

## Initial Thoughts on Transport Canada's July 11<sup>th</sup> airport announcement

This may change after reading the full 300 page report but my initial reaction is this is the best news we could have expected. No one ever expected Transport Canada to announce there was never going to be a need for an airport and that the land should be dealt with in a way that would make any future airport impossible.

The worst news would have been an announcement that the Federal Government had made a decision to proceed with an environmental assessment. If that had been the announcement, after a 1-2 year process, the likely result would have been a government decision to proceed to construct an airport, a process that would likely take another 8 years or so.

The other alternative would have been for the government to just delay the decision for a number of years. In many respects this is what Transport Canada has done. The Report states they feel they will need an airport sometime between 2027 and 2037. This suggests that any environmental assessment preceding any airport development is unlikely to start before 2017 at the earliest.

Compare this with the timetable outlined by the GTAA in their 2004 Pickering Airport Draft Plan Report. That report assumed they would get their foot in the door with a General Aviation airport by 2012 and open a major air carrier facility in either 2015 or 2019, depending on the scenario chosen.\* We were particularly concerned about the getting the foot in the door approach with a GA airport. That seems to no longer be on the table but I would like to further confirm this.

And when one talks as they now are of passengers forecasts 15 to 25 years in the future and how/where they can best be accommodated we are into rather wild speculation as Transport Canada's previous exaggerated forecasts and changing plans for accommodating growth have demonstrated.

Also positive is Transport Minister Lebel's statement: "We will develop a plan for the short- and long-term development\*\* and use of these lands, including the potential for a future airport, for the benefit and economic growth of the Greater Toronto Area".

Clearly there are a lot of still unanswered questions including terms of reference, intentions, stakeholder involvement, and how the process for developing a plan might proceed. In some respects if this plan is developed appropriately and with appropriate stakeholder involvement this is what we have asked for all along. Transport Canada has yet to decide how best to proceed to develop a plan, however, they must realize they would be open to a huge amount of criticism if they developed this plan in isolation.

This announcement seems to also be opening the way to a process in which one of the alternatives that will be considered is to add Federal Lands in Pickering and Markham that are not needed for an airport to a Federal Rouge Park or abutting Agricultural Preserve. There is growing recognition both among politicians and other stakeholders that regardless of the future governance approach chosen much of the land should be preserved as farmland.

\*Under the 3 scenarios sketched out by the GTAA at the time 2 scenarios envisaged Pickering Major Air Carrier activity would begin in 2015 with passenger projections ranging between under a million passengers to just under 3 million passengers and to between 3 and 4 million passengers by 2020 depending on the scenario chosen. A third scenario assumed Major Air Carrier activity would begin in 2019 with over 2.5 million passengers forecast by 2022.

\*\*One possible concern in the Minister's quoted comments is his mention that they will develop a Plan for the **short** and long term **development** and use of these lands. Is the implication here that short term development is being considered? If so, since any short term development wouldn't have anything to do with an airport what might it be?

We continue to believe the most ideal and cost effective solution would involve privatizing some of this land with conservation easements on them to ensure permanent protection.

As far as the 12 to 13,000 acres of Federal land falling within the Provincial greenbelt that all agree will never be needed for an airport is concerned, the announcement of the creation of this plan gives us the opportunity to dialogue with as many potential allies as possible and push strongly and constructively to ensure the very best possible and achievable plan for these lands is developed and implemented in a fashion that ensures their **permanent** future preservation and enhancement as both food land and natural area.

As far as the so called 5 to 6,000 acre provincial 'white belt' portion of the more than 18,000 acre federal holding is concerned, we believe there is absolutely no way government will agree to completely abandon the possibility of a future airport and agree to permanent protection of the entire site. As a result we feel the most realistic objective to push for on these lands is to call for much better and more far sighted stewardship overseen by the same conservation entity that would manage the lands to be permanently preserved..

Transport Canada is acknowledging that there is no need for an airport until sometime between 2027 and 2037 and seem to recognize other factors could change pushing this time off even further. As stated earlier, such future forecasts are wildly speculative in and of themselves. Couple this with changing technologies opening up new avenues for accommodating such travel, as well as changing public values that we expect over time will place greatly increased value on the global environment and on preservation of such prime farmland. So while we don't feel we can practically push for permanent preservation of all the lands now we believe the future is likely to tilt the balance our way.

Over the next few years we should continue to continue to critically evaluate air traffic projections in the south central Ontario region and how best to accommodate it, within a context that builds into any cost benefit analysis the growing importance of permanently preserving all these food lands and natural areas.

Since any future airport decision will not be made for many years, our current focus should be to work with other stakeholders in the development and implementation of a land use plan that best meets the objective of permanently protecting the land all agree will never be needed for an airport, while also working to ensure the development and implementation of a stewardship plan and common governance structure for the lands that Transport Canada feels might at some future point be used for a future airport.

We must also recognize that the more stakeholders can work towards developing a common approach – an approach that will inevitably require some compromise – the stronger that combined voice will be in influencing the Government's plan and governance approach.

--prepared & submitted by Brian Buckles