



ATTN:

Hon. Sandy Silver, Yukon Premier
Currie Dixon, Leader of the Official Opposition
Kate White, Leader of the Third Party
Government of Yukon
Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

April 20, 2021

Re: Continued Tourism Industry Crisis

Dear Premier Silver, Mr. Dixon, and Ms. White,

I am writing to convey our urgent industry needs at this time for the more than 400 tourism businesses that employed 4,000 Yukoners in 2019.

The Yukon is in a good position with regards to Covid, with one of the best epidemiological circumstances in the world. But this has come at a severe cost to our tourism businesses.

Even if we have relaxed border restrictions with any jurisdiction this summer, we are too late to see a fraction of a regular summer season.

There are a small number of operators who can benefit from business from Yukoners, but the clock is ticking on this as well. Many Yukoners have already made summer plans that do not include local businesses and we are losing more of this window of opportunity each day. The "Explore Your Yukon" web page and social media must be launched immediately to take advantage of those residents who have not confirmed their summer holidays yet and to encourage booking with local operators.

The majority of our businesses will not pass a break-even point until late 2022 at the earliest and likely many not before the end of 2023.

It is essential that the relief measures continue at the current levels minimally, and preferably with a continued assessment of needs followed by accommodation of discovered needs. This is essential if the territory is going to have competitive businesses that can capture the international and domestic tourism dollars for the Yukon upon re-opening.

The recovery program, Elevate, has been well received and has improved the competitiveness of our businesses. Coordinating the release of the \$450,000 that was earmarked for the continuation of this initiative in 2021-22 is a key priority. This funding must be released asap so that plans can be implemented and relief support from this program can begin to flow. There is a need.

We need more frequent communications with the CMOH. Most urgently, we need Dr. Hanley, and you as the leaders, to actively promote the Yukon staycation program and break through the misunderstandings about acceptability of travel within the Yukon, following the Safe Six + 1, particularly with the communities. This would be a healthy strategy for Yukoners and a small but critical input to the small businesses. We have achieved 70% vaccination uptake and have some of the strictest border regulation on the planet with the greatest clinical results.

We realize that the variants have created a great deal of uncertainty and that the state of affairs in much of Canada is currently a cause for concern. That said, we need our leaders to plan and maintain a state of active and alert readiness to take meaningful action as soon as it is possible: replacing the blunt tool of two week isolation so that we can welcome visitors to the Territory as soon as the CMOH deems it safe to do so. We are asking our leaders to meld science and medicine with political will and lead us out of this situation in a safe and timely fashion. Skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it is now.

Finally a reminder of our “campaign question”: If your party is elected, would you commit to \$2 million of new funding per year for the next five years to invest in a destination management fund that would see: A) \$1M injected into domestic and international in-market-spend each year and B) \$1M annually to develop initiatives recommended by TIAY to help the Yukon become a national leader in sustainable tourism? This investment will be crucial to the Yukon tourism industry’s long term survival. Examples may include adopting an ethical tourism code, and preparing visitors with sustainable practices prior to their arrival.

Thank you for your attention. I am available for questions at any time.

Sincerely,



Neil Hartling
TIAY Chair
Personal Cell 333-9222

cc: Valerie Royle, Deputy Minister, Yukon Tourism and Culture
Justin Ferbey, Deputy Minister, Yukon Economic Development
Dr. Brendan Hanley, Yukon Chief Medical Officer of Health

Reminders:

- Tourism was the first and hardest-hit industry in the Covid Crisis
- Tourism in the Yukon represents 5% of our GDP, the second highest in Canada.

- Yukon has over 400 tourism businesses and over 4,000 employees in 2019.
- The Tourism Association of the Yukon is pressing for an Active & Alert State of Readiness to begin a soft opening at the earliest opportunity. We want our leaders to “skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it currently is”.
- The graph curve of Covid waves-and-recovery promises to have the classic Long-Tail, tapered, lengthy finish (like a muskrat's tail). This jives with Dr. Hanley’s prediction a year ago, that we will have to learn to live in a world with Covid. It also adds clarity to our needs for an Alert and Active Readiness for the appropriate time, metrics and method to "step-off" the curve. The taper could conceivably take 2 or 3 more years until anything resembling a zero transmission state (a target we hear from some residents) is reached.
- If the goal is to reach this before shifting from the mandatory isolation mode, we need to know asap, so that we can advise most operators to move to new careers.
- Mechanism: Implement vaccination-and-test combination for a secure screening process, switching out the blunt instrument of 14 day isolation and geopolitical opening like the “BC bubble”.
- It will inevitably be a soft opening, like the BC Bubble was, because we know that vaccine distribution will take longer in the south, so we will have a measured, slow, intake of visitors, that will slowly grow over the year, re-uniting family members and allowing vaccinated Yukoners to travel.
- It will allow us to take “baby steps” in opening and managing the process at the borders with the two pronged approach of vaccination and test.
- This also allows for the option of additional testing upon arrival to be added, should it be required. The percentage of vaccinated Canadians is growing steadily.
- Our vaccination program is on track in the Yukon, thanks to the skills and leadership of our Health Professionals.
- Over 21,000 Alaskans transited through the Yukon without any discernible transmission.
- Yukoners have adapted to the 6+1 practices which are likely to be with us for some years to come.
- Yukon has become an “island of safety” with only 4 ports of entry. A rare situation anywhere in the world, even better than Singapore. An ideal situation to monitor and control a soft opening.
- The UN World Tourism Organization WTO is calling for proof of vaccination to be used as a travel criteria.
- TIA Yukon has demonstrated that we respect the desires of the Yukon communities. When it has been appropriate in months past, we have called for restraint, and now we see a timeline where communities will have the luxury of months after achieving herd immunity, for “stragglers” to be vaccinated and to be prepared for visitors – if they wish.
- What are the organizational needs of implementing the change from 14 day isolation? What HR needs and other organizational shifts are required to manage borders, testing etc. under the new reality. How does the government need to respond and what is the plan for this?