



## **A New Airport at Pickering: A Needs Assessment. Response to the Pickering Airport Draft Plan Report**

Transport 2000 Ontario, March 2005

### **Background**

The Greater Toronto Airport Authority is a private, non-profit corporation responsible for the management and operation of Toronto Pearson International Airport. The mandate of the GTAA is to help ensure that the airports of south central Ontario meet the air transport needs of the region. The GTAA has recently completed a redevelopment of Pearson at a cost of \$6 billion financed by debt. Pearson airport lost \$28.9 million in the latest quarter due to financing costs. To make up for the shortfall, the Authority has increased the airport improvement fee for departing passengers and is expected to raise landing fees by 18%. Pearson has the current reputation as one of the ten most expensive airports in North America. In spite of the redevelopment, the GTAA calculates that the airport could begin to approach capacity around 2020. The capacity limitations of the redeveloped Pearson led the federal Minister of Transport in 2001 to ask the GTAA “to undertake interim planning work which would enable the federal government to decide whether to approve the development of a regional reliever airport on the federally-owned Pickering lands.” An airport on the site was first proposed in 1972 by the federal government and land in the area was expropriated for that purpose. Public opinion was strongly opposed, and the plan was cancelled in 1975.

### **Transport 2000 Ontario is not in favour of building a regional airport at Pickering for the following reasons:**

- **Proper transportation planning would render this airport redundant.**

A significant portion of domestic passenger flights in and out of Pearson is in the Windsor/Quebec City corridor. The latest figures available from Statistics Canada are for 1999 as follows:

#### Traffic Volumes by City-Pair – Thousands of passengers

Montreal – Toronto	1261.4
Ottawa – Toronto	725.9
Quebec – Toronto	115.2
Toronto – Windsor	113.5
Montreal – Quebec	49.9
London – Toronto	42.4
London – Ottawa	38.9
London – Montreal	35.3
Ottawa – Quebec	29.1
Montreal – Windsor	21.4
Ottawa – Windsor	17.5
Montreal – Ottawa	16.3
Hamilton	48,287
<b>Total</b>	<b>- 2,515,087</b>

Total domestic passenger volume in 1999 for Pearson Airport was 26,681,133. Therefore, the ratio of passenger volume in the corridor (including a guess at Markham, Buttonville and Oshawa volumes, since their statistics are private) would amount to about ten percent of Pearson's domestic volume.

Rail would serve this large travel population much more efficiently with its origin and destination downtown to downtown and its much shorter waiting time. A shining example is the Eurostar train that takes passengers from London to Paris in 2 hours and 35 minutes, and to Brussels, in 2 hours and 15 minutes. The Eurostar now carries 68 per cent of all travellers between London and Paris and 63 percent between London and Brussels. Both routes are faster than trips to these destinations by air. (The Plane Truth About Trains, *Toronto Star*, December 18, 2004) A commitment by the federal government to upgrade VIA service in the corridor could reduce the need for a Pickering Airport.

Bringing VIA service in the corridor up to international standards is a more economic prescription for meeting south central Ontario's transportation needs. The price of two sets of tracks running between Toronto and Montreal (540 km) for high-speed rail at a rate of \$125 million per track km would total \$1.6 billion, 75 per cent of the Pickering Airport's \$2 billion estimate. At 230 km per hour, the Toronto-Montreal run would take approximately 2 hours. This speed is very competitive with a trip by air, which would have to include travelling to and from airports, waiting time for security and the flight itself – a total of four to four and one half hours. It is generally agreed that, for shorter distances, efficient ground transportation is superior to flight. It is more convenient, less polluting, and its use of land for railway tracks constitutes a light footprint on that land compared to the sprawling runways of airport terminals. The federal government should ensure that an environmental assessment of the proposed Pickering Airport includes a study of transportation alternatives.

- **Building an airport involves heavy investment in a depleting resource.**

Many geologists agree that the world supply of cheap oil has peaked and is declining. Major companies like Royal Dutch/Shell, ConocoPhillips and Chevron Texaco Corp. have reported that the replacement rate of their oil reserves has plunged. According to the Wall Street journal, the entire industry is straining to replace its stores of energy. (Wall Street Journal, reprinted in the Globe & Mail, Feb. 4/05) The persistently high price of oil gives credence to the geologists' forecasts. The fact that rail gives more bang for the oil buck is widely known but bears repeating. A 150-seat airplane has a fuel consumption rate of 44.7 passenger miles per gallon. By comparison, a train of five coaches with at least 300 passenger seats has a fuel consumption rate of 292 passenger miles per gallon. (Transport 2000 statistics)

No less a body than the International Air Transport Association recognizes the threat to the industry of this depleting resource. A recent Wall Street Journal states,

“The International Air Transport Association said it expects the global airline industry to post an overall loss of between \$3 billion and \$4 billion in 2004, as

high fuel costs outweigh strong increases in international traffic... This is just the beginning. Air travel is the first aspect of modern living that will succumb to oil depletion.” (*Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 27, 2004)

- **The claim by the GTAA that the Pickering facility is needed east of Toronto as a twin to the Hamilton Airport in the west is questionable.**

The evidence is that freight movement is going west, not east. CP is now building an intermodal truck/rail terminal in the Milton area at Highway 401 and Highway 25. Hamilton Airport, which is underused, could serve the freight needs in this area if ground transportation to the airport were to be improved. We urge that the improved ground transportation should favour sustainable modes.

On the subject of freight, Transport Canada should be reminded that “just in time” delivery of components to the automobile industry by air and truck constitute a subsidy by Canadian taxpayers to carmakers. In the past, manufacturers built warehouses to store components. Today, infrastructure (roads and airports) built by the taxpayer and delivered just when needed have reduced industry costs by using government built infrastructure. In addition to the subsidy, Canadians pay an environmental price in terms of increased air and noise pollution.

- **Air travel is a heavy polluter**

An airport at Pickering would provide another setback to Canada’s commitment to the Kyoto accord. A report in February 2000 by the U.S. General Accounting Office found that aviation emissions in the U.S. accounted for about 3 per cent of the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Furthermore, according to the report, jet aircraft deposits gases directly into the upper atmosphere and some of them have a greater warming effect than gases emitted closer to the surface. Carbon dioxide combined with other exhaust gases and particulates emitted from jet engines could have two to four times as great an impact on the atmosphere as carbon dioxide emissions alone. ([www.gao.gov/archive/2000/rc00057.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/archive/2000/rc00057.pdf))

Many studies have found a link between airports, poor air quality in the region and public health problems. The following three reports are notable:

*EPA Estimation and Evaluation of Cancer Risks Attributed to Air Pollution in Southwest Chicago.* ([www. areco/org/studies.htm](http://www.areco.org/studies.htm))

Katta, Murty. *Greenhouse Gas Pollution in the Stratosphere Due to Increasing Airplane Traffic, Effects on the Environment.* (ibid)

Timar, Gabriel S. *Effects of Aircraft Pollution at LesterB. Pearson International Airport: Preliminary Interim Draft.* (ibid)

Air pollution is just one of several negative environmental effects of airports. The de-icing process and spilled aviation fuel are water polluters. Building runways often requires the realignment of waterways; an activity that has serious implications for wildlife in the area, while the removal of wildlife habitat threatens the survival of local

species. Noise pollution and vibration around airports is a health hazard in surrounding communities.

The GTAA's answer to the concerns of environmental damage is vague and unconvincing: "Physical and natural environment information...have assisted with the preparation of a plan for the development of an airport that minimizes effects on the land and its historical landmarks." (GTAA, p. 3:27) The GTAA's response is understandable since airports by their very nature are incompatible with the natural environment, an incompatibility that an environmental assessment will do little to mitigate. An environmental assessment, to be effective, must consider alternatives to the project.

- **Ground transportation to the proposed Pickering Airport will increase urban sprawl.**

The Pickering Airport Draft Plan Report devotes almost four pages to a list of highway expansions required to serve the facility. Increased highway space will lead inevitably to urban sprawl and its offspring: traffic congestion and air and water pollution. Urban sprawl is universally recognized as a scourge in North America. Building this airport will prove a setback in the battle to limit growth of sprawl in southern Ontario. If a facility requires newly built roads to serve it, and roads are sprawl producers and polluters, then alternatives to the facility should be given priority.

- **An airport at Pickering will produce jobs, but at a price.**

Admittedly, airports generate jobs both directly and indirectly. However, the view that jobs must always trump environmental concerns is short sighted and dangerous since it makes no provision for experimentation and innovation. Industries, particularly emerging industries that are environmentally benign can also produce significant numbers of jobs if they are given the opportunity and the support.

- **Construction of an airport at Pickering will take fertile agricultural land out of production.**

The draft plan states frankly that the majority of land in the area is Class 1 or 2 agricultural land. Taking this land out of production accelerates the already destructive decline of land available for cultivation in Canada. Ontario, which has more than one-half of Canada's Class 1 agricultural land, has allowed more than eleven percent to be gobbled up by urbanization. A recent Statistics Canada report states,

"This has forced farmers to bring lower quality land under cultivation to meet the growing demand for agricultural products. Lower-quality land is often unsuitable for stable, long-term agricultural production. ...Production on poorer quality land may also be more environmentally harmful, as it is often susceptible to soil damage resulting in erosion, and requires greater use of fertilizers and pesticides." (Statistics Canada. *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin*, vol. 6, No. 1, Jan. 2005. The Loss of Dependable Agricultural Land in Canada)

Furthermore, as agricultural land becomes urban land, agricultural products have to be shipped from further afield, thus adding to shipping traffic and pollution.

- **An airport at Pickering would fly in the face of the provincial government’s goal in enacting Greenbelt legislation.**

The Pickering lands intrude into the Oak Ridges Moraine, an ecologically sensitive landform that is included in the proposed Greenbelt. The Ontario government must mount opposition to the airport to protect and conserve this important natural area.

- **The close proximity of the proposed Pickering Airport to the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station is a recipe for disaster.**

The airport lands are 7.5 miles from the nuclear station. Although the station is not in the direct flight path of aircraft, the two are much too close for comfort. The possibility of an accident or a terrorist attack should be enough to dismiss any thought of constructing an airport at the Pickering site.

- **The “demand” for air transportation is a created demand.**

The usual “demand” argument is recited in the draft report as a reason to build an airport at Pickering. The population in the GTA is expected to increase by over two million by the year 2031, therefore, “...so does the need for accessible and convenient air travel.” The belief that certain modes of transportation are more popular than others and therefore, should be supplied has a flaw wide enough to hold a Bombardier jet. “Build it and they will come” is the explanation for this phenomenon. In other words, provide air travel and neglect alternative forms of transportation, and the public will choose to fly. Rail, is a neglected alternative that needs to be built.

At a minimum, Transport Canada should fund:

- A non-stop high-speed train between Toronto and Montreal.
- A high-speed train in the corridor with stops in Ottawa, Kingston and Montreal.
- The continuation of local service in the corridor.
- Hourly departures between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m for basic service in the corridor with added departures at peak times.

Existing airports should continue to serve, and to concentrate on, long-haul continental and inter-continental travel. Since air transport is a heavy polluter, airports and the airline industry must concentrate on reducing harmful emissions. Canada’s federal government should support and promote rail as the mode of choice for short distance passenger transportation and for a larger portion of freight transport.

Natalie Litwin  
For Transport 2000 Ontario.