



Better still...

Real Jobs Now!

Response to
“Jets & Jobs: Summary of Findings
from the Targeted Stakeholder Consultations
by the Independent Advisor
on the Economic Development of the Pickering Lands”

January 1, 2017

General Observations

What did the consultations glean? Very little that wasn't already known.

For those familiar with the Pickering airport file, this should come as no surprise. The same words, arguments, concerns, conflicting opinions, misconceptions, hopes, and aspirations can be found, in an unbroken thread, in headlines, articles, letters to editors, council resolutions, reports, and interviews spanning the entire 44 years (and counting) since the 1972 airport announcement.

Why the report at all, then? The Harper government was on the cusp of calling an election and clearly believed the appearance of action on the airport file could be useful to the campaign. The original Pickering plan, after all, dates all the way back to the tenure of Trudeau *père*.

Transport Canada was tasked with commissioning two studies – a needs analysis (begun this year by KPMG and not due to be completed until 2018) and a “what if?” stakeholder consultation, essentially an opinion-gathering exercise on potential uses for the remaining Lands. “Jets & Jobs” is the result.

It's important to note that while the needs analysis is just the latest in a series of similar studies, the “potential uses” consultation was unique. It's also important to note that it was announced as an independent undertaking. But “independent” – exempt from external control or support [OED] – was a bit of a misnomer. The Independent Advisor was selected and appointed by Transport Canada, briefed by Transport Canada, paid by Transport Canada; Transport Canada wrote the background notes, drafted the discussion questionnaire, drew up the list of stakeholders to interview; Transport Canada provided the meeting rooms and the note-taker, reviewed the draft report, and (we can be sure) intervened in its contents before release of the final version.

The “Jets & Jobs” title must have warmed the heart of every Pickering airport advocate, strongly suggesting as it does that no viable alternatives were found; the airport was inevitable, and its thousands of jobs would soon be delivering the long-delayed prosperity. But the title misleads. The report reveals (if sketchily) that an alternative vision does exist. It reveals that the essential players in the aviation business – airlines and financiers – are, to put it mildly, unenthusiastic about a Pickering airport and in fact aren't counting on one. Meanwhile, the airport advocates can't agree on size, type, or timing. And Transport Canada has yet to prove that an airport is even needed. The jets – and the jobs – remain illusory.

This Response has been produced partly for the record but partly too because we know that knowledge is power. Parsing the details always delivers knowledge, some of it invaluable. So we did what we always do. We dug into the details of “Jets & Jobs,” because that's where the devil is – and we certainly found him there.

The Study's Shifting Sands

On July 11, 2015, in Pickering, Prime Minister Harper announced the transfer of a second tranche of the Federal Lands to the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) and went on to say of the remaining Lands that:

...Transport Minister Lisa Raitt will continue to **consult with all stakeholders to identify the best use for this land** ... Our Government will only support projects on these lands, including an airport, if they are backed by a sound business plan and if they are in the best interests of this community.

So an airport was, at first, just one among any number of other possibilities. Yet two days later, at a meeting in Durham Region's Council Chambers, Minister Raitt said that the rest of the Lands:

... will be retained by Transport Canada and **kept for development of a future airport.**

Her unscripted comments went beyond the language of the meeting's media release, which stated only that she would name:

... an **independent advisor who will meet with local interests on the potential economic development opportunities around a future airport** ... Transport Canada is committed to an **open and transparent process** concerning the future development of the Pickering Lands site. **No decisions have been made on the development or timing of a potential future airport.**

On July 31, at the official appointment, the new Independent Advisor told the invitees:

... I think it's my job to listen: that's what I've been commanded to do. And that's what I'll do. **I'll listen to anyone and everyone who wants me to listen.** I (promise) to record them honestly and to report them honestly ... **We want to meet with everyone** who wants to sit down and talk to us. **We have a list of dozens and dozens of people and this will be fairly well publicized...**

But by the time the interviews were being scheduled, in October, the focus had been shifted and narrowed. The publicizing was minimal. The Advisor would no longer be consulting with all stakeholders to identify, as the Prime Minister had announced, the best use for these lands. Instead, Transport Canada's information package referred to "**targeted stakeholders**" from whom the Advisor would:

... seek feedback **on their desired involvement in the economic development of the Pickering Lands, including a potential future airport.**

The study's Scope and Objectives (see Appendix A) revolved around an airport. The interview questionnaire, Potential Areas of Discussion (see Appendix B), treated the airport as a given, listing the questions under the following subheads:

A. Airport Development

B. Potential Interim Development

What the Prime Minister had announced as an open investigation into the best use of the Lands had become, after the election and change of government and once Transport Canada had realized the dangers of opening the options door too wide, a tightly controlled exercise in airport-centred economic brainstorming. A *truly* independent study risked stumbling upon a business opportunity capable of large-scale, immediate job creation, which might get politicians and local citizenry excited and outshine the “potential future airport.” This mustn’t happen; all other ideas must be limited to “interim.” And so they were.¹

The Advisor’s mandate changed from “potential economic development opportunities *around* a future airport” (July) to “economic development of the Pickering Lands, *including* a potential future airport” (October). Are we misreading these words? We don’t think so. During the summer, the emphasis was on the other opportunities. By the fall, the focus was the airport. The clincher is the questionnaire imposed on the Advisor by Transport Canada. It is dominated by references to airport development with the implied additional boon of tens of thousands of airport jobs – all hypothetical, of course, since “no decisions have been made on the development or timing of a potential future airport” – but no matter.

The Advisor asked participants to prepare for their interviews by completing the questionnaire and (if they wished) submitting it ahead of time. Thus, the meetings had a pre-determined core, a set of questions intentionally skewing discussions towards future airport scenarios at Pickering.

As the report shows, airport advocates played their allotted role, making no suggestions that might disrupt the airport dream. But while waiting for the shovels in the ground, sure, some no-threat agriculture could still be carried on. If the report is accurate, not a single alternative job-creation idea was put forward by any but the conservation/agriculture stakeholders. (Airport proponents did pitch the transfer of Buttonville or Downsview facilities to Pickering, but both would have transferred existing jobs without creating new ones for the GTA economy.)

This single-mindedness is extraordinary, not least because, according to the report (p. 8), there are currently 46 commercial leaseholders on the remaining Federal Lands. They already provide employment. Some have been prevented by their leases from expanding their businesses although they want to. They seemed the obvious people to approach for ideas on how to create more jobs on the Lands, so we urged the Advisor to meet with these local leaseholders/stakeholders. Contacting them would have been easy: their landlord is Transport Canada. But the appendix of participants indicates that such discussions never took place, not even in a round-table setting along the lines of the one the Advisor went to so much trouble to arrange with the financiers. This pretty well confirms that, despite the various claims and the report’s title, the study was never about jobs – that is, *real* jobs *now*. It was about protecting the route to the hypothetical airport. The financiers, as potential backers of an airport, were deemed worth the effort; the local employers, as potential impediments to an airport, were not.

1. It should be noted that Prime Minister Harper was interviewed by CFTO News during the election campaign by anchor Ken Shaw, a resident of Oshawa. Mr Shaw alluded to the notion of Pickering airport’s being needed by 2027 and, given the oft-quoted 10-year construction period, asked whether work on the airport would begin in 2017. Mr Harper said that his government had no plans to build Pickering airport in the foreseeable future.

Response to the Interview Reports

Re: Methodology and Format

The Independent Advisor told us during our November interview that he saw his role as that of listener and faithful recorder. It's a tall order, to condense hours of discussion and pages of argument into a small number of brief statements that still manage to accurately capture all essential elements. In the Interview Reports, the *modus operandi* was to leave the speakers/sources anonymous and (with one glaring exception) to avoid any word or action that would place the Advisor and his thinking in the frame. The idea, it appears, was to deliver to the extent possible an unfiltered record of what participants had said.

The implication is of a level playing field, untainted by intervention. But condensing can intentionally or inadvertently distort the original message; and choosing the points to incorporate means exercising personal judgement. Although the condensed and connected (or not) views within each stakeholder category are assembled under subheads, they have been given no hierarchy. No helpful commentary or guidance is provided. Every suggestion and observation is treated the same and accorded the same weight (whether warranted or not), so the absence of mediation of any kind becomes detrimental, especially where fact and misconception meld, or where observations based on experience are given no more weight than are examples of wishful thinking.

However, the *modus operandi* had been chosen, after which the Advisor was morally bound, in his report, to treat all stakeholder categories alike. Either he failed to do this or his even-handedness was subsequently undone by outside interference.

Re: Content

We don't know what the other stakeholder groups thought of their characterization in "Jets & Jobs." To our eyes, they each come across, given their specific areas of interest and expertise, as highly recognizable, with predictable and reasonably homogeneous views on the future of the remaining Lands. If they found no surprises, anomalies, or omissions in their respective sections, then the problems we discovered (described below) in the conservation/agriculture stakeholders section become even more suspicious.

As already mentioned, the Interview section assembles and presents the contributions of unnamed participants without other commentary (with the one notable exception). Below, we attempt among other things to connect some of the dots and point out contradictions and injurious interventions.

1. Business Stakeholders (pp. 12–19)

It's telling that the Independent Advisor had difficulty finding **bankers and financiers** willing to talk to him about the Federal Lands and a Pickering airport. The topic wasn't on their radar. But once at the table, they showed a clear-eyed understanding of what would be needed before anyone

considered launching what would possibly be the biggest Canadian transportation infrastructure project in decades. They would be interested only if:

... there was a **clear, market-driven vision** and the project phased out[sic] over a long enough term to provide investors with sufficient time and flexibility to generate return on investment ...; building a new airport is very expensive ... **revenues are not guaranteed. Forecasts are not always accurate and air travel is affected by many factors private sector interest is not guaranteed and will depend on business case, timing and sound planning...**

The comments suggest awareness of Buttonville airport's oft-delayed closure but no detailed knowledge of the current state of affairs there, or of how, precisely, an airport at Pickering would solve "important congestion and commuting issues within the GTA." The main take-away is their preoccupation with risk and their cautionary statements.

The **transportation companies** come across as highly knowledgeable and also wary. They made plain the need for (a) a solid business case and (b) a lot of very careful, unblinkered, comprehensive planning before any action is taken on a new airport.

Real estate developers, on the other hand, were happy to visualize a "multi-modal transportation hub" and "thousands of jobs" that would cut GTA congestion. However, they rightly worried about aviation forecasting, the impacts of high-speed rail and other local airports, and the potential resident opposition as Seaton and the RNUP took shape. While they were clear on the need for a market-driven decision (i.e., a business case), they still wanted airport planning to start "now."

The **business associations and chambers of commerce** were the least wary, favouring a "build it and they will come" approach even though the strategy has proven hugely costly, even disastrous, elsewhere. No concern was reported over lack of a business case or lack of consensus on type of airport or its chances of financial success. Nor does the report contain evidence that this group considered the consequences of a struggling airport in their midst, kept alive – as many other airports are – by municipal subsidies. And, apparently unaware that agriculture is big business, they couldn't imagine *any* interim use on the remaining Federal Lands.

The message coming from Business Stakeholders: From the most knowledgeable sectors (finance, transportation), a notable lack of enthusiasm. Instead, manifest wariness and calls for a solid business case. From the others, some surprising willingness to see the taking on of huge financial risks.

2. Government Stakeholders (pp. 20–28)

Area **MPs** were almost unanimously practical and true to their stated positions on the matter of the Lands, requiring a solid business case regardless of option chosen, acknowledging the importance of protecting prime farmland and of expanding/improving existing infrastructure (airport and transit) before contemplating a new facility. The dissenting MP saw "thousands of high-quality jobs" emanating from an airport and other development, and called for an immediate Buttonville replacement on the Lands – even though Buttonville's traffic is gravitating to Oshawa and elsewhere, and no business case (if one exists) has been made public.

The MPP level of the **provincial government** didn't participate, perhaps viewing the issue as outside the Province's purview. Surprising and disappointing, as it was the Province's stand in 1975 that stopped the airport then. But staff were strong in their insistence that provincial land-use plans and transportation strategy be taken into account in any decision on the Lands' future, and were also strong on continued farming on the Lands, in line with the Region's growth management plan. One discordant suggestion (also voiced by developers): that lack of a Pickering airport could deter tourists from visiting the region and the RNUP. But Pearson is less than 50 km (under 45 minutes) from the RNUP by road; it's impossible to imagine that this short distance would deter any interested tourist from visiting the Park. Niagara Falls is 123 km (and double the time) from Pearson, and experiences no shortage of visitors. Algonquin Park is much further and much visited. A far more likely scenario: that interested visitors would be deterred by the thought of spending a day or more at a national park situated at the end of one or more airport runways.

"About half" of **regional/municipal officials** were said to strongly support an airport, while the rest wanted farming or both. All stakeholders insisted on a solid business case for any decision made. Beyond that, confusion reigned, some seeing an airport as "nothing but opportunities ahead," others worrying about infrastructure issues or preferring the strong vision they've developed for agriculture-focussed economic growth. But the lure of "thousands of jobs" and "economic prosperity" flowing from an airport permeates this section. Airport advocates want to press ahead right away – the "build it and they will come" belief again – and not with just a little general aviation airport (although some do prefer that). Apparently, the regional/municipal level has decided that the airport must be a reliever. (It should be noted that the GTAA's Needs Assessment Study in 2011 was unable to identify airlines or cargo carriers likely to be interested in Pickering, and the airline interviews in "Jets & Jobs" suggest that the situation remains unchanged.) There were calls for Pickering to replace Buttonville, although Oshawa is already absorbing Buttonville's traffic and rebuilding its main runway. The likelihood that Buttonville staff would follow their jobs to Pickering goes unmentioned. Disconcertingly, one reason given for getting on with the airport now was concern over increased resident resistance to an airport once Seaton is built. Such an attitude by local government is in itself cause for pause.

The message coming from Government Stakeholders: Mixed. All tiers view a business case as a prerequisite, but the upper tiers have a broader perspective and urge caution, while the tier (regional/municipal) most likely to be economically hurt by an airport if it falters is the tier that's eager to see one built.

3. Conservation / Agricultural Stakeholders (pp. 29–32)

The report's careful neutrality evaporates on p. 29.

These stakeholders are described as 8 different groups "active in Ontario as well as in the community around the Pickering Lands" who are "advocates for the preservation of agricultural lands and/or natural resources." The problem is the yawning gap between the profile and what the participants are supposed to have said. The appendix doesn't resolve the disconnect: only 7 groups are listed, not 8, and the remaining participants in the list don't fit the profile.

The conservation/agricultural stakeholders went into this exercise well-prepared. Our submissions, on the whole, were detailed (some highly so), our arguments backed by experience, our own in-depth

research, and the research of leading authorities (not least StatsCan and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). Yet much (most?) of what we discussed with the Advisor, although directly related to job-creation in the near term and to a prosperous agricultural future for the Lands, went unmentioned in the report.

The outline is there, if sketchily represented. The rest is not. Instead, there is input from an apparently different stakeholder group. In our 3 pages (making this the second-shortest Interviews segment) and not counting the summary, 33 specific points are presented but no fewer than 15 of them (~45%) are overtly pro-airport or suggest ways in which an airport and agriculture would happily coexist. The report even implies that virtually all the conservation/agriculture stakeholders are pro-airport, asserting that “the majority of stakeholders (all but one) ... are adamant it [an airport] can happen with the implementation of sound agricultural and environmental practices.” Well, we know for a fact that Land Over Landings wasn’t the only group to reject an airport on Class 1 farmland. Nor can we imagine the rest of the conservation/agriculture groups being “adamant” in their acceptance of the idea.

The experts are said to have stated that “the agricultural industry is tough,” that “factory farms have happened for a reason,” and that “modern farming has evolved to bigger, more automated farms, specializing in soy and corn production as opposed to local food supply.” Are we to understand from this that they feel small-scale farming has no future? Or were their points more nuanced but missed by the Advisor? In actual fact, whether a particular farm is *viable* is the real issue, and the factors that make a farm viable can differ from farm to farm and area to area. *Small operations can be profitable.*

A farm service supplier (unfortunately not interviewed), long familiar with this area, has noted to us that soil fertility is degrading on the Federal Lands under the regime of 1-year leases and constant grain-cropping. In his view, such current farming practices are unsustainable – news that shouldn’t come as a surprise.² He says that the best use for the Lands would be mixed farming, not grain farming. Restoration of more diversified crop rotation and optimal long-term stewardship would improve the soil health, require smaller amounts of agricultural chemicals, and gradually restore the crop land to its maximum production capability. His opinion supports the agricultural plans being formulated for the adjacent national park, where conservation-minded mixed farming will be continued or transitioned to, as individual cases require.

The report, by emphasising the unrelated observations of individuals outside the category, distorts the conservation/agriculture stakeholders’ message and does these groups a great disservice. The true stakeholders in this category are highly knowledgeable and many have extensive firsthand experience in the areas in question. While it’s true that we couldn’t, at the time, deliver to the Advisor the results of an in-depth agricultural economics study, the RFP was already in preparation and we had shared with him the fast-growing and impressive list of those supporting the planned study. We delivered many and varied arguments for foodland preservation and food-and-tourism-related job creation *now*. They are not reported, whereas almost a third of this short section is given over to often unrelated opinions of others who do not fit the profile. Why?

2. As far back as 1986, citing a University of Guelph study it had commissioned, the Pickering Airport Lands Revitalization Committee warned federal Transport Minister Don Mazankowski that “...undoubtedly the short-term leases, loss of an attitude of stewardship and continuing possibility of airport development encourages mono-culture (continuous corn cropping) and reduced concern for long-term conservation of [crop land] fertility...” [p. 8, PARC report]

Examples of questionable inclusions:

One individual (said to have been approached on our behalf to help test our assumptions about the future of agriculture on the Lands) is described as “a global expert in Energy and Transportation who shared a vision of a carbon-neutral airport” and who sees an airport near the RNUP and Zoo as “a sustainable and environmentally friendly business.” Pardon? What do these comments have to do with our assumptions and how does this expert qualify as a conservation/agricultural stakeholder?

“Some stakeholders” are said to have argued, under “interim use,” that businesspersons need to know about the airport before they decide to locate their operations near the Lands. While undoubtedly true, the comment strongly points to a source outside the stakeholder group.

One or two experts (not stakeholders) contributed views on larger, automated “factory farms” – not at all the agricultural scenario the real stakeholders were outlining. They claimed that young Canadians don’t want to farm, which we know to be patently untrue; many do. Perhaps part of the problem was the question asked of these experts: “How could commercial agricultural development contribute to the region’s economic prosperity?” It was the wrong question. Consequently, it elicited counterproductive, misleading responses.

We know that the presentations and submissions of the conservation/agriculture stakeholders made a strong, multi-pronged case for protecting natural habitat, keeping an airport or other non-agricultural development off this irreplaceable farmland, and ensuring food security for the GTA in a time of unprecedented population growth and climate change. But in the final report, food security isn’t mentioned. Climate change and its growing threats are never mentioned (or even implied). The greener option of high-speed rail? Not in *our* section, although we’d promoted it. A burgeoning population’s critical current and future need to reduce its reliance on imported food? Not a word. The conflicting mandates of an airport and adjacent national park / wildlife sanctuary? Nothing. Instead, stakeholders are said to have suggested that an airport could heat large “green houses”; that there’s “an opportunity to foster a green business community including a ‘green’ airport”; and that moving ahead with an airport would be difficult without trying to obtain “social licence” (i.e., buy-in) from the community.... These aren’t the words or views of conservation/agriculture stakeholders.

The message coming from the Conservation/Agriculture Stakeholders: The outline of a viable economic future for the remaining Lands, an agricultural and tourism alternative to an airport – but a vision contradicted and undermined by other voices that dominate the section and are conspicuous by their incongruity in it. *What happened here?*

4. Aviation Stakeholders (pp. 33–41)

Neutral reporting resumes.

The observations of the **airlines**, like those of the financiers, are among the most important in the report. Although the airlines think it wise to protect the Pickering Lands for possible future aviation needs, they foresee none in the near future:

Pearson has yet to reach capacity and other regional airports are underutilized ... Pearson will reach capacity at some point ... existing airports, perhaps expanded, could be at least

part of the solution ... **any decision to build a new airport would need to be market-driven, not forcing passengers or staff to be or go where they don't want to** ... the role of a potential Pickering airport needed to be defined ... **splitting airline operations between airports is expensive and unpopular** [and presents] a challenge for border crossing agencies that are already short-staffed...

These are authoritative voices, speaking from long experience, urging prudence, and also corroborating what the Needs Assessment Study had reported in 2011.

The **airport operators** were less consistent – understandably so, as in some cases they compete with one another and would compete with a new airport too. But most pressed for a Buttonville replacement even though Oshawa is adding facilities and on record as saying it could handle all Buttonville traffic. One particularly interesting statement, and a cautionary one: a number of operators apparently observed that while a new airport could start with general aviation and cargo, “passenger service is essential to making money.” Passenger service is the very service the Needs Assessment Study felt Pickering unlikely to attract, not least because Canada has so few carriers.

The group most eager for construction *now* was the **general aviation** contingent, no business case or federal buy-in apparently deemed necessary. But their position is inconsistent; their beef with Pearson has been that the GTAA doesn't care about GA traffic and wishes it gone. Yet they suggest a little GA airport on the Lands that could grow in phases into a reliever. They recommend long-term leases – 60-99 years – “to allow time to generate return on investment” although their long-term vision is for a “multi-sector airport,” involving just the type of growth and activity that risks pushing them aside or even out yet again. They don't acknowledge Oshawa as a Buttonville replacement even though Buttonville's traffic is gradually moving there and elsewhere. One participant suggested offering flight schools at Pickering to attract community buy-in for the airport – a startling idea: flight schools, by their very nature, particularly disturb the peace of the neighbourhood and anger residents. Ask Peterborough.

The **sector experts** offered various insights, but more in the way of generalities. The two most important: that “aviation demand forecasting is speculative” given all the variables, and that airport investors must understand that it isn't a short-term but a medium-to-long-term investment. Disappointingly, they felt a “green” airport possible. At least they admitted that none, despite claims to the contrary, yet exists. Still, we have to ask: how green does an airport have to be to offset or neutralize, just as a for-instance, the emissions of all the aircraft that use it and all the vehicles and equipment that service it and all the cargo and passenger vehicles that frequent it? No number of rooftop gardens and LED lights could ever bridge that gap.

The message coming from the Aviation Stakeholders: It runs the entire gamut, from no interest to let's start right now. Caution is the watchword, except from the general aviation sector, where eagerness to get themselves a new airport at Pickering is the overriding message.

5. First Nations Stakeholders (p. 42)

Of special note is the warning that while some First Nations archaeological sites on the Lands (the Draper and White sites) are known about, development would likely reveal more, and some could be of deep importance to First Nations. Clearly, if the remaining Lands were part of the RNUP, these sites would be protected and might even be carefully explored. An airport or other major development project wouldn't allow such protections; a quick-and-dirty dig would have to do to keep to the project's schedule. As for the stakeholders' request for ongoing monitoring of wildlife, an airport would certainly involve monitoring, but not in the way that we or First Nations people would like. Wildlife hazard zones are the opposite of wildlife protection areas.

Response to “Perspective of the Independent Advisor”

It’s natural for an advisor to question, record, analyse, and then make informed decisions; how else can he or she advise with confidence? So we expected the Perspective to be where the fact- and opinion-gathering ceased and the analysis took over. Instead, nameless stakeholders continue to be quoted and, through them, doubt continues to be cast on the views of the pro-agriculture groups. Meanwhile, the text waxes lyrical on the advantages of an airport, without acknowledging that the said airport remains speculative.

Participants’ views receive no examination or evaluation in the Perspective. Nor (except in the conservation/agriculture section) are any claims or suggestions challenged. The Perspective doesn’t clarify which assertions were grounded in fact backed by research and which were unsupported hopes and pipedreams. It doesn’t differentiate between (a) plans that could create jobs now, or soon, with a reasonable chance of their being long-term and paying decent salaries/wages, and (b) plans that offer only potential jobs linked to a putative airport at some unknown point in the future – which is awfully similar to no jobs at all.

In our interview we were asked: “What if there’s no choice [but to build an airport on the Lands]?” Were airport advocates asked (and we bet they weren’t): “What would you suggest for the Lands if the Pickering airport plan got cancelled?” If both sides on this supposedly level playing field weren’t asked to consider the “unthinkable,” why not? (The question is rhetorical; the reason is obvious.)

The “anti-Airport contingent” is discussed first in the Perspective, and warning bells ring immediately. It’s dumbfounding to find NIMBYism reported as one of our driving forces. It isn’t; most of us don’t live anywhere near the proposed airport site and are unlikely to have said anything that could even vaguely have been construed as NIMBYism. It’s an old charge, often lobbed at us to discredit our position, and one that we take pains to avoid provoking – so how did this claim materialize?

Conservation/agriculture stakeholders are said to have referred to “8688 acres of prime agricultural land” – a precise figure we’ve never heard before, nor used, having no access to surveys of the area. We tend to use the 9,600 acres quoted by Transport Canada on its 2015 map of the remaining Lands – so where did that unfamiliar, highly specific number come from?

There is another anomaly – the only one of its kind in the report. The same sentence reads:

They point out, rightly, that 8688 acres of prime agriculture land is a lot of land, as is eating local and fresh food.

An unknown number of words have gone missing from that sentence, taking the sense with them. Too bad, because there’s a hint that this might have been where our vision of a revived and prosperous agricultural future for the Lands was persuasively stated. We’ll never know. The rest of the paragraph puts our vision on trial while affecting to do otherwise, incorporating detractors’ jibes and revisiting a reference to a type of farming unlike any we’d promoted in our interviews. The Advisor declares himself in sympathy with us and our cause (and we certainly felt that he was), but the text follows up with an indictment. It’s only with effort that one can put a slightly more sympathetic slant on those words.

Another opportunity is missed in paragraph 3, on the GTA's importance and its issues ("congestion, smog, voracious growth, the compulsive need to compete...") – "all of which are concerns to the agricultural/conservation groups," we're told. Well, yes, they do concern us, but this was the place to link the "voracious growth" to the GTA's increasing need to protect near-urban green space and farmland for the spiritual and physical nourishment of its burgeoning population. Ensuring *food security* for the GTA is crucial in a time of rapidly changing climate. "Local food" on its own is not the same thing.

Our position, in our meetings with the Advisor was that, by growing more of our own food in the GTA, we not only increase food security but also help create and keep more jobs here. The main thrust of Land Over Landings' written submission had to do with *creating jobs now*.

You would never know it from this report.

The airport advocates are the ones given the credit for being concerned about that "4-letter word: jobs," The Perspective goes on to deliver a full-throated airport paean on their behalf: residents to the east of the GTA would no longer be condemned to "family-haunting" and "environment-bruising" commutes (as if an airport weren't environment-bruising); the airport would deliver "abundant, new, commercial profits and tax revenues" and "convenient, affordable and safe travel," and perpetuate the GGH's "claim and reality of being a world-leading region," along with finally giving Durham what other regions have.

We'd been told in our November interview that airport advocates were "galvanized by one 4-letter word: jobs." Sound familiar? The phrase had already been coined! The fact that those hypothetical jobs were decades down the road (if ever), whereas our agricultural jobs could start *now*, was clearly an unwelcome message in the scheme of things. Our job-creation suggestions got short shrift. At the close of our interview, we were asked what made the remaining Federal Lands so special, why all the efforts to save them, given the vast amount of other farmland in Durham? We submitted a comprehensive reply; the many reasons why the Lands are unique and so worthy of protection. None of the reasons made it into the report. What does appear is the same scepticism we'd been asked to refute – and had. Why did we bother?

Response to the Recommendations

It's highly likely that the media and public will largely focus on the report's recommendations (bland and unobjectionable) and the minister's responses (neutral).

Given that it never made sense to conduct a consultation on future development options on the remaining Federal Lands before knowing whether or not an airport would be dominating the landscape, **Recommendation 1** (do the other study) is obvious.

Recommendation 2 asks Transport Canada to do something – communicate with the community – that it has never done in the entire history of this never-never airport project and there is very little likelihood that the *modus operandi* will change. No need to belabour the reasons here, but they are many, varied, and entrenched, maybe even in the genes by now.

We agree entirely with **Recommendation 3** (foster agricultural activities). This prime agricultural land has provided a prosperous livelihood for farming communities for hundreds of years. It's one of Pickering's finest natural assets, offering the possibility of sustainable jobs and healthy food for generations to come. No other option can make this claim.

Recommendation 4 (establish a Pickering Lands Advisory Network) presupposes an airport on the Lands – a decision not yet made and not a certainty. That said, given that Transport Canada has never set up a standing/durable/permanent joint committee with local stakeholders, it's again highly questionable that it will change its historic pattern and do so in the future.

Response to the Conclusion

The study, through its interviews, did corroborate certain positions of certain sectors, but the report is lacking in insight, despite what the Conclusion says. It's the reader who must draw insights from what was reported of the interviews and what was left out. Here are the most important:

The airlines don't want to do business in Pickering. The financiers are obsessed with risk. And without financing and without willing airlines, you don't have an airport.

Pearson's hub status will continue to be enhanced, meaning that Pickering's best-case scenario is as a reliever airport. (But south-central Ontario already has at least two air-passenger-jet relievers and they struggle to find and keep business.)

The general aviation case is weak at best, and any attempt to turn expropriated land over to a general aviation airport would be met by vehement local opposition.

Any study of aviation and future airports, in this time of accelerating changes to our climate, is an empty exercise if climate change isn't an integral part of the discussion. The topic was certainly raised by conservation/agriculture stakeholders. But it was clearly and intentionally left out of, or removed from, the report.

The conservation/agriculture case was sabotaged in the report by obvious efforts to discredit stakeholders' contributions. We don't know how this came about; we can only draw attention to the fact that it happened.

Finally, neutrality goes missing in the Conclusion. The pro-airport side is given the gift of a sales pitch in glowing language: "a rare and glorious opportunity: tens of thousands of potential, good jobs associated with an airport and its economic outflow." The pro-agriculture side must make do with some empty word-play: we have "the agricultural counter-vantage, which has 'rooted' for decades."

Transport Canada must be very pleased.

APPENDIX A

Objectives and Scope of the Consultations

The Advisor's objective is to gauge the level of private and public sector interest and/or desired involvement in economic development of the Pickering Lands, including a potential future airport. This will involve consulting on certain points that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- the regional interest in developing an airport on the Pickering Lands;
- private sector interest in developing an airport, aviation cluster or other economic development on the Pickering Lands;
- when and what type of airport to develop;
- how an airport should be developed and operated;
- what type of economic development opportunities could be attracted to the Pickering Lands that would be compatible with a potential future airport;
- what type of investors would be interested in developing the Pickering Lands;
- what type of support, financial or otherwise, would developers/operators expect from the Government of Canada;
- what role the private sector envisions in the development of the Pickering Lands;
- what are the key aviation sector issues identified by stakeholders;
- what position, questions and concerns do community organizations have in relation to a proposed development;
- what types of funding models does the private sector envision in developing the Pickering Lands;
- what information gaps does the private sector believe need to be filled in order to advance airport development work; and
- what information and action does the private sector require from government to facilitate development?

Source: Transport Canada Information Package: Consultations on the Development of the Pickering Lands

APPENDIX B

Potential Areas for Discussion

A AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT

1. Do you believe that an airport should be developed on the Pickering Lands?
2. When and what type of airport do you believe should be developed?
For example, a large, international airport or a smaller regional airport?
3. What information and action do you believe would be required from the federal government to facilitate the development of an airport on the Pickering Lands?
4. What would you identify as the key elements that must be addressed in any business case for a future airport?
5. What are your expectations regarding consultations with stakeholders during the planning and development processes?
6. What, in your view, are the environmental considerations related to the development of an airport on the Pickering Lands?
7. What role do you think the private sector should play in developing and operating the Pickering Airport?
8. Do you think a public/private partnership (P3) – where the private sector partner assumes appropriate risk for a reasonable return (i.e. financing or operations) – is a reasonable model for the development of an airport on the Pickering Lands?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Why not?

B: INTERIM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1. What are your thoughts on the idea of pursuing interim economic development of the Pickering Lands pending a decision on airport development?
2. What information or action do you feel is required from the federal government to facilitate the interim economic development of the Pickering Lands?
3. What roles should the government, the private sector and community groups play in the economic development of the Pickering Lands?
4. What do you believe could be the financial and social benefits of interim economic development of the Pickering Lands?

Source: Transport Canada Information Package: Consultations on the Development of the Pickering Lands