

Green Durham Association Presentation to Transport Minister Lisa Raitt

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Our members have for many years had a deep interest in the Federal airport lands; as well as the Provincial lands to the south including Seaton and the Agricultural Preserve. And over the past decade our focus has broadened to the Moraine lands in Uxbridge, working with municipal, conservation and other partners to acquire natural heritage and trail linkages connecting communities and conservation lands.

Our priority on the Federal lands has been to develop a consensus among stakeholders around the protection of the lands falling between the Federal Rouge Park and the 8700-acre airport site.

The objective is to protect these lands for agriculture; establish appropriate environmental buffers and a nature/trail corridor linking the Moraine with the Rouge Park and urban areas to the south; and ensure that environmental regulations, and open space uses are consistent with Provincial policies as reflected in the Greenbelt and Moraine Plans.

In support of this objective Pickering, Uxbridge, and Ajax councils with unanimous backing on council from airport opponents and proponents alike, have very recently passed resolutions asking the Federal Government to respect Provincial Greenbelt and Moraine policies on lands falling outside the airport site. And in June the Regional Planning Commissioner wrote to Transport Canada articulating Durham's position and also calling for agriculture and open space uses consistent with the Greenbelt Plan on all of these specific non-airport lands.

Furthermore, more than a decade ago the Federal Government announced that some 7200 acres including the 5500-acre moraine portion, as well as the Rouge corridor lands, would be permanently protected as Green Space. The Minister at the time appointed an Advisory Committee, which included a member from our organization. And a draft Master Plan and Strategy was developed, but never finalized.

Years after the change in government Transport Canada continued to reference this 7200 acre Federal commitment, and Federal Green Space signage still identifies these lands. And the Pickering, Ajax and Uxbridge resolutions just noted also ask the Federal Government to respect previous Federal Green Space undertakings. The reality is that without a recommitment to additional protection, the Federal Rouge Park announcement and the inclusion of 5,000 acres of Federal land in it, while very positive, will - **on its own** - be seen by many not as progress, but as a step backward

We urge government to reiterate what it has already in the past largely committed to – permanent protection of the lands between the Park and the airport site. This will not inhibit possible future airport operation on nearby lands, and will also greatly benefit the Park Itself. And since the northern boundary of the Park abuts

the Stouffville urban area, the only way to create a robust nature corridor and trail connect from the Lake and the Park to the Moraine is through the lands east of the Park. Agriculture in the Park will also benefit as part of a much larger farm area.

We further urge Transport Canada to expand on the extensive existing studies and work completed for them by the Conservation Authority, and engage stakeholders, and develop and implement a Management Plan for this area. Given the work already completed this should be a relatively speedy and inexpensive process.

The Food and Farming sector is an absolutely critical part of the economy. Any plan for the area needs to evaluate how to best take advantage of the role these prime agricultural lands could play in augmenting this sector, while doing so in a manner that addresses environmental and other considerations including a natural area/trail link to the Moraine

Given overlapping objectives, Transport Canada and Parks Canada need to coordinate efforts. And if government decided to extend the Park we would support that. However we are also open to other approaches, and don't feel any review of governance alternatives has to take place before Government acts to protect these lands and further consultation and planning has taken place.

The 8700-acre airport site is twice the size of Pearson and at least a third of it falls within the Provincial greenbelt. We believe that much if not all of this environmentally sensitive land - particularly the main branch of the West Duffin should be removed from the airport site, and included in any study of the non airport lands. However we are hesitant to encourage boundary review at this time due to concern it may delay and possibly derail shorter term action to protect the lands falling between the Park and the airport site as it is currently defined.

The Government's own sponsored studies indicate no airport is likely needed for many years. We also believe that these studies continue - as past studies have done - to overestimate that need. Regardless however of **whether** or **when** an airport decision is made, any possible development would start small. And there are also extensive commercial greenfield lands available in Seaton just south of the airport lands, further reducing the need for development on federal lands. The reality that needs to be taken into consideration is that for many decades to come, the highest and best use of the majority of the lands in the airport site will be agricultural.

In conclusion we urge the Government to commit to protect the lands between the Park and the airport site; pursue the objectives outlined; consult with stakeholders; and develop a Management Plan to oversee them. Such action would receive enthusiastic public support.

Brian Buckles, for the Green Durham Association