



Instead of resurrecting moraine airport, feds should push 905 trains to Pearson.

Plane Stupid

No wonder Pickering airport plan has new wings – transit review was done by airport authority

By Josh Garfinkel

Environmental victories have a particularly short shelf life in Ontario. Our collective long-term memory is so weak, we don't notice when governments, responding to pressure from industry groups, insert loopholes in laws designed to protect the environment.

On the Oak Ridges Moraine north of Toronto, that subversion began right away, when developers were granted permission to erect subdivisions on supposedly protected land. But a bigger threat looms on the 11,600 hectares of federally owned land on the moraine's eastern flank.

The critical link activists want added to Ontario's Greenbelt is being eyed once again as a site for a Pickering airport – years after residents thought they'd killed the proposal.

A review of transportation needs in southern Ontario commissioned by the federal Liberal government in 2005, now shrouded in secrecy under the Tories, seems to have given the plan new wings. Evictions and demolitions of heritage homes have been speeding up in north Pickering.

Driving concerns sky high is the fact that the Greater Toronto Airport Authority (GTAA) is the agency conducting the review for Transport Canada. The review was supposed to assess, in general, the transportation needs of Ontario. But the GTAA's main function is promoting air travel.

Scott Armstrong, manager of communications for GTAA, is talking as if a Pickering airport is a viable option – despite two earlier needs assessments showing that existing airports in the GTA can satisfy even the most optimistic airline passenger forecasts to 2032.

"I would disagree," he says. Ironically, it's a Liberal, area MP Mark Holland, who's now leading the charge politically. Holland smells a cover-up. He says Transport Canada has rebuffed his attempts to obtain information about the review through Access to Information

rules. He's taking his case directly to the information commissioner. "There is an enormous amount of secrecy going on," says Holland.

He says the feds should be looking at other options, like a high-speed rail link to get 905ers to Pearson, instead of contemplating an airport on land that forms the only green link between the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Ontario.



There is no need for this airport," Holland says. "Pearson is well below capacity."

At risk is the Duffins Creek watershed, the last intact watershed left on the north shore of Lake Ontario. It runs south to Lake Ontario, flushing and diluting pollution generated by urbanization. Says Sierra Club's Bernadette Zubrisky, "Attacks on biodiversity are one of the biggest threats to our planet. We should be acting locally to sustain biodiversity."

The GTAA's Armstrong counters that considerations about wildlife management are "an important part of the review process."

But others wonder why, years later, discussion of an airport is back on the table at all.

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