

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH SERVICES
INFORMATION BRIEFING NOTE**

Cliff 843765

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Kevin Falcon, Minister of Health Services
- FOR INFORMATION

TITLE: Interior Health Dedicated Medical Transfer Helicopter Trial

PURPOSE: Provide an update and background information on the IHA helicopter trial

BACKGROUND:

Currently, emergency air transport in Interior Health (IHA) is provided by both BCAS contracted fixed-wing aircraft and chartered helicopters. BCAS does not have any dedicated air ambulance helicopters on contract within IHA but charts helicopters from pre-qualified local air operators on an ad hoc basis where there are critical patients and time is of the essence.

Chartered helicopters are generally used for scene responses, particularly to remote or difficult to access areas. Advanced Care Paramedic (ACP) service is currently only available in urban and metropolitan centres in BC, therefore most often medical attendants in rural and remote communities are Primary Care Paramedics (PCP). Without access to ACP, air ambulance flights may only be from the scene, or local facility, to the next the higher level of care in the region. As a result, patients may not necessarily be flown directly to a tertiary care centre.

Only when a higher level of staffing is available, ad hoc helicopters are used to fly ACP or Critical Care Transport (CCT) paramedics from an urban centre directly to a scene or rural facility. Those paramedics help stabilize and then accompany the patient back to a tertiary centre.

DISCUSSION:

A pilot for a dedicated helicopter air ambulance service in IHA has been proposed to assess how significantly it may reduce transport times between rural facilities and tertiary care centres. With the addition of a helicopter pilot in Kamloops, the entire Southern Interior would have service from helicopters equipped for pre-hospital and inter-facility work, and would provide quick access to CCT paramedics to be transported directly to a scene or rural facility decreasing high-risk, out-of-hospital time.

This pilot would see a dedicated day-only helicopter provided on a temporary basis to the Kamloops CCT team. In return, Interior Health and BCAS will evaluate the effectiveness of the project based on a cost benefit analysis, key performance indicators, infrastructure requirements and limitations etc.

The pilot is scheduled to run for eight weeks this summer, with an official launch tentative set in Kamloops for July 23rd. Communications departments for PHSA, IHA and the Ministry will coordinate the logistics of an announcement.

The Emergency and Health Services Commission (EHSC) has approved the pilot, in principle, subject to approval of the use and evaluation criteria. Data collection has already begun and will be utilized for the final pilot evaluation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

It is estimated that the helicopter use will be approximately 40 flight hours per month during the trial period. At current fuel cost and hourly helicopter rates that would equate to approximately \$140,000 per month. The cost of the CCT paramedics is an existing expense.

Funding for the proposed trial will be accommodated within existing budgets; however there is no identified BCAS budget for a dedicated helicopter service in the Interior, post pilot. EHSC intends to review the evaluation of the pilot and determine its appropriateness as a component of a provincial air support strategy. This review and considerations will need be assessed prior to any extension of the pilot or a decision on how to move forward on a more permanent basis.

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Date:	July 14, 2010
File Name & Path:	Z:\Deputy Minister\Briefing Documents\Appr'd July 19, 2010\843765 - IHA Dedicated Medical Transfer Helicopter Trial.doc

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH SERVICES
INFORMATION BRIEFING DOCUMENT**

Cliff # 855820

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Kevin Falcon, Minister – **FOR INFORMATION**

TITLE: Meeting Request from Mark Seter (Priority 1 Air Rescue)

PURPOSE: Minister Falcon has been asked to meet with constituent Mark Seter. He earlier approached the minister for “advice” on how he and others in the emergency services field could bring a helicopter service to BC “that is capable of multiple roles: rescue, medical evacuation, fire fighting, and emergency team transport to name a few.” Seter is associated with Priority 1 Air Rescue (P1AR), a Surrey-based, for-profit service that provides air rescue and related training and program development for police and other emergency services helicopter operations across the continent. P1AR was not specifically mentioned in his request for a meeting.

BACKGROUND:

- In a letter to the minister, Seter said his proposal would be modeled on Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter Service in Australia, a non-profit service (primarily sponsored by Westpac Bank) that provides medical emergency and search and rescue services. This service is similar operationally to the Alberta Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society (STARS) which supports a helicopter rescue/medical emergency service through perpetual fund-raising. Both services are not limited to ambulance-only type operations.
- BCAS’ Air Ambulance Program currently has nine aircraft under contract: six fixed-wing airplanes (one located in Prince George, two in Kelowna and three in Vancouver) and three helicopters (one located in Prince Rupert and two in Vancouver). These contract aircraft are for the exclusive use of BCAS and transport 85 percent of the approximately 9,000 patients transported annually. BCAS also utilizes approximately 40 ad-hoc charter carriers for patient transfers on an as-needed basis.
- Contracts for the nine dedicated aircraft were the result of a competitive RFP process managed according to BC Government procurement rules and regulations.
- In fiscal 09/10, the following expenditures were incurred: Contracted Fixed Wing, \$18.5M; Contracted Rotary Wing, \$7.5M; and Charter Rotary Wing, \$1.4M.

DISCUSSION:

While BCAS cannot speak to the needs of other emergency/rescue agencies, it is open to working cooperatively with all services. That said, BCAS does note that relying on a single source as backup during emergencies or times of high call volume poses both operational challenges and potential risk given the variety of responsibilities and specific aircraft needs by forest fire fighting, search and rescue, and other services.

Several other points are important to note in relation to this meeting request:

- The Emergency and Health Services Commission (EHSC) is currently transitioning from the Ministry of Health Services to the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) to better reflect a health care system focus.
- BCAS/PHSA is currently finalizing an RFP for provincial rotary-wing services. A final decision by the PHSA Board of Directors to move forward on awarding a contract is anticipated later this month. Over the life of this initial eight-year contract, the cost is estimated at more than \$100 million.
- BCAS and the Interior Health Authority (IHA) are jointly evaluating the results of a recent eight-week trial of a BCAS dedicated air ambulance helicopter based in Kamloops. The trial was undertaken to determine whether a dedicated helicopter air ambulance service in IHA would significantly reduce transport times between rural facilities and tertiary care centres, resulting in decreased patient morbidity and mortality, as compared to the current "as-needed" system. IHA has lobbied for a permanent service in the past and at one time called for such a trial to be undertaken by Alberta based STARS.
- At the direction of the EHSC, BCAS is reviewing the IHA trial results in a broader context as part of an examination of all provincial air ambulance needs.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We acknowledge Mr. Seter's interest in proposing new or additional rotary-wing medical emergency and search and rescue services in B.C.
- Currently, provincial medical emergency, search and rescue and related needs are served by a variety of dedicated and contracted rotary and fixed-wing aircraft.
- Specifically, for medical emergency needs, BCAS contracts both fixed and rotary-wing fleets on both dedicated and ad hoc basis. For the rotary wing, BCAS contracts three dedicated helicopters and about 40 rotary-wing aircraft chartered on an as-needed basis.
- BCAS is in the midst of several important and related matters, including: finalization of an extensive RFP process for a new rotary-wing aircraft contract, joint evaluation with IHA of a recent dedicated helicopter trial based in Kamloops and consideration of these trial results within a broader review of all provincial air ambulance needs.
- At this point in time, the Provincial Government is not in a position to enter into a competitive process to procure the suggested services. Operational demands and relationships between agencies using such helicopter services would need to be clarified prior to a RFP process.
- Priority 1 Air Rescue is encouraged to respond to future BCAS RFP's.

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Date: October 25, 2010

File Name with Path: Z:\Deputy Minister\Briefing Documents\1. Approved 2010\COO, MacDougall\855820 - Meeting Request from Mark Seter Priority 1 Air Rescue for Mtg Nov 5th.doc