

## Eyes on direct Toronto route

...THA and CAL meet to strengthen air connectivity

THE Division of Tourism, Antiquities and Creative Industries (DTACI) and Caribbean Airlines (CAL) met on April 1 as part of ongoing collaborative efforts to strengthen air connectivity and improve reliability across the domestic and regional network.

In a joint news release issued on Saturday, the entities stated that the discussion was both timely and necessary, set against the backdrop of continued challenges affecting the domestic airbridge and broader national conversations regarding its future.

'Both parties engaged in focused, solution-oriented discussions aimed at improving the reliability, responsiveness and longterm sustainability of the airbridge, recognising its critical importance to Tobago,' it stated.

It added that CAL focused on its ability to respond to the airbridge's high-demand periods to support the island's festival calendar of events, with particular emphasis on the Tobago Carnival event.

'Opportunities were also explored to accommodate increased visitor demand through targeted initiatives such as vacation packages, charter services and potential refinement of the international schedules,' the release stated.

It added, 'However, the airline emphasised that all proposals must be commercially viable. While acknowledging the operational and financial realities confronting the airline, the Division wanted to ensure that proposed adjustments remain sensitive to the needs of residents who rely heavily on the domestic airbridge for access to essential services.'

The joint release stated that the meeting allowed for 'frank dialogue on improving airbridge performance in the short to medium term, including scheduling consistency, capacity constraints and disruption management'. It added that both parties shared perspectives on the complexities of airlift economics, recognising that sustainability must be balanced with national responsibility.

'Attention was also given to future-facing opportunities, particularly the exploration of a direct Toronto route under a prospective Memorandum of Understanding. This potential development is seen as a strategic step in expanding Tobago's reach into a high-value market while strengthening diaspora connections. Discussions centred on feasibility, demand considerations and the framework required to support such a route in a way that is both commercially viable and beneficial to Tobago's tourism sector,' it stated.

Secretary of Tourism, Antiquities and Creative Industries, Zorisha Hackett, underscored the Division's position, noting, 'Tobago's development is inextricably linked to the strength and reliability of its airlift. As we explore new opportunities for expansion, we must be equally deliberate in addressing the long-standing issues affecting the domestic airbridge. Our priority is to ensure that Tobagonians are not disadvantaged, even as we work collaboratively with our partners to navigate the financial and operational realities of the industry.'

CAL's acting chief executive officer Nirmala Ramai added that the airline remains committed to working collaboratively with national stakeholders to enhance connectivity while ensuring operational sustainability. She also emphasised that CAL is committed to maintaining a safe, reliable and commercially sustainable operation, while

continuing to work with stakeholders to align capacity with demand and support Tobago's growth.

'The engagement was described as productive, with both sides agreeing to continue technical discussions and refine areas of collaboration. Both parties reaffirmed their commitment to continued engagement through technical discussions and data-driven collaboration, with the shared goal of ensuring that improvements in airlift translate into tangible benefits for residents and the wider economy,' the release noted.

At the high-level meeting representing the THA were Hackett, Assistant Secretary for the Division of Tourism Niketa Percy, administrator Shelly Trim, and technical adviser Korice Nancis, together with chairman of the Tobago Tourism Agency Ltd (TTAL) Abena Richards and TTAL CEO Sandra Orr-Toney. The CAL delegation was led by Ramai, acting chief financial officer Neera Ramai, executive manager for airports and ground operations Brent Gaspard, manager of revenue management Randall Henrique, and sales executive Janelle Gangoo.



THA SECRETARY OF TOURISM, ANTIQUITIES AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: Zorisha Hackett



CARIBBEAN AIRLINES: Acting CEO Nirmala Ramai.