

Market Watch

S&P/TSX 33,040.55 +11.63	S&P 500 6,940.01 -4.46	DOW 49,359.33 -83.11	NASDAQ 23,515.39 -14.63	DOLLAR 71.88¢US -0.07¢	OIL per barrel US\$59.34 +\$0.26	GOLD US\$28.30 \$4,595.40
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‘IT JUST DIDN’T LAND’ WestJet reverses move to instal tight seating after backlash

CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS
The Canadian Press

In the wake of a backlash sparked by a viral video, WestJet said it will scrap a new seat configuration that squeezed an extra row on board many of its planes and left passengers with stiflingly little legroom — and the airline with a budding customer exodus.

In a major about-face, the country’s second-largest carrier announced on Friday it

would return the cabins to a more spacious layout — a pricey reinstallation process — after harsh feedback from travellers and employees.

In a phone interview from Calgary, CEO Alexis von Hoensbroech said he made the final call when the blowback began to show up in surveys and sales figures.

“We saw that this was all trending in the wrong direction,” he said of data on customer loyalty

and guest satisfaction.

“It just didn’t land the way we were anticipating ... and that’s why we’re correcting it.”

The overhaul will likely be completed by year’s end, he said.

Already installed on nearly two-dozen of WestJet’s Boeing 737s, the non-reclining seats in a majority of the cabin’s economy section featured the smallest amount of leg room on any large Canadian carrier.

The configuration, which had been planned for at least 20 more aircraft — 43 all told, or more than a quarter of the jet fleet — went on to draw national attention after a TikTok video showing the tight fit for passengers drew more than 1.1 million views.

Staff and travellers warned that the cramped cabin curtailed safety, particularly in the event of an evacuation, and hurt the customer experience.

WestJet has pointed out that the reconfiguration underwent a full certification process.

It plans to convert all of its tight-packed 180-seat jets to a 174-seat layout after receiving regulatory certification.

The change could come with trade-offs for travellers, including a slight uptick in fares owing to the lower chair count.

“It sucks to have to pay more to fit into a seat. I get that. But also some people are just not well off financially enough to be able to afford more, and if they can have that cheaper option, why not?” said Andrew D’Amours, founder of flight deal site Flytrippers.

“But it is certainly very, very tiny.”

Whatever the effect on fares, the decision marks a direct response to customer feedback — and bad publicity.

“It’s one of the rare occasions where people’s voices and opinions have an actual impact on how airlines treat us,” D’Amours said.

Still, a push to win back disillusioned travellers could prove difficult.

“I’m still not convinced they won’t just start charging us a carry-on fee for our legs,” said Edmonton-based radio host Courtney Theriault in a social media post Friday, alluding to a quip in the viral video.

John Gradek, who teaches



CP FILE PHOTO
WestJet passengers deplane at Yellowknife Airport on July 22.

aviation management at McGill University, said WestJet will need to fix its dented reputation.

“They have to rebuild the brand,” he said.

“The social media onslaught was amazing, and people were basically saying, ‘That’s it, we’re done with WestJet, we’re walking.’”

Cabin crew also criticized the more claustrophobic quarters.

The union representing some 4,600 WestJet flight attendants previously said they faced “frustration, and even aggression,” from passengers for a layout they too opposed.

It welcomed the rollback announced on Friday.

“We remain hopeful that this signals a shift toward a more collaborative dialogue (with management) going forward,” said Alia Hussain, who chairs the WestJet contingent of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, in a news release about the move.

Currently, a dozen of the 22 rows in the planes’ economy class feature 28-inch pitch — the distance between one point on a seat and the same point on the seat in front — versus 29- or 30-inch pitches on most other carriers’ lower-tier seats. They also have what WestJet calls a “fixed recline design,” meaning they cannot be tilted back.

Hoensbroech noted that a 28-inch pitch is common among discount carriers, especially in Europe — where trips are generally shorter.

“The unique thing about Canada is the very long stage length, particularly during the

winter peak season where many of those flights were going south to the Caribbean,” he said.

Flights generally range from four and a half to six hours.

The revamped planes will see mainly 30-inch economy seats, he said.

That reconfiguration carries complications.

“It comes at a cost” — and not just from reinstalling the seats themselves — von Hoensbroech said, from Calgary.

“You also need to deal with the overhead part of it, because there are oxygen masks and then there’s in-seat power that you need to rewire.”

The narrower rows had put some WestJet cabins on a par with budget carriers such as Spirit Airlines, Frontier Airlines and Wizz Air, all of which sport 28-inch seats.

“At what point do we just all stand and hold onto a rubber ring handle?” asked one TikTok commenter.

However, the now-nixed configuration also carved out more space for 36 “extended comfort” seats with 34-inch pitch and 12 premium seats with 38-inch pitch, both of which yield bigger profit margins.

In December, WestJet paused a move to install the controversial seats on a big slice of its fleet amid earlier pushback, but also “to support our operations during the peak winter travel season,” said spokeswoman Julia Brunet in mid-December.

As recently as last week, the airline said it planned to continue converting to the tighter configuration come spring.

PUBLIC NOTICES

**Medicine Hat**

8AM - 4PM SPECIAL SERVICES

Electric Outages.....	403.529.8260
Gas Emergency.....	403.529.8191
Water & Sewer Emergency	403.502.8042
After Hours Special Services.....	403.526.2828

DEVELOPMENT PERMITS APPROVED JANUARY 8 TO JANUARY 14, 2026

COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL/ INSTITUTIONAL

68 RICE DRIVE SE - School Addition With Variance To Garbage Enclosure Screening

621 2 STREET SE - Change Of Use To Retail And Consumer Services.

902 KINGSWAY AVENUE SE - Change Of Use To Animal Service – Re-vised.

HOME BUSINESS

1600 ECHO DALE ROAD SW - Home Business Major - Dog Grooming/Kennel.

44 SUNDOWN COURT SW - Home Business Minor - Consultant.

1499 10 AVENUE NE - Home Business Minor - Investment Advisor.



Scan code
to view development notices online (updated weekly)

A person claiming to be affected by a decision of the Development Authority may appeal to the Medicine Hat Subdivision and Development Appeal Board by completing and submitting to the City Clerk Department, the required Notice of Appeal form within twenty one (21) days of this publication. Forms available from: City Clerk Dept., 3rd Floor, City Hall or City website: www.medicinehat.ca.

All Development Permits listed are subject to conditions. For more information, contact Planning and Development Services, 2nd Floor, City Hall. Ph. (403) 529-8374.

REAL CHRISTMAS TREE RECYCLING

Recycle your **real** Christmas tree **now until January 30, 2026**, by dropping it off at one of the following convenient drop off locations:

- 20 Northlands Way NE – Northlands Co-op Recycling Depot
- 240 Kipling Street SE - Kipling Street Recycling Depot
- 3292 Dunmore Rd SE - Southwest corner of the Medicine Hat Mall parking lot

Prior to drop off, **please remove all plastic bags, stands, tinsel and decorations.**

Please note that **artificial trees cannot be recycled** in this program nor in the blue recycling cart program. Artificial trees that can no longer be used or donated should be discarded in your grey waste cart.

Alternatively, you can take your real Christmas Tree to the Compost Facility or your unusable artificial tree to the Landfill, both located within the Waste Management Facility.

The Waste Management Facility hours of operation are as follows:

- Monday through Saturday
 - o 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- Closed on Sundays and all Statutory Holidays

Download the Recycle Coach App, refer to medicinehat.ca/landfill, or contact Environmental Utilities at 403-529-8176 for more information.

PROTECT WATER LINES FROM FREEZING

The following actions should be considered to protect your water lines from freezing during the cold weather months:

- Repair broken windows and ensure windows/vents are closed during the winter.
- Insulate water pipes in unheated areas, including crawl spaces.
- For sinks located against a non-insulated outside wall:
 - o Open the vanity door to allow warm air to reach the water pipes.
 - o A light bulb placed near the water pipe may generate enough heat to keep the water flowing.
 - o Heat tape wrapped around the pipe may keep the pipe from freezing.
- Residents of mobile homes should check the condition of the heat tape on their water service and water meter.
- Protect an unheated indoor water meter with an insulated box and water pipes should be wrapped in insulation using heat tape.
- Outside water faucets and underground sprinkler systems should have the water supply shut off inside the house at the isolation valve for the faucet/ hose bib.
- Sprinkler lines and faucets should be drained/blown out.
- Run a stream of cold-water, with a flow of approximately 250ml per 10 seconds, continuously from one faucet.
- If you plan to be away from home over the winter period, close the main water isolation valve located next to the water meter in your home.
 - o You should leave the heat on in your home and have someone check inside your home daily while you're away.

A frozen water service or a burst water pipe is an inconvenience and expense that most people would like to avoid. Please take all possible precautions to prevent this happening in your home or business.

For more information, refer to www.medicinehat.ca/frozenwaterlines or contact Environmental Utilities at 403-529-8176.

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www.medicinehat.ca

CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS
The Canadian Press

Flair Airlines is revamping its ultra-low-cost brand in a bid to attract more business travellers, despite a lack of frills on board.

In a phone interview this week, CEO Maciej Wilk said Flair is attempting a strategic shift away from a pure-play budget airline and toward what he dubbed a “value carrier.”

The goal is to attract more work travellers — mainly from small businesses — via affordable fares and by plugging into networks linked to travel agents, booking sites and hotels.

“We’re just ignoring this enormous corporate opportunity and simply abandoning this highly — potentially — profitable segment for us,” Wilk said.

“We need to consciously deviate from the textbook.”

The Edmonton-based company won’t be unfurling first-class accoutrements any time soon.

“No silverware, no free catering, no lounges, no red carpets unrolled in front of the customers,” Wilk said.

Instead, Flair is offering express treatment to all guests who pay more for the privilege of add-ons like carry-on luggage, granting them priority status at the check-in counter and gate. They will enjoy greater leeway with bag size, too.

More importantly, the airline plans to tap into one of a handful of global distribution sys-

tems, which form the digital back end of commercial air travel. Platforms such as Amadeus and Sabre connect travel agents and online agencies to airlines, hotels and car rental companies, comprising a central marketplace that can distil bookings from various providers into a single purchase.

Flair has yet to partner with one, though it hopes to within months.

“They don’t see Flair in the systems because we’re not a part of it,” Wilk said of travel agencies. “These are the gaps that we’re filling.”

Shorter layovers and more flights from Atlantic Canada — mainly to Toronto or Ontario’s Waterloo Region — also aim to broaden the carrier’s catchment area and make its one-stop cross-country trips more appealing.

The changes don’t quite amount to an overhaul.

“Of course, the fundamentals of the low-cost model remain,” Wilk said. By that he means strict cost controls, a pay-for-service plan — carry-on bags, meals and seat selection all cost extra — and squeezing as many passengers as it can on board. That leaves no room for business class seating.

Wilk said Canadians’ turn away from U.S. travel has been tough for a company that staked its expansion on that market — particularly sun destinations — less than two years

ago. The number of cross-border Flair flights is poised to fall 59 per cent between the first three months of 2025 and the same quarter this year, according to aviation data firm Cirium.

But its handful of routes to Mexico and the Caribbean, along with its first bundle of vacation packages mean it hasn’t lost out on sun revenue, Wilk said.

Nonetheless, the absence of loyalty points, fewer destinations and lower flight frequency — Air Canada’s fleet is more than 12 times the size of Flair’s — means C-Suite executives may not be boarding many Flair flights in the near term.

“I don’t see any CEOs flying Flair any time soon,” said Andrew D’Amours, co-founder of flight deal site Flytrippers.

Business passengers typically travel on tight schedules, he pointed out. That makes some smaller airlines less attractive.

“Because they don’t have a network of partners, they don’t have other hubs to route you through, if you’re cancelled you’re kind of stuck. Whereas Air Canada, if your flight’s cancelled ... they just put you on the flight that’s two hours later.”

Flair has pointed out that its on-time percentage leads the pack. Some 74.2 per cent of its flights arrived within 15 minutes of their scheduled time last year, followed by WestJet at 73.6 per cent and Air Canada 73.3 per cent.