



## FAMOUS CZECH GOVERNMENT PLANE MAKES ITS FINAL JOURNEY

The Russian-built plane that carried presidents and the Nagano hockey team heads to a museum

BY RAYMOND JOHNSTON - PRAGUE.TV (FOTO: YOUTUBE.COM)  
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A plane trip across the Czech Republic usually takes less than an hour. But it took a Soviet-built Tupolev Tu-154 three days to make the journey from Prague's military airport at Kbely to the Aviation Museum in Kunovice in the Uherské Hradiště district of Moravia. The former state-owned plane once carried presidents Václav Havel and Václav Klaus as well as the Gold Medal-winning 1998 Czech hockey team from the Nagano Olympics. It made its final journey in several flatbed trucks. The plane and its twin were retired from service in 2008 and replaced with more modern Airbus planes.

The Tu-154's wings, tail and some other parts had to be detached for the journey as it was too wide for the road. Moving the hull on a 50-meter flatbed was a difficult task, and one of the biggest land transports of plane in Czech history. Large crowds gathered to see the plane pass along its journey. The project to move the plane was called the Big Flyover, or Velký přelet.

"We're here, the Big Flyover was successfully in the end. We had a trip of 383 kilometers and a hundred meters. In Kunovice they prepared a beautiful welcome for us. It's a wonderful feeling. We are happy, very tired and really relieved," Big Flyover spokeswoman Tereza Šírová told the media.

It took several months and thousands of hour of work to prepare the plane. Many of the bolts and screws were held in with glue. Removing the tail section was particularly tricky. The museum said on its website that the Russian manufacturer Tupolev said the tail was not removable, but that turned out not to be true.

The plane now needs to be reassembled, which should take until sometime in 2018, but it should be easier than taking it apart. "It will be great Russian puzzle. On the other hand, we know how to do it and where parts belong. Compared to the disassembly we have an advantage," spokeswoman Šírová said.

The Aviation Museum in Kunovice purchased the plane from the Czech government and on Feb. 28, 2016, the 18th anniversary of its famous flight with the winning Olympic hockey team, announced the initiative to raise money to move the plane. Some 1,300 people donated over Kč 1.2 million, far exceeding the goal of Kč 400,000.

The Tu-154 was first flown in 1968 and was introduced into service in 1972. It is powered by three rear-mounted low-bypass turbofan engines. It has a cruising speed of 975 kilometers per hour and is one of the fastest civilian aircraft in use. Its range is 5,280 kilometers. Its wingspan is 37.55 meters and its full length is 48.0 meters. The last ones were built in Russia's Tupolev factory in 2013.

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