

# InterVIEW from the top: YVR discusses national testing strategy



During the pandemic, the airport partnered with its local health authority to develop a drive-thru public COVID-19 test collection site at one of its long-term parking facilities; more recently, YVR recalled some laid-off airport workers to staff clinics and support the province's vaccination effort

Scheduled to speak at Summit of the Americas – a Virtual Experience, as part of its Knowledge Hub, Tamara Vrooman, President & CEO, Vancouver Airport Authority, will feature on day four of the View from the Top series. Following up on the invite, Vrooman will share with listeners from across the aviation industry what recovery might look like in the Americas. The leading topics of discussion include the future of the airport business model, the maintaining and managing of airport relationships (from concessionaires to brands) and the evolving of consumer expectations and behaviors.

As an expert in the field and featured speaker, *Americas Duty Free* interviewed Vrooman to learn more about Vancouver International Airport's (YVR) diversification strategy and its health and safety campaign, TAKEcare. During the Q&A, the President & CEO elaborates on minimizing operating costs, developing local and national partnerships, researching new technologies and advocating efforts to establish a unified framework. She believes that the path to recovery requires a standardized national testing strategy.



Tamara Vrooman, President & CEO, Vancouver Airport Authority, says that the path to recovery requires a standardized national testing strategy

**Q: As passenger traffic continues to slow at YVR, the airport has optimized the use of its terminals. Describe public response. In addition to this change in service, what other ways has the airport diversified its business model?**

**A:** During the pandemic, we've minimized our operating costs to be more in line with reduced passenger demand wherever possible. This includes consolidating our operations and closing 22% of our terminal. YVR is the only airport in Canada that hasn't increased its fees during this time - we looked very closely at how to balance reduced passenger flows with supporting our airline customers and commercial partners as they continue to operate.

Regarding diversification, we've looked at ways to ensure our airport remains in service of our community. For example, we partnered with our local health authority to develop a drive-thru public COVID-19 test collection site at one of our long-term parking facilities. We've also just announced that YVR will be lending its expertise to British Columbia's vaccination effort, recalling some laid-off airport workers to staff vaccination clinics.

Despite these challenges, those who need to travel can still expect the same high-level of customer experience when traveling through YVR including strict health and safety protocols under our TAKEcare program. I often say that the airport is the best kept secret during COVID-19 — while everyone is familiar with what the grocery store looks like these days, only those who need to travel

have experienced YVR and everything that has gone into making it a safe and positive experience.

**Q: How does YVR's health and safety campaign, TAKEcare, impact public awareness, on-site traffic, retail sales, consumer engagement and travel experience? Please touch on the team's investing in new technologies and re-thinking airport processes.**

**A:** YVR TAKEcare is an operational program and health and safety campaign that is designed to help people move through the airport safely and with confidence.

When first launched in 2020, it served as an educational program helping those who need to travel for essential reasons understand new protocols that have since become a part of our everyday lives: social distancing, hand sanitizing, mask wearing.

It applies to all aspects of our operation, placing industry-leading health, safety and cleaning practices and protocols at the forefront of all airport processes. As part of the program, we've asked only travelers and those working at YVR to enter the building. This has aided in reducing crowd size and easing the flow of passenger traffic.

We've been researching and investigating new technologies and their place in the airport for when we welcome travelers back such as an electro-static sprayer that is being used in the terminal. It uses robot sensors to kill 99.9% of surface bacteria in five seconds or less.

**Q: How will YVR support the development of a long-term testing strategy for international travel and the recovery of the travel retail industry?**

**A:** The path to recovery requires a standardized national testing strategy. That's why Canadian Airports, along with the Canadian Airports Council and the National Airlines Council of Canada, are advocating and lobbying for a unified national testing framework for Canada's airlines and airports that is consistent with the global aviation industry.

We're also busy doing our own research and expanding our testing capability to help inform and prepare for a future testing solution.

This winter, we partnered with WestJet, UBC and Providence Health Care to lead a voluntary research study for departing passengers. This study was the first of its kind in Canada and it was designed to investigate both the feasibility and the practicality of rapid antigen testing to detect COVID-19 in departing passengers. It concluded in late-February, with zero positive test results and has been submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

YVR has also partnered with LifeLabs to create a full testing and laboratory facility on Sea Island, BC. This will provide greater capacity for longer term testing needs, as we anticipate testing will be a part of travel for some time. We're in exploratory talks with other testing providers about further testing projects and providers.

**Q: Elaborate on the creative concept of YVR's Pier D expansion project. Once opened, how will the expansion help to improve the overall travel experience and return to pre-pandemic levels?**

**A:** The Pier D Expansion Project is our largest expansion since 1996. It aims to bring the beauty of British Columbia to travelers making their way through YVR. It features a glassed-in forest with access to the outdoors, an immersive digital experience and a yoga, prayer and quiet room.

While plans to open the facility are on hold due to COVID-19, we anticipate it'll position us well for

when air traffic does rebound to pre-pandemic levels. It has eight more gates, which will allow for additional flights and its aesthetic will provide a calming, natural experience for travelers.