



BACKGROUNDER

Friendship Agreement - WSÁNEĆ First Nations and Victoria Airport Authority

Signed: February 4, 2026

Location: Sidney, British Columbia

Overview

Four WSÁNEĆ First Nations and the Victoria Airport Authority (VAA) have entered into a 15-year Friendship Agreement that establishes a long-term, collaborative relationship grounded in respect (ÁTOL), cooperation (ĆAINEUEL), and partnership (HIWESTEL).

The Agreement recognizes that Victoria International Airport (YYJ) is located within the traditional territory of the WSÁNEĆ people — BOKEĆEN (Pauquachin), WSÍKEM (Tseycum), WJOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), and STÁUTW (Tsawout) — and recognizes the WSÁNEĆ First Nations' Aboriginal and Treaty rights recognized and affirmed under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. Developed over several years of dialogue and relationship-building, the Friendship Agreement represents an incremental but meaningful step toward reconciliation and provides a practical framework for how the parties will work together on future development and shared interests over time.

Who is involved

- WSÁNEĆ First Nations:
BOKEĆEN (Pauquachin), WJOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), STÁUTW (Tsawout), and WSÍKEM (Tseycum)
- Victoria Airport Authority (VAA):
The not-for-profit operator of Victoria International Airport (YYJ)

Term

- Agreement term: 15 years, with potential for renewal

Purpose of the Agreement

The Friendship Agreement establishes formal structures and processes to guide how VAA and the Nations will work together over time, including:

- Creation of a new Advisory Committee and Technical Working Group
- Clear engagement and communication protocols

- Collaboration on culture, heritage protection, and placemaking at the airport
- Employment, training, and education opportunities for WSÁNEĆ members
- Support for WSÁNEĆ business and procurement opportunities
- Joint environmental stewardship initiatives
- Annual economic contributions linked to airport revenues

The Agreement is forward-looking and business-focused, recognizing YYJ's role as a key regional transportation hub and economic driver.

Airport operations

The Agreement confirms WSÁNEĆ Nation support for existing airport operations and establishes collaborative processes for engagement on future development projects.

The Agreement does not replace or alter the WSÁNEĆ Nations' relationships with the Crown, nor does it extinguish Aboriginal or Treaty rights.

Elements of the Friendship Agreement

Implementation

- Establishes an Advisory Committee with representation from the WSÁNEĆ Nations and the Victoria Airport Authority to set priorities and guide implementation of the Agreement
- Creates a Technical Working Group to advance projects, commitments, and implementation actions
- Provides for a dedicated WSÁNEĆ Liaison Officer within VAA to support ongoing engagement, coordination, and relationship-building

Communication and Engagement

- Commits the parties to develop formal Communications and Engagement Procedures
- Includes agreed protocols for:
 - Employment, business development, and training
 - Information sharing
 - Cultural protocols and recognition

Culture, Heritage, and Placemaking

- Further refinement of archaeological and chance-find procedures, including cultural monitoring
- Cultural awareness training for VAA staff, contractors, and Board members

- Expanded visibility of WSÁNEĆ culture, artwork, and SENĆOTEN language within airport facilities
- Investment in placemaking initiatives and cultural features at YYJ and on airport lands

Employment, Training, and Education

- Development of an Indigenous employment strategy at YYJ
- Establishes an annual Scholarship Fund to support education and skills development for WSÁNEĆ members
- Encourages airport contractors and tenants to employ WSÁNEĆ members

Contracting and Business Opportunities

- Strengthens Indigenous procurement and business opportunities at YYJ
- Updates procurement processes to better support WSÁNEĆ businesses
- Encourages partnerships with airport tenants and developers

Economic Contributions and Revenue Sharing

- Provides annual economic contributions to the WSÁNEĆ Nations based on the airport's total annual revenue - contributions are funded through non-aeronautical revenue and do not come from the Airport Improvement Fee

Environmental Stewardship

- Collaboration on progressive, practical, and economically viable environmental projects
- Integration of WSÁNEĆ Traditional Knowledge, including ecological knowledge, into environmental planning and restoration
- Joint work on impact assessments, restoration initiatives, and sustainability priorities

About the WSÁNEĆ Nations

The WSÁNEĆ people have lived on the Saanich Peninsula, Gulf Islands, and surrounding waters since time immemorial. WSÁNEĆ, meaning “the emerging people,” reflects a worldview grounded in stewardship, sustainability, and the interconnectedness of all living things. The four WSÁNEĆ Nations — BOḰEĆEN (Pauquachin), W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), STÁUTW (Tsawout), and WSÍKEM (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 WSÁNEĆ people whose historical relationship to the land continues to this day.

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