the Victoria Airport Authority.

The Friendship Agreement was formally signed on February 4, 2026, at the Mary Winspear Centre in Sidney, British Columbia, with leadership from all four W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations and representatives of the Victoria Airport Authority in attendance.

About the W̱SÁNEĆ Nations

The W̱SÁNEĆ people have lived on the Saanich Peninsula, Gulf Islands, and surrounding waters since time immemorial. W̱SÁNEĆ, meaning “the emerging people,” reflects a worldview grounded in stewardship, sustainability, and the interconnectedness of all living things. The four W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations — BO̱KEĆEN (Pauquachin), W̱JO̱LE̱P (Tsartlip), S̱ṮÁUṮW (Tsawout), and W̱S̱Í̱KEM (Tseycum) — continue to uphold their cultural traditions, exercise their rights, and work toward the well-being of their communities and future generations.

About Victoria International Airport (YYJ)

Victoria International Airport (YYJ) is Vancouver Island’s gateway to the world, connecting more than 1.9 million passengers annually to key domestic and seasonal international destinations. Operated by the Victoria Airport Authority, a not-for-profit, non-share capital organization, YYJ plays a vital role in regional connectivity and economic growth. The Victoria Airport Authority operates the airport under a long-term ground lease with Transport Canada. YYJ is located within the homeland of the W̱SÁNEĆ people whose historical relationship to the land continues to this day.

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