
For Information

REPORT TITLE: Paramedic Response at Pearson International Airport

FROM: Cathy Granger, Acting Commissioner of Health Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide an interim report to Regional Council regarding the status of paramedic service delivery and costs to Pearson Airport, and to identify directions for future collaboration with the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) on service improvements and efficiencies.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Servicing a large, high-traffic and complex transportation hub such as Pearson International Airport presents unique challenges for Paramedic Services.
 - In 2019, Paramedic Services responded to approximately 6,400 calls at Pearson Airport. Fifteen per cent of calls (983) were cancelled before paramedics arrived on scene, and 52 per cent of calls (3,306) were not transported to an emergency department.
 - The total cost in 2019 for servicing Pearson Airport was \$1,484,600.
 - Paramedic Services has worked to improve interoperability and working relationships with the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) and other partners at Pearson Airport to improve service efficiency.
 - Paramedic delivery implemented at other large international airports can provide examples of service delivery options for paramedics at Pearson Airport. Staff continue to gather information about these models, as an input into collaboration with the GTAA leadership.
 - Representatives from the Region and the GTAA met and agreed to convene a working group this summer to further the collaboration between the parties in improving paramedic response at Pearson. Progress on this work will be reported early in 2021.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

At its February 13, 2020 meeting Regional Council discussed the unique challenges faced by Paramedic Services in planning and delivering efficient service to Pearson International Airport (Pearson). Staff were directed to update Council on servicing of Pearson, service delivery costs, measures taken to improve efficiency, and considerations regarding potential future initiatives to improve service delivery. The Pandemic response has slowed down progress, but communication has proceeded, and meetings are being held throughout the summer. At the request of the Regional Chair, GTAA management and Regional leadership met in June and have agreed to proceed with a working group meeting in July.

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Servicing a large, high-traffic and complex transportation hub such as Pearson presents unique challenges for Paramedic Services. Operated by the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA), Pearson has been likened to a city that is connected to a workforce of 50,000 employees and saw 50.5 million travelers pass through its facilities in 2019.

The first quarter of 2020 has brought unprecedented and dramatic challenges to the aviation industry due to COVID-19, in large measure due to travel restrictions by governments, route cancellations and fleet groundings by air carriers, as well as the current economic contraction. Specifically, passengers travelling through Pearson in April 2020 dropped by approximately 98 per cent over the same period in 2019, and forecasts suggest that a full recovery to 2019 passenger numbers may not happen until 2024. In 2019, the GTAA reports approximately 15 to 20 medical calls for per day. Since COVID-19, ambulance call volume been reduced to two to three calls per day.

Serving Pearson remains complicated due to the airport's large geography, numerous and changing access points and security protocols, and network of stakeholders, such as the GTAA, airline companies, Peel Regional Police, the Canadian Border Services Agency, and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Paramedic Services' divisional model (reporting and satellite stations) and fluid deployment planning ensures that paramedic crews are positioned in locations across Peel to enable quick and efficient response to calls. Paramedic resources are deployed by the Mississauga Central Ambulance Communication Centre (CACC) according to Paramedic Services' deployment plan. In 2016, a co-located paramedic and fire station was built across from Pearson located at 6375 Airport Road (Ward 5). This station was purposely located here to support high ambulance call volume at Pearson and vicinity.

Calls to 9-1-1 from Pearson are often relayed through several stages (i.e. inbound flight to airport communications to 9-1-1 to the CACC), resulting in loss of critical information and time. Further, when responding to 9-1-1 calls, paramedics often need to coordinate with other agencies such as security services to reach patients who are in secure sections of the airport.

2. Findings

Paramedic service to Pearson is notable for its high and rapidly increasing call volume, and many of these calls are assessed as being low acuity.

a) Call Volume Trends and Costs

In 2019, Paramedic Services responded to approximately 6,400 calls to locations within Pearson. Of this total, 15 per cent of calls (983) were cancelled by the Mississauga CACC before paramedics arrived on scene (compared to 13 per cent in all of Peel), and 52 per cent of calls (3,306) that were attended did not result in a patient being transported to an emergency department. This contrasts to 30 per cent of all Peel calls not resulting in transport. Of those patients who were transported to hospital, one per cent (92) were prioritized as being high acuity by paramedics on scene. Moreover, call volume over time from 2015 to 2019 increased by almost 72 per cent, the number of cancelled calls increased by 81 per cent, and the number of patients not transported to the emergency department increased by 122 per cent.

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The total cost for servicing all 6,400 calls to Pearson (2019) was \$1,484,600. This cost is based on a total of 6,388 hours on task for servicing calls to Pearson, multiplied by the cost per service hour for paramedic resources responding to calls. Most of the total hours servicing calls at Pearson (5,494 hours) are by ambulances, at a cost of \$250 per hour. Rapid Respond Units spend a total of 840 hours on task at Pearson, at a cost \$125 per hour. (Supervisors make up the remaining 53 hours). Over the period from 2015 to 2019 the cost to service calls to Pearson has increased by 36 per cent.

b) Efficiencies and Service Improvements

- Over the past several years Paramedic Services has worked to improve interoperability and business relationships with airport communications, emergency management, the Canada Border Services Agency, and GTAA Fire. While there has been some progress, future discussions with partners at Pearson Airport will be an opportunity to address other operational challenges to improve response efficiency. Some of the initiatives taken on by Paramedic Services and the GTAA include:
 - Collaboration with GTAA Fire and GTAA safety officers to improve paramedic escorted access to secure buildings and airside facilities.
 - In 2018, Paramedic Services introduced response by single-crew non-transport Rapid Response Units (RRUs) to respond to calls at Pearson, but avoid sending ambulances, unless needed. Deploying RRUs was intended to reduce paramedic resource demand and more effectively respond to low acuity calls but was ultimately not permitted due to Ministry of Health policy that requires an ambulance to be deployed to all 9-1-1 calls.
 - In 2019 and early 2020, discussions with the GTAA, including management from their internal operational communications group, fire, emergency management, and the Canada Border Services Agency began to examine options for embedding paramedics within the airport to facilitate paramedics' travel within terminals and reduce demand on authorized personnel providing escort into secure areas of the airport.

3. Service Priorities and Opportunities

Paramedic Services has identified key areas with the greatest potential to improve service and cost efficiency at Pearson. Improved communication with the GTAA regarding operational changes at Pearson (i.e. access/entry), and coordination including protocol development with the various partner agencies will enable faster paramedic access to secure areas, and more efficient use of paramedic resources. For example, airlines regularly call 9-1-1 for paramedics to complete 'fit to fly' wellness checks for passengers (departing or connecting flights) who report mild complaints to airline staff; these activities may not be the most appropriate use of resources given system demands.

Further efficiencies may be realized through deployment of specialized response teams within the airport, and by leveraging developments in the emergency health services system, including the implementation of accurate patient triaging technology at the Mississauga CACC.

In addition, the Ministry of Health has communicated its intention to introduce new models of care that will also enable paramedics to 'treat and release' and 'treat and refer' patients who

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do not require transport to hospital emergency departments; thereby, potentially increasing efficiency across the emergency health services system, particularly for calls coming from locations such as Pearson.

a) Review of Service Delivery Models in Other Jurisdictions

Paramedic Services is exploring paramedic delivery models implemented in large international airports that are comparable to Pearson. One example at Vancouver International Airport is the deployment of specialized paramedics from stations within terminals, allowing them to move quickly and easily through both public and secure sections of the airport (e.g. deployed on bicycles).

While this work is in early stages, a forthcoming review of models and operations in Vancouver and elsewhere will assist Paramedic Services and its partners at Pearson to understand how paramedics can be integrated into airport facilities and operations.

4. Next Steps

The Region is committed to collaborating with the GTAA to identify areas of service delivery that can be adapted to increase efficiency. This collaboration will be increasingly important to Paramedic Services and the GTAA as operations adapt to reflect a recovery from the coronavirus pandemic in the months ahead.

A working group meeting is being set up in July that will explore and design new ways to work together to improve paramedic response at Pearson.

Paramedic Services will continue to explore models and options for positioning and deploying paramedics at Pearson in preparation for discussions with the GTAA. Council will be updated on deployment models and on initiatives led by the working group in early 2021.

CONCLUSION

Paramedic Services will continue to collaborate in planning with the Greater Toronto Airports Authority to address the unique challenges presented at Pearson, improve service efficiency and provide the care required in a responsive and timely manner.

For further information regarding this report, please contact Peter Dundas, Chief and Director, Ext. 3921, peter.dundas@peelregion.ca.

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Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

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Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nancy Polsinelli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "N" and a distinct "P".

N. Polsinelli, Interim Chief Administrative Officer