

Improving Food and Beverage Options at Winnipeg Richardson International Airport

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Executive Summary

The research focuses on different ways to improve the food and beverage offerings in the Winnipeg Richardson International Airport to better match what is offered to declared customer preference, thus improving overall passenger satisfaction with the facility. Critical areas of improvement were identified based on the data from 100 travellers through surveys and an interview with Lisa-Marie Buccini, Manager of Brand and Customer Experience. This was determined through an online survey via social media and messaging, as well as online reviews to Google and Yelp expressing interest in more food options, specifically quick service and international. Travellers also indicated that existing options do not include popular/culturally relevant brands while local Winnipeg-based brands are also scarce. Most of the respondents were concerned with high prices, average customer service, and limited hours of dining, which also affected their experience at the airport. The study advises that these expectations can be met by introducing renowned international brands, promoting of more local flavours, developing efficiency in customer service, and competitive pricing. These enhancements will make Winnipeg Richardson International Airport not only a better experience for travellers but also a more pleasing and competitive airport.

Overview

Airports serve as the best starting points for your new trip, adventure, or even life. The airport is, after all, not just some big building with a lot of doors, vendors, and check-in stations. They are actual hotspots where people of all types come together into one place, creating a lively and diverse environment. Whether for business or pleasure, airports offer the traveller a sense of thrill and promise as one departs for their destination. Of course, there are many good reasons for that sense of excitement. The purpose of this study is to identify what food and beverage services, or new vendors, would best enhance the experience at Winnipeg Richardson International Airport for its travelling

customers. Understanding the passengers' preferences will, therefore, enable the airport authority to serve different customers.

About the Company

The Winnipeg Airports Authority operates Winnipeg Richardson International Airport. It is a not-for-profit, community-based organization committed to safe and efficient travel, joining people and businesses to our region, Canada, and the world. Its vision is to drive a sustainable future through innovation, exceptional service, and environmental responsibility. WAA plans to further develop digital infrastructure, increase air service routes, and put the environment at the forefront in 2027, all while the authority maintains operational excellence and inclusive priorities within its walls and around it within the airport communities.

Historically, Winnipeg Richardson International Airport started its work in 1928 when the Winnipeg Flying Club opened an airfield called Stevenson Aerodrome. Throughout the years, from its modest construction, it turned into an aviation, military operation, and commercial carrier hub. The airport played an important role during WWII; later on, it got its name changed to Winnipeg International Airport. It was renamed in 2006 after the aviation pioneer James Armstrong Richardson. The Airport continues to grow today, adding new and modern facilities, concentrating mainly on air cargo services.

Services at the Airport

The following facilities are available at the International Airport for the convenience of travellers, starting from baggage handling to currency exchange, duty-free shops, dining, and transportation arrangements. Many lounges, spas, and play areas or entertainment are added in airports to make the travel experience reasonably comfortable for the passengers. Food vendors and dining options at the

airport will be further examined in this paper, in terms of quality, variety, and affordability, to determine how they would detract from or add to a traveller's general experience. Such an understanding of the contribution of food vendors to passenger satisfaction can lead to decisions by airports on improvements in services. It's possible to name twelve different varieties of food vendors in an airport, from Pizza Pizza to Freshi, including the popular chains Tim Hortons and Starbucks.

It is important to consider that the airport in question does not have McDonald's and Burger King. Their absence may allow the airport to capitalize on the opportunity regarding the review of possible joint ventures with other chains of fast food. As it has been suggested recently by the work of the Upgraded Points team, 20 of the most popular fast-food franchises can be found in 60 of the biggest airports across the United States (Cole, 2022). A report by this source further shows that most US airports have a good representation of Wendy's, McDonald's, and Burger King. In another analysis by Mordor Intelligence (2024), the fast food and meal category is projected to see "significant growth in the market" from 2024 to 2029. For instance, by 2029, the fast services market will grow to a value of USD 582.06 billion. It also shows, with large corporations such as Burger King, McDonald's, and Subway, that this is the largest market in the world and is referred to as the North American market.

Research method and procedures

For the purpose of this research, we decided to incorporate the perspective of Lisa-Marie Buccini, who holds the position of Manager of Brand and Customer Experience at the airport, for the entire purpose of this research. From her experience in customer experience, Lisa-Marie will be able to give an overview of the airport's branding strategies and customer satisfaction initiatives. Furthermore, her perspective will enable us to understand how these strategies are implemented and their impacts on the overall customer experience at the airport.

The next step in the process is the review of the online passengers' feedback, through Google reviews and Yelp, and a 10-question survey, subsequent to the interview with Lisa. The idea for this approach is to reach a good number of participants and understand their preferences at the airport. This will allow us to collect even more data on customer satisfaction and define areas for improvement. Combining the insights from Lisa-Marie with the results of this survey will allow us to build a global strategy for the elevation of customer experience at the airport.

Authorities POV (Point of view) – Lisa Marie Buccini

In an interview with Lisa Marie, the person in charge of the visitor experience at Winnipeg Richardson International Airport, detailed insights were brought concerning challenges and efforts put into food and beverages at the airport. Having served in marketing and customer experience for more than six years, Lisa emphasized that customer feedback is overwhelmingly out of dissatisfaction with current restaurant options. Many passengers have also asked for more variety, including recognizable brands and fast-food franchises. Currently, the airport's food and beverage concessions are contracted to SSP, a foreign company that operates several generic brands that, in many cases, do not resonate with travellers who are expecting to find recognizable names. The arrangement lightens the workload but diminishes the airport's ability to add more widely recognized franchises, as desired by passengers.

Data from the Wi-Fi surveys of visitors, and other feedback channels, supports these concerns. According to Lisa, fast food — with a focus on Asian food and burgers — was the Number One request for airport users. Additionally, many travellers expressed interest in more sit-down restaurant options, especially following the pandemic-related closure of local favourite Stella's. While the airport has signed a deal to bring Stella's back, the process has been delayed due to construction and permitting issues. Also topping the most-wanted list were healthy and vegetarian options. Again, while existing options like Green Carrot and Freshii don't quite fill the bill, that may be because there is a difference between perceived demand and actual eating habits.

Another important point identified during the interview is the representation of local food within the airport. Lisa confessed that, unlike the other big airports—Toronto Pearson and Vancouver YVR—their airport has to attract customers by emphasizing the local flavors in their restaurants, and Winnipeg has to do the same. Involving Jenna Ray Cakes is the first step to include businesses from the local level. However, Lisa emphasized the fact that there is an obvious gap in bringing forward more local food and beverage offerings to improve the overall traveller experience. This is an area of focus for the airport moving forward as it works to balance efficiency in operations with customer satisfaction and regional representation.

Reviews of Passengers

Passenger reviews of Winnipeg Richardson International Airport often point out the lack of variety and quality of food. Many passengers complained about the dominance of Tim Hortons with three outlets in the terminal, yearning to see more variety with fast-food restaurants like McDonald's; the closure of Stella's, one of the previously popular options, has left an obvious void in the choice of eating establishments. In addition, slow service and a lack of urgency by airport staff contribute to less than the ideal layover experience, which many find dissatisfying.

Other reviewers remark that, while the airport itself is far better than the old terminal used to be, the dining and restaurant options are still too ordinary. The overall variety of food and beverages available to passengers is not as thrilling as one might hope, and this does make the experience at the airport suffer somewhat. Consequently, many travellers give suggestions on how the quality of food and diversity in foodstuffs, as well as service efficiency, could be enhanced to make the airport experience much better, especially when a layover is involved.

The general impression is that better food choices, improved customer service, and increased attention to the needs of travellers would significantly raise levels of satisfaction at the airport so that it becomes more competitive with other major Canadian airports.

Questionnaire

We create our questionnaire (Appendix I) to fulfill the objective of this study. The purpose of the questionnaire is to collect information about managers' and airport authorities' perceptions of the fast-food options available at Winnipeg International Airport. This information is essential to evaluate market trends and opportunities for growth in the fast-food sector in airport environments. The number of participants in this survey reached 100 responses, and we sent it online via social media, text message and WhatsApp.

The questionnaire focuses on factors such as customer preferences, passenger perception, and overall satisfaction with the current offerings. From the analysis of the data, we hope to give insights that will help improve the fast-food services at Winnipeg International Airport and maybe attract more customers soon. Also, this data will help us understand the point of view of Lisa-Marie, an authority at Winnipeg Airport.

Data Analysis and Findings

Most of the results from the 10-question survey are in line with Lisa Marie's perception. Some key areas where the food and beverage options at Winnipeg Richardson International Airport may improve were pointed out through responses to the survey. Many felt either "Neutral" or "Satisfied" regarding the overall quality, meaning that while offerings are acceptable, they do not particularly stand out. Moreover, in terms of ratings for the variety of food options, ranged from "Fair" to "Poor," indicating a perceived lack of diversity impacting overall satisfaction.

Preferences strongly leaned toward fast food and international cuisine, indicating a strong demand for convenient meal choices and globally inspired ones. Many times, respondents would

nominate, through mentioning, the most recognizable brands such as McDonald's and KFC, with local flavours like Colombian coffee, presenting a desire for cheap and recognizable options that will answer to diverse tastes.

Customer satisfaction about customer service was rated mostly as "Good" or "Average," meaning moderate satisfaction but still leaving room for improvement. Price, on the other hand, was more of a sore point, with most of the respondents describing it as "Expensive" or even "Very Expensive." Prices this high may discourage frequent purchases; moreover, that would show an opportunity for offering more budget-friendly options.

When asked about improvements, the most frequent response was in having more affordable options, and a greater variety of food. More specific suggestions included: longer hours of operation, more restaurant options, and offering 24-hour availability for passengers arriving at odd hours. Many felt that the airport's food offerings were either "Worse" or "About the same" compared to other airports, which underlines still some potential to improve to better cope with or even surpass travellers' expectations.

In summary, the responses would indicate that Winnipeg Richardson International Airport could improve traveller satisfaction by increasing their selection of food types and brands, offering more affordable options, and increasing accessibility through longer operational hours. These changes will make the airport a better and more competitive option for travellers. Appendix II indicates responses to each question and its results.

Conclusion and recommendations

Research and survey findings have shown that there is a clear opportunity for Winnipeg Richardson International Airport to step up its Food and Beverage game to match passenger expectations. While it does feature several basic vendors, including popular shops like Tim Hortons and

Starbucks, what annoys travellers is the lack of variety and high prices. One of the conspicuous gaps is the fact that there is no presence of widely recognized fast-food options besides the culturally diverse and local flavours. Poor service and limited dining hours add to this underwhelming experience, much more so for travellers with longer layovers. Indeed, several passengers have been repeatedly demanding that improvements be made to options and access to bring it to a standard set by other major airports in North America.

Add diversity in fast food and international cuisine, for example, the provision of popular brand names, McDonald's, KFC, or chains local to Canada, to complement passenger demands for more familiar, affordable, culturally appropriate foods. Franchising with these recognizable franchises might also bring in customer satisfaction and a notable rise in business. Also, competitive pricing or offering lower-budget alternatives would address concerns about high costs from the travellers, hence making dining more accessible for them to buy frequently.

The other is to improve the quality and efficiency of customer service. Some of the common frustrations can be reduced by improving service issues with more personnel during peak times and training for efficiency. Further, the airport can upgrade the dining experience by introducing local vendors from Winnipeg, just like major airports such as Toronto Pearson have done, so that travellers can get a new taste of the local flavours. Furthermore, it will ensure the inclusion of more vegetarians, vegans and other categories of diet by adding them to the menu.

Lastly, extended dining service hours could be operated around the clock to support passengers with either very early morning or very late-night flights and ensure that food and beverage options are always available. In this way, Winnipeg Richardson International Airport would notably improve its F&B offer, notably improve passenger expectations, and put itself in a position to be more attractive and competitive in the catchment area.

Limitations

Limitations of this study will impact the generalisability and depth of the results. First, although enlightening, the sample size may not be indicative of the various demographics of all the travellers passing through Winnipeg Richardson International Airport. Second, the responses to the survey introduce potential biases in the research because participants may hold different expectations or subjective perceptions regarding food and beverage quality and service.

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Appendix I

1. What are the primary factors that lead to passenger dissatisfaction with the current food and beverage options?
2. How do passengers perceive the quality of food (taste, freshness, and presentation) at the airport's current dining options?
3. What specific types of cuisine or food options (e.g., fast food, healthy, international, local) do passengers feel are lacking?

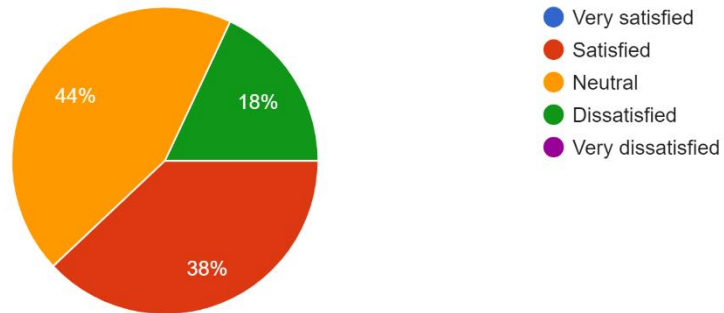
4. How important is variety in food and beverage options for passengers during their airport experience, especially during layovers?
5. How do current food and beverage prices at the airport impact passenger satisfaction and purchasing behaviour?
6. Which popular or globally recognized food chains do passengers wish to see introduced at the airport?
7. What improvements in food service (e.g., speed, availability, customer service) would passengers like to see?
8. How do passengers' expectations for food and beverage options at Winnipeg Richardson International Airport compare to their experiences at other airports?
9. What specific dietary preferences or needs (e.g., vegetarian, gluten-free, vegan) are not currently being met at the airport?
10. How do passengers feel about the variety of beverages (both non-alcoholic and alcoholic) available at the airport?

Appendix II

Question 1:

How satisfied are you with the overall quality of food and beverage options at the airport?

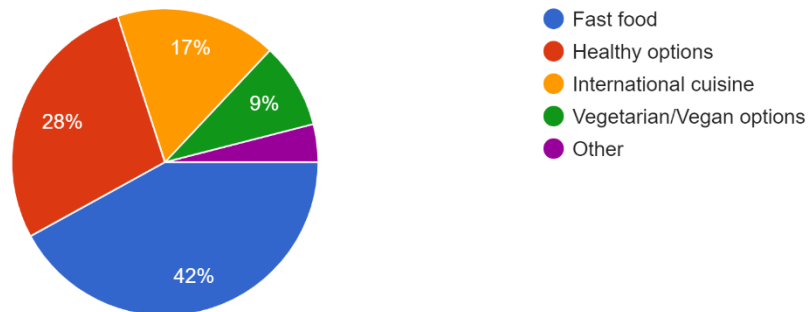
100 responses



Question 2:

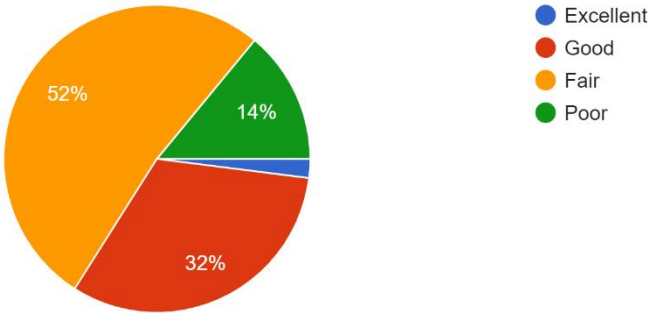
What is your preferred type of food when travelling?

100 responses



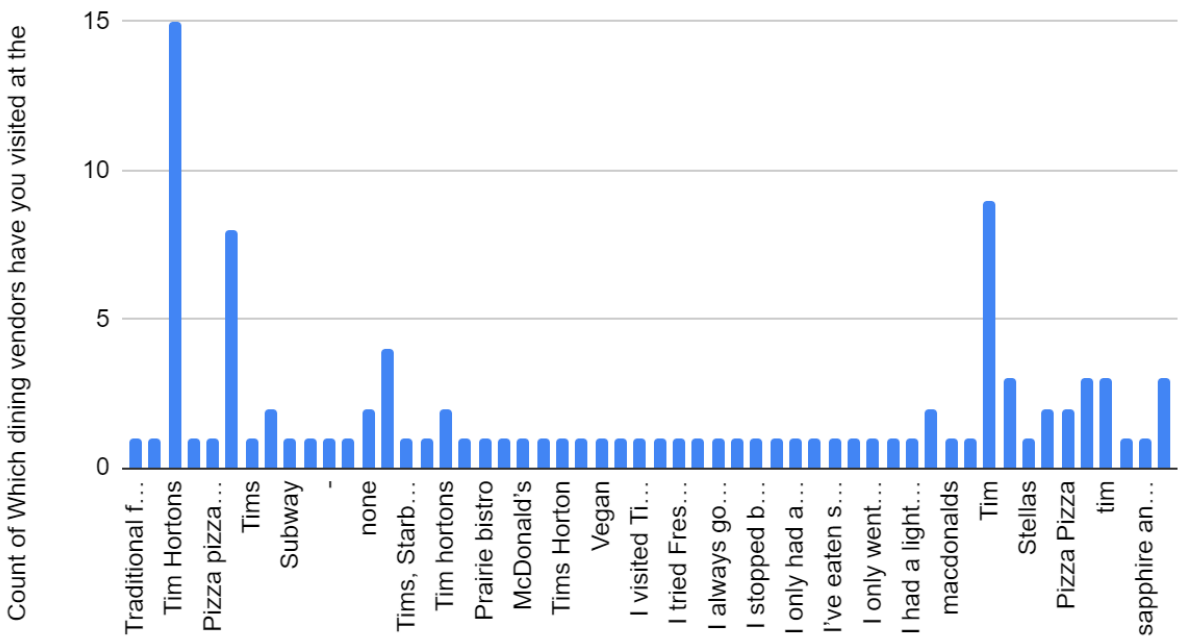
Question 3:

How would you rate the variety of food options available at the airport?
100 responses



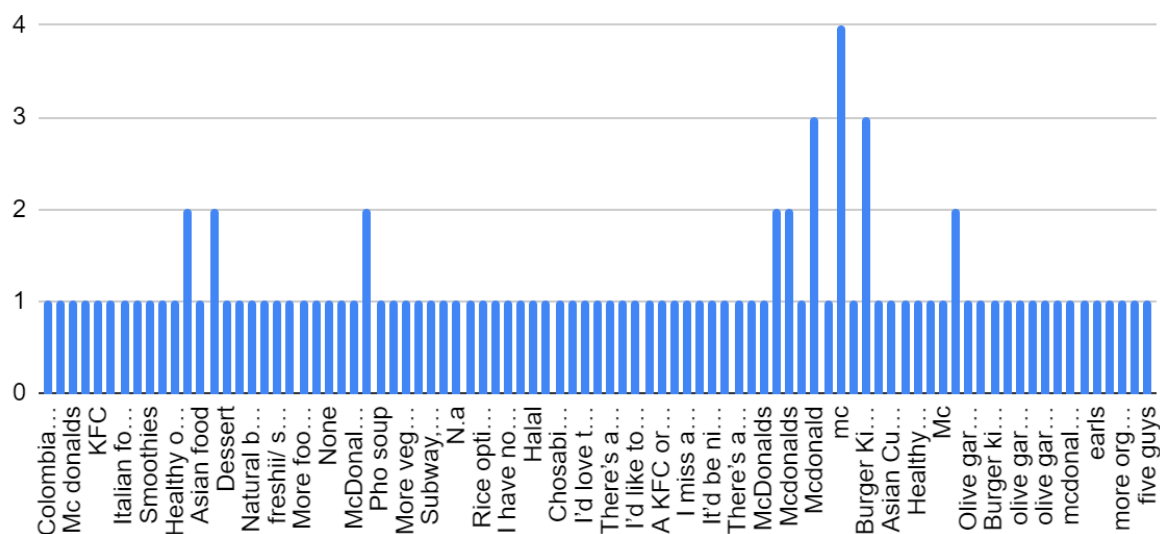
Question 4:

Count of Which dining vendors have you visited at the airport?



Question 5:

What food or beverage options or brands do you think are missing from the airport?

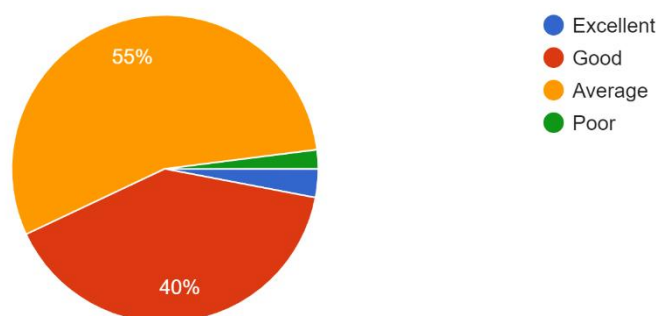


Count of What food or beverage options or brands do you think are missing from the airport?

Question 6:

How would you rate the customer service at the airport food outlets?

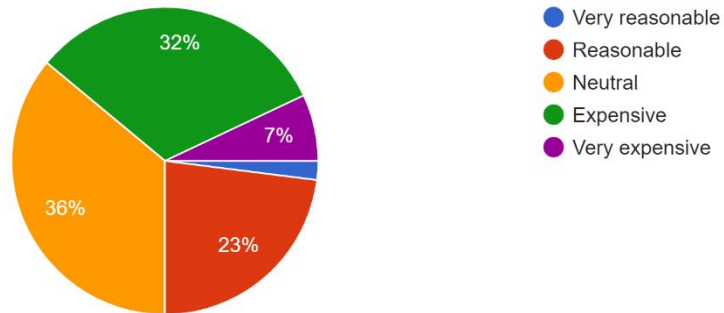
100 responses



Question 7:

How do you feel about the pricing of food and beverages at the airport?

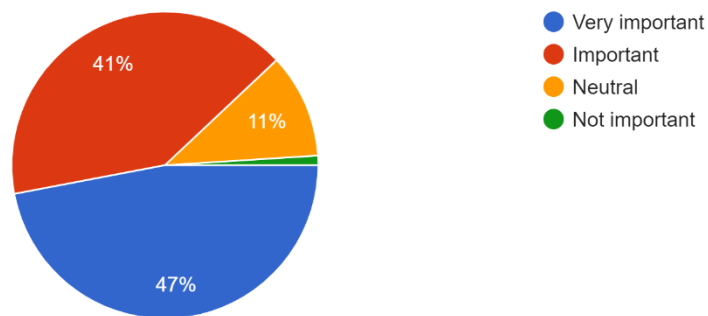
100 responses



Question 8:

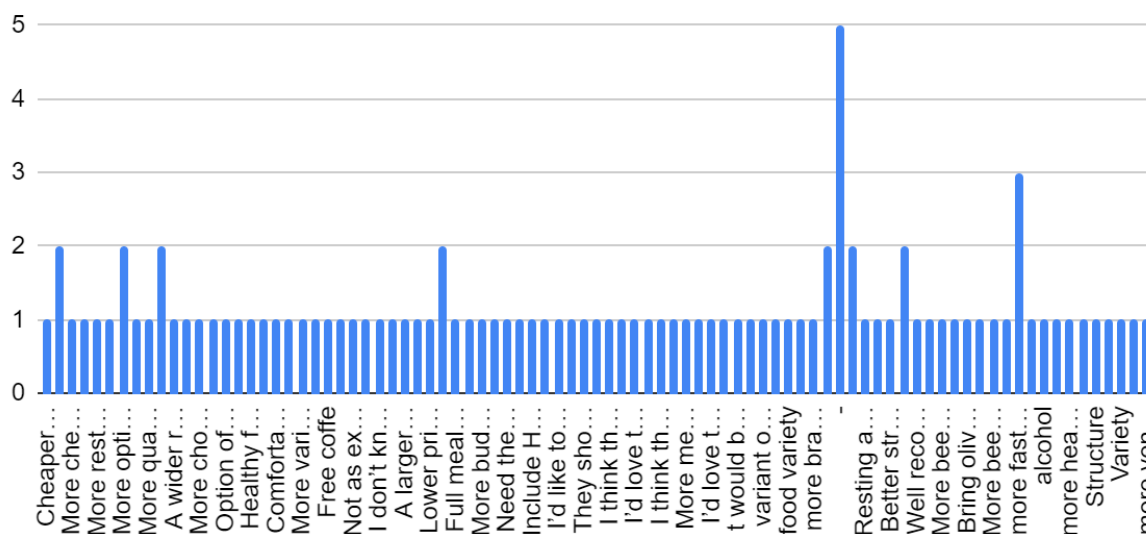
How important is having a wide variety of food options for you during a layover or wait at the airport?

100 responses



Question 9:

What improvements would you like to see in the airport's food and beverage services?



What improvements would you like to see in the airport's food and beverage services?

Question 10:

How does your experience with food options at Winnipeg Richardson International compare to other airports you've visited?

100 responses

