

Durham Conservation / Green Door Alliance

Review of the Case for and against the Pickering Airport Durham Conservation / Green Door Alliance

July 21, 2009

Summary

Airport opponents are not opposed to leaving the option of a possible future airport open. Best land use will evolve as we meet the challenges of the 21st century. However based on the available evidence, much of it referenced in the body of this report, an air carrier airport that can accommodate large passenger jets is not needed at Pickering.

1 Pearson and Hamilton have the capacity to handle the GTAA's projected air carrier forecasts for the foreseeable future. However unlike Pickering which falls under the GTAA mandate, Hamilton is operated by another Airport Authority. As a result the GTAA has less interest in more fully utilizing Hamilton.

2 Airport proponents argue that adding Pickering to the mix, in addition to Pearson and Hamilton, would result in either cheaper or better service.

The GTAA's ability to pay for developing Pickering by taxing users at Pearson should not be used to argue Pickering is the most cost effective solution. And since all evidence would suggest opening a 3rd air carrier facility at Pickering must add to expense, any argument for Pickering has to be based on user convenience.

Pearson's is located at the center of the south Central Ontario region and can handle a minimum of 50 million passengers. Hamilton is located to the west with a population more than four times greater than the communities to the east and can accommodate an additional 15 million passengers. Even the great majority of the population to the east is within an hour to an hour and a half of Pearson, an airport that would offer many more flight choices than Pickering. Fewer airports also limit airline costs in duplicating services, and avoid transfer costs. These factors all demonstrate that any so called "convenience benefits" of adding a third airport at Pickering must be very small indeed and very likely illusory.

3 Opening a third air carrier facility has many other impacts on the community, on noise, on its sense of place, on recreation opportunities, on food land and the environment.

4 Fossil fuel consumption and the impact of air travel on global warming are attracting increasing public, media and government attention. Ameliorating these impacts is going to result in increased costs, and promotion and subsidization of air travel will become increasingly unacceptable as we recognize the very serious harm being done to the planet. This will dampen future growth projections and over time as well result in diversion of short/medium hall flights to other transportation modes.

There are more important land uses for the 18,600 acres as a new century unfolds. For one the majority of these lands are class 1 and 2 agricultural land – land in very short supply and continuing to be urbanized and "paved over". National food security doesn't trump all other possible land uses but is ignored at our peril.

Introduction

This review has been triggered by a number of requests from individuals and groups who wish to be better informed on the arguments for and against a third Greater Toronto Area international airport located at Pickering and on the nature of the 'evidence' supporting these positions.

Put most simply views for and against a third airport are based on an assessment of need; alternatives for meeting any perceived need; and the criteria and the weighting of those criteria that should be used in choosing the most appropriate alternative.

This debate has a long history (almost 40 years). Its public face began with a 1972 Announcement by the Federal Government that a new airport was to be built in the Toronto area. Its bureaucratic face began well before 1972 with the initial reports produced for Transport Canada. Those reports provide a disquieting glimpse into the working of governments. Given the longevity of the debate and the twists and turns it has taken, it is useful to start with some history including a brief summary of the debates that have taken place.

1972 - 1992

When the airport was announced in 1972 some 64 million passengers were projected for Pearson for the year 2,000. Air travel was growing very rapidly at the time and Montreal had been given a second airport so politicians decided Toronto needed one too.

After Pearson expansion was dismissed because of noise some, 59 possible locations- none of them at Pickering - were initially looked at and then narrowed down to four. And after extensive study a site to the west of Toronto was picked .because it best served airport users given the greater population to the west. Then at the very last minute with almost no study two new sites were introduced into the mix. One of them was Pickering and was chosen because the Province wanted to stimulate growth to the east of Toronto.

The creation of People or Planes (POP) immediately after the March 2 1972 announcement; the arguments it put forward at the hearing of necessity required under the Federal Expropriation Act, and the subsequent Airport Enquiry Commission; and the PR and media war it waged - street theatre, a spring festival, a farmers market at Toronto city hall, the Grim Reaper and the Pickering Fusiliers marching on Queen's Park, a giant Earth Days rock concert, a hang glider circling the peace tower in Ottawa, and the mock hanging of Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Davis are all well documented elsewhere

Those however on both sides of the issue would almost certainly agree today, that at the time of the airport announcement in 1972 and for decades beyond, the cursory business case put forward by the proponents turned out to be dead wrong. Expanding Pearson was far and away the cheapest and most environmentally supportable decision while also best serving air travelers.

Interestingly the voluminous internal reports produced by and for Transport Canada which studied Pearson capacity and possible airport sites had come to this conclusion before 1972. When the airport was announced these reports, were initially not made public because they contradicted the government's public position. Over the ensuing period however a few were leaked and the government then released them all. Occasional reference will be made below to a couple of these reports that are still relevant today.

The 1972 decision then ended up being a political decision. And opponents had a whole array of well researched reports contradicting the government's official position and supporting their position that Pearson expansion was the best alternative but that if a new airport was chosen a western site was much more convenient. These internal reports also indicated that due to the introduction of quieter aircraft, mandated by the FAA in the U.S., even with additional runways and flights the number of people impacted by noise at Pearson would not increase.

It is important to note as well that the airline industry, both IATA and CATA were opponents of the proposed airport. They knew it would be far too expensive to provide duplicate servicing, negating the emerging single hub advantage.

And two decades later in the early 1990's a Federal Environmental Assessment at Pearson effectively came to the same conclusion – Pearson expansion was the best solution.

The 1995 SOAS Reports (Southern Ontario Area Airports Study)

In 1995 (23 years after the initial announcement) Transport Canada produced a series of reports, the SOAS Reports. These reports concluded that when Pearson reached capacity, a case could be made for additional capacity being provided at either Pickering or Hamilton. Hamilton would be cheaper they stated and less environmentally disruptive; however it would impact more people.

The overall SOAS reports' main argument for favoring Pickering however was their very tentative conclusion that *“a Pickering location would likely attract more passengers than the Hamilton alternative.”*(p-75). And even that tentative conclusion seemed to be contradicted a page later when they state, with respect to Hamilton that *“a recent marketing study indicates it has excellent potential for growth probably greater than indicated by current Transport Canada forecasts.”*

The SOAS reports' conclusion regarding convenience and public preference was cursory, simplistic, and contradicted their own far more extensive pre-1972 study that demonstrated a western site was much more convenient for users. The SOAS report stated that in 1991 there were 660,000 people within a 30 km. radius of Hamilton; 1,600,000 within a similar radius of Pickering. In addition it stated that the eastern Regions Durham and York were growing faster than Peel and Hamilton Wentworth. Therefore users would prefer Pickering.

Continuing in this vein it claimed “ Looked at another way, it is expected that the population of Durham, York and at least the eastern half of Metropolitan Toronto would find the location at Pickering preferable to Hamilton, simply because of travel distance. Even if it were assumed that the populations of the western half of Metropolitan Toronto and all of Peel, Halton and Hamilton-Wentworth would prefer an airport to the west that would total 3.8 million in favor of one to the west compared to 3.4 million preferring one to the east, roughly a 50-50 split. Pearson already serves the 3.8 million western group and we are analyzing the location of an additional major airport. If the second major airport were to be located even further to the west this would result in about half the total population (the western half) served by two airports, namely Pearson and the additional one. The eastern half would have long distances to travel to access an airport. From the perspective of providing the best level of service to the total market, it would be preferable to have a major airport in each half of the market. “

There might be some logic to the above if Pearson were being closed, since Pickering is closer to Toronto than Hamilton. However Pearson was not being closed and could reasonably be expected to handle the vast bulk of this market and provide excellent service to all of Toronto and indeed, York and West Durham as well. Furthermore the demographic centre of the south central Ontario region is to the west. Pearson is at the demographic centre of its catchment area – to characterize it as a western location just isn't accurate.

The Hamilton Airport Gateway Opportunities Study conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers in 2002 divides Central Ontario into 3 regions: (see p-36 of Report found at <http://www.investinhamilton.ca/publications/strategic-reports-plans-studies.html> .

East - composed of Durham, Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes, Northumberland and Peterborough,

Central - composed of Simcoe, York and Toronto,

West - composed of Dufferin, Peel, Halton, Wellington, Waterloo, Hamilton Brant, Haldimand and Niagara.

In 2001 41.9% of the population was in the west; 47.5% in the central area; and **only 10.5% in the east**. According to this 2002 study, if one looks at projected 2021 populations, the west would grow to 43.9% of the total; the central area remains at 47% and **the east slides two full percentage points to 9.2%**.

The above details remain relevant because claims about the importance of having an airport to the east persist. In assessing these claims it is important to be aware of the demographic realities mentioned above. Pearson is at demographic centre of this broader South Central Ontario Region. And the western portion of south central Ontario is more than 4 times larger than the east and growing faster.

The recent GTAA ‘business case’ for Pickering

Since the SOAS reports the on the ground reality has also changed. Hamilton has spent more than a hundred million expanding its operation. No one even the GTAA is now suggesting Hamilton shouldn't be expanded. Hence, the decision today is not a choice of Pickering or Hamilton (the main source of the SOAS reports); it is whether one should build Pickering **in addition to** Hamilton!

In November 2004 the GTAA produced its Pickering Airport Draft Plan Report. Before looking at the ‘business case’ the previously mentioned SOAS reports have a useful word of warning here.

The SOAS report states, “*should Hamilton remain independent the Greater Toronto Airports Authority might look for ways to attract cargo/courier traffic back to its airport in order to maximize its revenues. This would become increasingly important as it looks for ways to finance very costly runway and terminal projects..... However should Hamilton become part of the GTAA, it would be in the best interest of the Greater Toronto airports Authority to encourage full cost recovery for each of its individual airports*”,(p-82). In short the GTAA is likely to be biased

The GTAA ‘business case’ was contained in a Financial Assessment analysis prepared in 2002 and referenced in their 2004 Pickering Airport Draft Plan Report. To our knowledge nothing more recent has been made public. (The Draft Plan report and the financial analysis is found at www.gtaa.com/local/files/en/PickeringAirportDraftPlanReport.pdf.)

Again it is a very cursory report prepared for the GTAA by Landrum and Brown. In a nutshell it looks at 3 different passenger forecast scenarios ranging between 54 and almost 60 million in the year 2032; and then allocates 50 million passengers to Pearson and assumes Pickering handles the rest.

It then estimates costs and funding sources for these scenarios. Funding sources included GTAA Airport Revenue Bonds, bank lines of credit held by the GTAA and Airport Improvement Fee, (AIF) revenues, to be collected at both Pearson as well as Pickering. The AIF revenues generated at Pearson and applied to Pickering ranged from \$345 million to \$1.058 billion. AIF revenue at Pickering ranged from \$251 million to \$333 million.

The analysis then concludes that if the GTAA with its monopoly at Pearson can charge users at Pearson between \$345 million and \$1 billion it can generate sufficient funds to open and operate Pickering.

The Report doesn't tell us how much cheaper it would be to handle the traffic at Hamilton, and like all Transport Canada and GTAA reports it is based on forecasts going out 20-25 years into the future. As already noted in 1972 Transport Canada forecast 64

million passengers at Pearson in 2000 – passengers in 2006 six years later were half that – 31 million! This 2002 financial forecast projects almost 39 million passengers in 2009, 25% more than the GTAA’s most recent forecast for 2009!

Further to this the GTAA published its Pearson Master Plan last year. Given the economic meltdown and projections for lower traffic in 2009, in an early 2009 news release they projected some 1.8 million fewer passengers in 2009. The result is that the passenger forecast of 36 million for 2010 is now unlikely to be realized until much later. This pushes their estimates of when even they feel Pearson’s capacity may be reached into the 2021-2026 time period. And their Master Plan Report suggests further measures “have a theoretical potential to increase passenger capacity by 5-10% or more.”

And of course even if such measures were not taken the essential question is - why can’t Hamilton handle any excess and along with Pearson provide sufficient additional capacity for the foreseeable future.

With respect to development at Hamilton their 2004 Airport Master Plan update indicates future airfield capacity is 265,000 operations per year which they state, (see page 34), translates into approximately 15.4 million passengers. Surely if the GTAA were to negotiate with Hamilton to meet Toronto area aviation needs an arrangement to meet those needs could be struck that saw them taking far less from Pearson travelers than the GTAA’s financial analysis contemplates would be needed to support Pickering!

To summarize then the ‘business case’ of those who oppose Pickering: given as the GTAA indicates Pearson can handle at least 50 million passengers, and when necessary Hamilton can handle at least another 15 million, Central Ontario’s air carrier capacity needs will be met for the foreseeable future. So Pickering is not needed.

Airport opponents raise the question – Why would Ontarians who fly out of Pearson feel it makes sense for them to pay hundreds of millions more in airport improvement fees in order to have Pickering developed in addition to Pearson and Hamilton?

General Aviation

The GTAA uses the closing of Buttonville and Oshawa as a rationale for Pickering. The GTAA recognizes that for a decade and more after opening Pickering would be a general aviation airport since the business case for an air carrier airport is weak. Transport Canada has no government mandate to build or own general aviation airports. And given Hamilton it is difficult to claim Pickering would be needed to serve a reliever function.

Regarding Oshawa, a 2006 economic development study commissioned by Oshawa Council indicated the airport has a very positive impact and contributed some \$60 million to Oshawa and the Regional economy. Oshawa followed up and approved the Oshawa Municipal Airport Business Plan in 2008 – a plan that confirmed the importance of the airport as an economic driver, and in order to attract new investments committed itself to staying open for a minimum of 25 years regardless of what happens at Pickering.

With respect to Buttonville, after some arm twisting by the Federal Government the GTAA has for the past number of years been supporting the Buttonville operation to the tune of \$1.5 million per year. Interestingly however the GTAA citing financial problems has announced this year funding will cease and the Buttonville owner has indicated he needs the subsidy to continue operation.

Buttonville is some 165 acres in size. Airport opponents have long believed that decisions on what should happen with such airports should be left to the private sector and local government. If Buttonville were to close one such alternative would be for Markham airport to be developed to accommodate the additional traffic.

Airport opponents believe any decision on whether or not to build an airport on the Federal government lands should be based on whether or not a case can be made that it is needed for major air carriers. If not, other solutions to General Aviation should be found.

And any general aviation solution to the possible closing of a 165 acre airport should not be used as a springboard for the GTAA to fund a much larger airport at Pickering subsidized in a major way by the traveling public at Pearson.

Noise and other Community impacts

Noise has long been an issue of contention at all existing or proposed airport sites. The need to protect Pearson residents from additional noise if the airport was expanded was the reason given for needing an airport in 1972 even though Transport Canada's internal reports demonstrated no more Pearson residents would be impacted by noise than previously. And in jurisdictions like Vancouver where Transport Canada at the time was wanting to expand facilities it was passing out pamphlets entitled "*Its getting quieter all the time*" showing quite rightly that even with a doubling or tripling of traffic, in future, once the older much noisier jets of the day like the DC8 were phased out and new quiet engine technology mandated by the Federal Aviation Authority was implemented there would be a net noise reduction. (When airport opponents made presentations to a Provincial cabinet committee and later to then Premier Davis, in the months before the Province withdrew support for the airport they got a chuckle from these pamphlets.)

And when Transport Canada prepared the previously mentioned SOAS reports, one of the arguments used against Hamilton was that Pickering would affect less people and would not be as close to future likely development. The SOAS report didn't count the Pickering residents on the site and trying to stretch the argument as far as possible concluded the average income in the area affected around Hamilton was lower and stated that "*A key principle in the assessment of social effects of planning proposals is that those in society who are worse off should not be more worse off as a result of development activities, and thus the relative vulnerability of those potentially affected, is an important consideration.*"

In the past then noise has been used as an argument for Pickering and in many instances not very objectively.

What these arguments also don't mention is that it has never been a choice of Pearson **or** Pickering **or** Hamilton. Hamilton for example - where there is no night curfew - will continue to grow regardless of what happens at Pickering, so opening Pickering would have a minuscule effect on noise at Hamilton.

Opening Pickering however will spread noise to a whole new area. Granted because of its largely rural surrounds great numbers will not fall within the NEF contours. However because of that very rural nature and low ambient noise levels, opening an airport at Pickering would very significantly impact the surrounding community both in terms of noise and overall "sense of place".

The Federal Airport lands and surrounding rural areas form a green belt that is becoming increasingly appreciated by urbanites to the south. The fact that a family from Toronto or Pickering can visit farmland, natural areas and miles of public conservation land a few short miles from their homes is an important element in their sense of place as well. And in this day and age maintaining and improving the quality of life is a critical component in attracting those individuals who will help to ensure the GTA Region is competitive and prosperous. Unfortunately these elements that are more difficult to quantify are given short shrift when it comes to evaluations made by airport planners.

The Broader Business case – Bringing in environmental/other considerations

i) Green house gas emissions

The need to respond to man-made climate change is accepted. Many believe it is the largest problem facing the world. With the Obama administration now taking things seriously Canada and the rest of the world are likely to be operating under a cap and trade system before any new facility could be opened at Pickering.

World wide, carbon dioxide emissions from aircraft are growing faster than any other form of green house emissions and would form a critical element in any environmental assessment process on the airport. George Monbiot in his 2006 book "Heat" makes the point that particularly since unlike other areas of energy consumption, there are no substantial fixes to existing aircraft technology that will significantly reduce carbon emissions, "*unless something is done to stop this growth, aviation will overwhelm all the cuts we manage to make elsewhere.*" Flying he states "*dwarfs any other impact a single person can exert*".

According to the U.K. Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, the carbon emissions per air passenger mile while half the average carbon emission per auto traveler mile, has to be multiplied by the huge distances traveled by air. Not only that, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change estimates that when one considers all the gas

and particle emissions in the upper atmosphere, the warming effect of air travel could be 2.7 times that of the carbon dioxide alone! (A good report on this subject is a European Report – “Clearing the Air the myth and reality of Aviation and Climate Change. It can easily be googled)

Presently there is no international agreement on allocating carbon emissions from international flights – due to airline lobbying they escaped Kyoto. However there seems absolutely no doubt that as climate concerns intensify, air passenger and cargo travel won't be given the same free ride. If the true costs of air travel including carbon emissions were passed on to users, current demand forecasts on which the need to expand beyond Pearson are based, would be reduced.

To quote from an Economist article in 2006. *“This week IATA said the net loss to the world's airlines in the past six years would amount to almost \$44 billion. Carriers have been hit by terrorism, war, recession, the respiratory disease SARS and soaring oil prices. There were hopes the industry could make a small profit in 2007. but having to pay for environmental costs would change that. Yet global warming is not something that airlines or any other industry can shake off for ever. Sooner or later, aviation will have to shoulder the burden it imposes on the planet”*

Not only that, shorter haul flights are 2-3 times worse green house gas emitters per passenger km. than long haul flights given the short time spent cruising, so developments like high speed rail in the Quebec-Windsor corridor are becoming more and more likely. Such developments would reduce passenger forecasts at Pearson significantly – again reducing the need to provide capacity elsewhere.

Due to reduced passenger forecasts the GTAA has recently (Feb 2009), announced they will raise their Airport improvement fee from \$20 to \$25 to cover shortfalls. Much more troubling, they also announced an airline incentive program. This program will offer landing fee rebates of up to 50 per cent for a 12-month period to air carriers that are introducing new services at Toronto Pearson. This includes new air routes that are not currently being served and net increases in service on existing routes. This program we are told is meant to drive more traffic to Toronto Pearson and result in a measurable economic benefit for the airport as well as the surrounding community.

Particularly given the approaching realities of climate change and the need to make tough choices around how to reduce emissions, these measures dig us a deeper future hole and are extremely short sighted - rather like the big three automakers building plants to produce monster SUV's a few years back! Good for the bottom line in the short term disastrous in the longer term.

This stance by the GTAA also highlights the fact that air travel demand is quite elastic – No one is talking about outlawing it. However the extent we want to promote it is going to become a very big issue.

Those who feel this issue of climate change will not become a very public issue may want to consider the article from the January 17 2009 Economist on the opposition to expanding Heathrow. The Conservative Party has said they will stop it when they come to power and the Mayor of London and major environmental groups are

against it. As the article states Prime Minister Gordon Brown *"even had to overcome the disquiet of nearly half his cabinet, who feared that the legally binding commitments to reduce by 80% Britain's carbon emissions by 2050 would be made to look ridiculous."*

ii) The Pickering lands

The GTAA draft plan itself acknowledges that the great majority of the airport site is class 1 food land and that the Duffins and Caruthers watersheds are the healthiest in the GTA. As already noted the SOAS report states, *"The natural environment is much more sensitive at Pickering than at Hamilton and would require greater mitigation efforts and costs."*

In their business analysis the airport proponent – the GTAA is prepared to build mitigation costs into their analysis and would make every effort to site the airport in a manner that attempted to reduce the impact.

However those opposed and environmentalists generally feel that any business case must make a far more substantial effort to quantify the 'external' costs associated with such developments. On the environmental side this means going beyond the costs of remediation and attempting to quantify impacts on air and water quality etc. including quantifying the carbon emissions referenced in i) above.

Also class 1 food land is very limited in Canada and is critical to future food security particularly given global warming and population increase. It is also one of Durham's largest employers. Surely any business analysis should attempt to quantify the current and future impact of permanently taking such lands out of food production. Yet the GTAA in its analysis assumes there is zero cost to society in paving a very limited resource like prime food land abutting Canada's largest urban area!

Airport opponents believe strongly that if these and other externalities associated with building an airport at Pickering were factored into the analysis, development of an airport at Pickering would be shelved for the foreseeable future.

iii) Priorities/Differing Interests/The decision making Process

The GTAA faces many priorities and the current financial problems greatly adds to them. The GTAA's interest is focused on its narrower airport mandate. As already mentioned the GTAA has responsibility for Pearson, Pickering and airport planning in the Region, but isn't responsible for Hamilton. This is likely to result in the GTAA favoring and providing financial support for the development of Pickering while downplaying the role of non GTAA airports. This isn't in the broad public interest.

In addition with its monopoly at Pearson it can charge the public users at Pearson in order to fund Pickering development. Yet these same users who are footing the bill, along with their governments might prefer that money be spent on public transit or some other priority they consider of greater importance. However the GTAA mandate and its structure as a Quango, (Quasi non governmental organization), results in conflicts between the broader public interest and the Quango's funding priorities.

Durham Region has its priorities. The Region has always favored the airport. They feel it will stimulate their economy and the public beyond Durham is footing the bill.

Creating a 'business case' aimed at justifying building an airport or increasing air traffic 'here' as opposed to 'there' in the GTA, may make sense from the point of view of those in a specific jurisdiction. However individual jurisdictions benefit most if they are part of a vital productive broader region. And that is why important decisions on where to build airports should be aimed at making the best decision from the point of view of the broader south central Ontario Region.

As futurist and best selling author Richard Florida, puts it in his report Ontario in the creative Age, *"the mega-region is our main source of connection to the world economy and main competitive asset. The stronger it gets the stronger the province will be in the global competition for talent, creativity, investment and jobs."* He stresses we can dramatically improve productivity by encouraging density and concentrating development, and cutting out commuting time by improving connections within the mega region – new subway lines, high speed rail etc.

Transport Canada's stated plans for moving forward on a possible airport

In 2007 Transport Canada awarded the GTAA with a contract to undertake a needs analysis study of Pickering. The needs analysis was expected to be completed in 2008. Transport Canada has also indicated they will then do a due diligence review following which the GTAA analysis and possibly the Transport Canada review will be made public, and the federal government will then decide whether it wishes to proceed with a full panel federal environmental assessment or whether it will put it on the shelf for a number of years.

Neither the terms of reference of the needs analysis nor the nature of Transport Canada's subsequent review have been made public. And since the GTAA has been a long standing proponent of proceeding with the Pickering Airport there seems little doubt the GTAA's analysis will support the need to develop an airport at Pickering.

And as Richard Korasill the President of Hamilton Airport stated in a 2008 speech *"the Pickering idea has come back again and the GTAA is busy working out how to make it happen.... Having the GTAA study the need for Pickering is what we call letting the fox mind the hen house."* Before considering Pickering he went on to say, *"Why don't we maximize what we already have first?"*

Many have asked us why if we feel our case is so strong wouldn't we welcome an environmental assessment. Wouldn't all the facts come out? The authors of this report participated in the Airport Enquiry Commission in the 1970's presided over by a learned judge who ruled in favor of proceeding even though in retrospect all would agree that at the time this was not the appropriate decision. We realize when one faces a proponent with very deep pockets, with a terms of reference framed to limit the scope of the review, it is very easy to come to the wrong conclusion.

For this reason we have long argued that before going into a very costly and more narrowly focused Environmental Assessment a much broader review needs to take place taking account of the issues raised in the above analysis. Transport Canada's current secretive process does not fill us with confidence.

Management of Federal Lands in excess of any possible future airport need

Regardless of whether or when an airport is built all parties are agreed that 18,600 acres, more than triple the size of Pearson is not required. In 2000 Transport Canada announced 7200 acres would remain permanent green space and was not needed for future airport and appointed a Green Space Advisory Committee to advise on the creation of a Master Plan for the 7200 acres. The report was submitted in 2005 and has since gathered dust. The view at the time was that substantive action could be taken on these lands regardless of any future airport decision as long as care was given that no ensuing action would be incompatible with a future airport.

More recently the Province placed another 6,000 acres within the Provincial green belt. This land will also never be needed for an airport. This still leaves a Pearson size acreage for a possible future airport.

Regardless then of what decision is made on the airport or whether it is made in the next few years or set aside and revisited a decade or two from now, a Plan needs to be developed for the surplus lands since it is obvious that the great majority of the lands will remain surplus even if it were decided to proceed with an airport.

The broad objectives governing a plan for the excess lands are not controversial either. In 2001 after announcing preservation of the 7200 acres of Federal Green Space Transport Canada appointed a Green Space Advisory Committee to advise on the development of a Draft Master Plan for the lands. In advance Transport Canada laid out a number of guiding principles to provide guidance in creating the Plan.

These principles included:

- protecting restoring and enhancing the natural heritage system
- preserving and enhancing agricultural capability and farm enterprise
- maintaining the cultural heritage with emphasis on revitalizing and enhancing the hamlet of Altona
- Encouraging limited public access for passive recreation purposes

In summary then there is a very large amount of surplus land to manage, and general agreement on most if not all of the key principles that should be strived for in managing these lands. The time is long overdue for Government to take action on these lands to begin to meet its own previously stated objectives.

We direct readers interested in more detail on the history of past land management recommendations, and on current possible alternatives, to read reports on this subject soon to be available on both the Green Door Alliance/Durham Conservation Association and Land over Landings websites.

Prepared for the Green Door Alliance/Durham Conservation Association and Land over Landings to encourage public understanding of the issue

Brian Buckles, buckles@zing-net.ca 905 649 3331
Lorne Almack lorhoda@gmail.ca 905 649 2202