

Timeline: 2020-

An “Aerotropolis” in a Time of Climate Change and COVID-19?!

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2020

- **January** – The year starts with a flurry of op-eds and articles by people suggesting (or claiming) that 2020 will be the year when Pickering airport gets the go-ahead. Is this insider knowledge? A little digging reveals that the claims are just wishful thinking on the part of a few. We cry foul and our complaints prompt some revisions to articles.
- **Jan. 9** – In an op-ed on the website of the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association, a COPA member writes: “More opposition is coming from environmentalists, questioning the wisdom of building an airport when air transportation is a significant contributor of greenhouse gases.” And he takes aim at Durham’s Regional Chair: “Perhaps [John] Henry needs a primer on the results of the last time the federal government built a major airport.”
- **Jan. 15** – We discover that the City of Pickering and an entity called Toronto East Aerotropolis are both listed as clients of one Melanie Greenwood, graphic designer, who apparently once hailed from this area but now lives and works in California. One of the items in her portfolio? A logo for the aerotropolis. Did taxpayer money go to the U.S. for a logo for a non-existent airport? As we’re looking into this, the logo disappears from the site and only the client list remains, unchanged...
- **Jan. 17** – We make a preliminary delegation at the Durham Region Roundtable on Climate Change, pointing out that while we agree with Durham’s declaring a climate emergency, the Region’s emissions-reduction and climate-adaptation planning will be pointless if its political leadership simultaneously pushes for an aerotropolis, which would add massive volumes of new emissions to the Region’s tally. The prime farmland it would destroy is currently a carbon sink. It should be protected and made a significant part of the Region’s climate action plans.
- **Jan. 22** – The Council of the Town of Newmarket declares a climate emergency. The text is short, to the point, and utterly unambiguous in terms of the Town’s intention to do everything necessary to adapt to the difficult times ahead. The difference between this clear motion and Pickering’s (all denial) is breathtaking.
- **Jan. 24** – The *Sudbury Star* runs a terrific – and unexpected – piece by columnist Steve May: “No new airport in Pickering in a time of climate crisis.” He asks: “Could 2020 be the year that the federal government decides, once and for all, that building a new airport northeast of Toronto is simply not compatible with achieving Canada’s climate targets?”
- **Jan. 25** – *Canadian Geographic* has confirmed that a photo-and-text submission of ours has been accepted for the March/April issue as part of an article on Relocation, a new project highlighting the forced movement of Canadian communities. Our story will appear in the online version.
- **Jan. 29** – Sari Sarieddine, chair of our Youth Wing, delivers LOL’s presentation before Durham Regional Council prior to Council’s debate and vote on its own Climate Emergency Declaration. Once again, we point out that adding an aerotropolis is incompatible with the Region’s aim to

reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. Whitby's mayor delivers an impassioned speech in support of the motion, there is pushback from two other councillors, and the motion is carried, 23-2. The degree of overall commitment by Council remains to be seen.

- Cadillac Fairview and Armadale Co. Ltd. (owned by the Sifton family) announce that the 170-acre Toronto Buttonville Municipal Airport site will be sold. Cadillac Fairview claims it wants to concentrate on developments in downtown Toronto. There is no word from Armadale, but the years of unproductive wrangling with the Town of Markham and the OMB over the new site plan and its ramifications for the town no doubt played a role in the decision.
- **Feb. 3** – A letter is sent by LOL as a follow-up to the Jan. 29 Regional Council meeting, providing Ajax Mayor Shaun Collier with information he requested regarding constraints on successful vertical farming in North Pickering. The regional chair and all councillors are copied. (No one acknowledges the letter or replies to it.)
- **Feb. 24** – We send letters to all federal ministers, explaining the situation on the Lands, showing (where pertinent) how the health of the Lands tallies with certain aspects of their mandate, and (in case of a pro-airport KPMG report) asking them, as Cabinet members, to vote to protect this farmland.
- **Mar. 5** – Transport Canada quietly releases KPMG's report: 400+ pages covering the study period 2016-2036. The date of release is 48 years and 3 days after the original airport announcement...
- Transport Canada does not issue a media release.
- Our Pickering-Uxbridge MP does put out a news release: "The report states that no decision has been made to develop an airport on the Pickering Lands, and that there will be no immediate need for an airport until at least 2038 [sic] ... Transport Canada will retain the land for future consideration. ... Any decision on the future of the Pickering Lands will be made based on a sound business case and demonstrated aviation demand and capacity, as well as a thorough analysis of several regional and national factors, including environmental impact."
- MP O'Connell, adds: "An airport in Pickering cannot, and should never have been, a substitute for a real job creation and economic growth strategy that would benefit our community now. Infrastructure projects of this scale can only be viable under the right conditions, and cannot be rushed or manipulated to fit local strategic planning. The KPMG Aviation Sector Analysis clearly articulates that there is no demand for the immediate development of an airport. ... The facts are evident and publically available. It's time for all levels of government to work together to create real economic prosperity and opportunity for our community, while protecting our environment, fighting climate change and supporting our agricultural industry."
- We go through the Report with a fine-tooth comb. It is heavily redacted in parts, but not enough to hide the overall conclusion: KPMG finds that "a new airport is not expected to be required in southern Ontario prior to 2036 to meet the forecast demand." And it states clearly that, with modifications and modest expansions to existing facilities in the Southern Ontario Airports Network, there will be a considerable gap in 2036 between the capacity available and the [smaller] demand that can be expected. In fact, the gap is so great that it becomes immediately clear that an airport at Pickering may *never* be needed, and that Transport Canada's continued insistence on dangling the airport carrot (or threat) cannot be justified.

- Important note: While the report refers (once) to possible future policy changes concerning emissions, it includes not a single mention of climate change and how it will affect aviation worldwide. If this issue had been factored into the analyses, **the forecasted 64% gap between capacity and expected demand in 2036 would have been even greater.**
- Although Transport Canada's website claims that "the report was *not* intended to provide a recommendation on whether to build an airport on the Pickering Lands," we know that, had KPMG identified a need for the airport, the pro-airport lobby's pressure on Transport Canada to act on this finding would have been instant and considerable. Will the Supply and Demand Report's unequivocal conclusion put an end to the lobbying?
- Pickering's mayor, his solidly pro-airport CAO, and Durham Region's chair all manage to spin the KPMG conclusions 180 degrees. Mayor Ryan is quoted as saying that he thinks the study has found that the airport *will* be needed in 2036 and he calls this "great news." The CAO professes to be "thrilled." Chair Henry finds the report's conclusion "exciting" and feels "encouraged."
- There is some local media uptake but, from a news point of view, the report's conclusion means that nothing has really changed. So the limbo continues, as does the uncertainty – but there is much less uncertainty than before.
- **Mar. 6** – All the news is suddenly about COVID-19. Twenty confirmed cases in Ontario now. Within days there will be little else in the news feeds.
- We learn from the results of a Pickering resident's Access to Information request that Pickering's CAO was busy seeking sizable contributions from other local governments in 2019 to help Pickering fund a study that would rebut our 2018 agricultural study – and some of those officials were delighted to offer financial help!
- **Mar. 8** – On our Facebook page, Pickering Councillor Maurice Brenner writes: "While I can not speak for the Council, I have reviewed the KPMG Executive Summary and this is my position. The [Pickering] 2017 adopted Motion supported an Airport conditional on the outcome of a business case from the KPMG Report. I believe without a business case for today and for decades this condition has not been met which nullifies Pickering Support for an airport. I will be working to refocus City priorities [putting] an emphasis on addressing climate change and environmentally friendly new modes of transportation that will achieve the goal of 0 Carbon Footprint by 2050 – such as High Frequency Rail Service utilizing the Havelock line from Windsor to Montreal with a stop in Pickering."
- **Mar. 10** – The *Durham Post* reports on the KPMG study and blatantly misrepresents the study's conclusion, saying that "Last week, Transport Canada released its KPMG Aviation Sector Analysis, which confirmed that the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) needs a new airport in 2036." The report said nothing of the kind. The public comments beneath all the current pro-airport articles are almost uniformly opposed to an airport.
- **Mar. 11** – We hold our last in-person executive meeting for the foreseeable future; the country is shifting into shelter-in-place mode to try to slow the rate of COVID-19 transmission. We will soon be obliged to postpone our AGM.
- **Mar. 18** – Councillor Brenner asks Pickering staff to shift priorities from advocating for an aeropolis to advocating for a Pickering station on the future higher-speed Havelock line that is under consideration by Ottawa. There are no objections by other councillors.

- **Mar. 25** – Transport Minister Marc Garneau writes to John Henry, Durham Regional Chair, in reply to two missives of Henry’s (Nov. 6 and Dec. 10, 2019) requesting public release of the KMPG study. The Minister notes that the study was released on March 5 and that “no decision has been made to develop an airport on the Pickering Lands. Any decision...must be based on a sound business case, updated data on aviation demand and capacity, and stakeholder engagement.” He also says that “the ASA (Aviation Sector Analysis) suggests there is no immediate need for additional airport capacity in the Greater Toronto Area before 2038 [sic]...,” thereby refuting claims by local pro-airport voices that the study said the opposite.
- **Apr. 2** – We send a letter to Pickering Council, demanding answers to a dozen questions raised by the Access to Information request (see Mar. 6). The CAO responds via e-mail (to short-circuit Council?), failing to answer most of the questions. His e-mail address does not accept replies...
- **Apr. 4** – The number of US air passengers has dropped 95% in a month, thanks to COVID-19. The situation applies worldwide.
- **Apr. 19** – We post our full “Response to the KMPG Study Report,” a compilation of important passages and revelations, heavily annotated, with the Report’s findings and conclusions clearly underlined. Those conclusions are unambiguous. No airport needed and not even a hint of when it might be needed. If ever.
- **Apr. 21** – Articles on the importance of growing food locally are starting to crop up everywhere. The fragility of global food supply chains is becoming evident as the effects of lockdowns are felt.
- **Apr. 27** – Councillor Brenner fails to get Council’s backing to stop expenditure on the aerotropolis project even though all other major expenditures of the City have been paused for the duration of the general COVID-19 shut-down. He quizzes the director of economic development (sitting in for the CAO during the virtual council meeting) about an Ottawa lobby group he has learned about, that has been hired to press Transport Canada to proceed with a Pickering airport. He finally manages to obtain some details: the lobbyists (called Counsel) have been hired by Durham Region, and the Region will be expecting Pickering to help fund the costs. Who knew about this? Just staff? Or were Pickering’s mayor and just some councillors in the loop?
- **May 28** – Transport Canada responds to our request for (a) the full cost of the KPMG analysis study and (b) a cost breakdown by individual report. The full cost: \$799,710.61, of which the Supply and Demand report claimed \$281,189.09; the Contextual Bridge report, \$27,000.00; the Type and Role report, \$99,787.91; and the Revenue Generation and Economic Impact Report, \$391,733.61. In other words, almost three quarters of the cost of this study went on “what if” exercises to do with a potential airport “that could support economic growth,” apparently supported by “anecdotal evidence” (Type and Role report, p. 2). It’s worth noting here that “anecdotal” generally means “unreliable,” something based on personal accounts rather than scientific evidence.
- **May 29** – Invest Durham releases the results of Durham Region Business Survey #3, on the business community’s evolving needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some 400 businesses responded. Although the survey offered the building of a Pickering airport as one way to boost Durham Region’s economic recovery, almost 70% of businesses indicated that they wanted to see programs or strategies that would “bring the local food & agriculture sector into the Region’s downtowns.” The top three strategies they selected to aid the recovery were “expanding high speed internet, supporting local programs and incorporating agri-business into urban downtown areas.”

- **Jun. 8** – The International Air Transport Association (IATA), the largest airline lobby group, produces a diagram (“Return to growth post-COVID but at a lower level”) showing expected aviation growth by 2025 to be a mere 10% lower than pre-pandemic forecasts.
- Pearson’s latest stats are posted: the airport has seen a 96.8% drop in overall passenger numbers compared with the previous year, and an 85.1% drop in total aircraft movements.
- **Jun. 12** – Pickering’s pro-airport CAO, Tony Prevedel, retires.
- **Jun. 14** – CBC News runs an excellent article: “Environmentalists, farmers renew push to shelve Pickering airport, save prime farmland.” Very timely, with the need for improving food security ever more evident as the pandemic persists. Despite the Transport Minister’s letter regarding no need (so no plans) for an airport, Regional Chair Henry promotes a Pickering airport in the article. Meanwhile, the media worldwide describe empty airports, grounded fleets, cancelled orders for new planes, a devastated tourist industry, widespread hesitation about flying again... The future is a complete unknown.
- **Jul. 9** – Pickering Council endorses a Ministerial Zoning Order (MZO) that would allow a 4,000-acre residential and commercial development called “Veraine” on prime farmland a few kilometres to the east of the Federal Lands. The promotional material touts the planned subdivision’s “green” credentials and boasts of its proximity to a Pickering airport. We team up with Environmental Defence and others in a campaign to stop this plan.
- **Jul. 13** – Aviation analysts are now saying they don’t expect airline traffic to fully recover until the mid- to late-2020s.
- **Jul. 14** – The Canadian Press reports: “Greater Toronto Airport Authority cutting 500 positions due to drop in traffic.” Apparently, passenger levels at Pearson have fallen to 1996 operating levels.
- **Jul. 17** – We learn that the developer behind the Veraine proposal (Dorsay) was a sponsor of the 2018 APBOT “lunch and learn” pro-airport event. It has also been confirmed via an ATIP request that Dorsay was active in the lead-up to Pickering’s aerotropolis event in April 2019.
- **Jul. 23** – A Moody’s analysis: the commercial aviation industry will continue to be devastated by the coronavirus pandemic for years to come.
- **Jul. 27** – Cross-border air passenger numbers are down 99% compared with 2019.
- **Jul. 29** – Durham Regional Council votes unanimously (but for one Pickering councillor: Ashe) to oppose the Veraine development, and asks that the MZO be withdrawn.
- **Aug. 13** – Bloomberg reports that early signs of tentative airline recovery have been stalled by new virus flare-ups. IATA, known for its rosy forecasts, now predicts that 2019 traffic won’t been seen again until 2024 (formerly, 2023). “The situation is deteriorating,” says IATA Chief Economist Brian Pearce.
- **Aug. 31** – Pickering announces its plans to launch a local food strategy. A motion to begin the process had been introduced in June by councillors Maurice Brenner and David Pickles. The City currently has no economic development strategy re the potential of produce grown within Pickering – rather startling, given all the farmland in the municipality. Will the Lands be counted? (No, as it turns out; the City’s excuse is that it’s federal land so outside Pickering’s jurisdiction – which has never stopped Council from promoting an airport and indoor farming there.)

- **Sep. 8** – Amazon announces it will be opening a new fulfilment centre in Ajax in 2021, creating 1,000 jobs. Which only goes to prove, Pickering, that a local airport (or promise of one) wasn't a prerequisite for Amazon after all.
- **Sep. 8** – We lend our support to the Green Durham/Township of Uxbridge proposal to augment the trail system and create Uxbridge Municipal Park, which would, in part, border the Federal Lands.
- **Sep. 21** – As COVID-19 cases rise again after a dip during the summer, aviation analysts now anticipate “a lost decade for aircraft manufactureres and suppliers.”
- **Sep. 28** – Nav Canada, the private corporation that owns and operates the country's civil air navigation service (which includes air traffic control, flight information, weather briefings, and much more) is cutting its workforce by 14%, as flight numbers remain low, airlines drop routes and services, and our border with the U.S. and most other countries remains essentially closed.
- **Oct. 8** – Pickering's mayor continues to promote a Pickering “aerotropolis.” Today, he hosts (virtually) the City's “Second Annual Realtor & Developer Symposium.” Mayor and staff, in their contributions, ignore or distort both the content and conclusions of the KPMG report and the pandemic's disastrous and potentially long-term impact on aviation. The City's “forward-thinking” is really just more business as usual.
- **Oct. 15** – A supporter, responding to a challenge to parishes by the Anglican Bishop of Toronto to identify projects that would be beneficial to the environment, has chosen to support the protection of the Federal Lands as farmland, and launches an online petition to the federal government. Our MP, Jennifer O'Connell, has agreed to endorse and present it.
- **Oct. 27** – Aviation news remains dire. CNN reports that airlines are bleeding money, business travel isn't expected to return to its former levels (thanks to the convenience and lower cost of video conferencing), leisure travel will be slow to recover while people don't feel safe... To make matters worse, the articles suggest that none of the forecasts on the sector's future, bad as they seem, have factored in the impacts of climate breakdown and the necessity of lowering/eliminating emissions within the decade.
- The Airports Council International Europe (ACI Europe), which represents airport operators, reports that nearly 200 airports in the UK and Europe will “go bust” within months because of the “dramatic collapse in air travel” triggered by the pandemic. Apparently 193 of Europe's 740 commerial airports face insolvency if passenger traffic isn't well into recovery by year's end. As there's no guarantee of a vaccine by then, and no public vaccination timeline as yet, that end-of-year deadline will not be met.
- **Oct. 28** – GTAA president Deborah Flint, in a presentation to Durham Regional Council: Aviation significantly impacted by COVID-19; Pearson's passenger traffic down by 96%, almost 30% of the workforce laid off; with border restrictions and quarantines in place, GTAA not expecting passenger volumes to recover for years; not surprisingly, cargo flights increased. She stresses the importance of the 407/400 series highways and the need to integrate transportation services and transit connectivity. Not surprising again, no calls for a Pickering airport.
- **Nov. 22**– GTAA president Deborah Flint, in a presentation to Peel Regional Council: “We recognize this industry will be forever changed. This is absolutely the same for the GTAA. We have suffered significantly. We all have to prepare for a new future and a new reality. I expect we will have to coexist with COVID-19 for many years.” A Peel board member adds that the impact of COVID-19 on

airports and the travel industry has been “staggering” and that service providers must prepare for the future and rebuild confidence in air travel.”

- **Nov. 23** – Pickering’s mayor, in an address on economic development in the city, concedes that development of an airport hasn't yet received the green light but adds that "when" the decision is made, it will take up to 10 years to get the airport established and operational. “We need to get started now and that’s where the federal government really needs to start to be more directly involved ... We need to be proactive more than reactive or we’re going to find ourselves lagging behind in the world economy.” He seems utterly disconnected from the real world...
- **Dec. 9** – The Stay Grounded Network publishes a map of the world showing the locations of no fewer than 65 currently planned airports, Pickering among them.
- **Dec. 10** – In a letter to the editor of a local newsfeed, a frustrated Pickering resident calls for new local municipal leaders – including “leaders who don’t think a cargo airport in the greenbelt is a good idea.”
- **Dec. 11** – We release our latest research paper: “Indoor Farming and North Pickering.” It explains the pros and cons of indoor farming, compares indoor and outdoor farming, and shows, unequivocally, that local politicians’ embrace of vertical farming facilities as part of a Pickering airport (or aerotropolis) is uninformed and irresponsible. Such operations would be uncompetitive and could never make up for the loss of the prime farmland.
- **Dec. 13** – A *Wall Street Journal* tweet: “The pandemic has changed few professions as profoundly as that of the airline pilot. Young pilots with little seniority are being let go, older ones are taking early retirement and a generation of aspiring captains is being told not to bother for now.”
- **Dec.** – The month and the year end almost in silence. There is no further news on the fate of the Federal Lands, and Ontario is one of many jurisdictions around the world now facing tighter restrictions and broader lockdowns as COVID-19 cases continue to surge.

2021

- **Jan. 4** – Toronto Pearson has confirmed reports that its passenger numbers have declined to 1996 levels.
- **Jan. 12** – In a mini-shuffle, PM Trudeau moves Marc Garneau to Foreign Affairs and Omar Alghabra to Transport. Insiders assure us that this is *not* bad news for the Federal Lands.
- **Jan. 19** – We now have some answers regarding construction at the northwest corner of Hwy 7 and Sideline 26 on the Lands: Transport Canada has apparently leased property to the Region of Durham (and this seems to go back to 2014 or earlier) for the creation of a “Seaton Zone 4 Water Reservoir and Zone 5 Pumping Station”– even though the land is zoned agricultural.
- **Jan. 21** – *Ontario Farmer* reports that, 50 years later, raw emotions still linger over the expropriation of 97,000 acres of prime farmland for a Mirabel airport that only ever used 6,000. Most of the land has been sold back to farmers (not always the original families, who had moved elsewhere, often to Ontario, or who had left farming). The pain is still alive, though. As it is here.
- **Feb. 4** – A bridge repair on Concession Road 8 on the Federal Lands was supposed to start in 2010 but the road was closed instead, the bridge access blocked off by massive concrete barriers. Nothing has been done since. Too little traffic, too costly to rebuild, says Transport Canada. Residents and first responders must just take detours.

- **Feb. 18** – CBC Radio’s Ideas program broadcasts “The Forever Protest” – about three long-running Canadian protests, ours being one of them.
- **Feb. 21** – The aviation sector is in deep trouble as countries keep their borders closed to international passenger flights and the pandemic wreaks havoc on all aspects of the industry. Last year, Toronto Pearson reported that its airline passenger business had plummeted to 1996 levels. Compared with 2019, total air passenger numbers dropped from 50.5M to 13.3M and aircraft movements from 453k to 175k. Had Pickering airport been built or even started, it would now be another ghost airport.
- Pickering’s mayor is now pushing an industrial airport idea: “This business model ... doesn’t focus on passengers. Instead, it will be dedicated to the science, technology, and industry of planes. Let’s focus on creating a large and dynamic economic development zone – the kind that organically grows and develops around airports.” He claims that KPMG had made “a business case for an aeronautics industry hub focusing on large-scale aviation industrial businesses, such as aircraft/-components, maintenance and overhaul, avionic systems, and cargo operations.”
- **Feb. 25** – Our MP, Jennifer O’Connell, introduces two new petitions in the House of Commons; both ask that Ottawa abandon any plans for a Pickering airport. One stresses the need to keep the Lands agricultural, the other asks that they be added to Rouge National Urban Park, and that leases be lengthened to aid recovery. These petitions come from concerned citizens, not Land Over Landings.
- **Mar. 5** – A CBC article describes how the aviation industry has been slow to evolve as climate change bears down on us. Andrew Murphy, director of aviation for Transport and Environment, a European non-profit, says: “The aviation sector has constantly put off having to reduce its own emissions ... And that’s catching up with it because it doesn’t have the technologies and the solutions in place ... The airline sector doesn’t have a plan to date, and it’s kind of scrambling to come up with one.” At the same time, orders for new aircraft have dropped to record lows.
- **Mar. 10** – Reuters reports that, in 2020, air-passenger travel in the U.S. fell by 60%, to its lowest level since 1984, and it is expected that demand will continue to be depressed throughout most of 2021. The Canada-U.S. border is still largely closed, and quarantining is required for passengers arriving from the U.S. (and elsewhere, of course).
- **Mar. 31** – Airports large and small, existing or planned, are facing opposition. A few recent examples: Oshawa (invasive noise); Orillia (planned expansion would harm wetland); Waterloo (planned expansion would destroy wetland); Bristol, U.K. (planned expansion called “surreal in a climate emergency”); Lisbon, Portugal (second airport rejected by regulators when no local municipalities would support it); Paris, France (4th runway for Charles De Gaulle airport abandoned as “obsolete”) ...
- **Apr. 1** – New research out of Cornell University has found that rising temperatures are having a slowing effect on agricultural yields; field and livestock productivity is down by 21% since 1961.
- **Apr. 8** – We write to Regional Chair John Henry, requesting that the Region’s seriously misleading website post of March 9, 2020, on the KPMG report, be corrected. Or better still, that the Region post a new and accurate accounting of the results of the KPMG study. Our letter includes an attachment in which we compare the Region’s claims with what KPMG’s report actually said. We copy the letter to all local councils, our MP, the media, and others.
- **Apr. 15** – Region advises, in response to our letter, that their webpage is being reviewed for inaccuracies, and corrections will be made if required. [As of June 22, 2022, there have been no changes.]

- **May 2** – Premier Ford appoints a new Greenbelt Council Chair, Norm Sterling, to replace David Crombie, who had resigned in November, calling the Ford government’s actions “high-level bombing” that “needs to be resisted.” The new appointment doesn’t bode well. In 2015, Sterling voted against the creation of the Greenbelt.
- **May 3** – City of Pickering Exec. Committee (virtual) meeting: there is a report by Fiaz Jadoon, Director, Economic Development & Strategic Projects, on the status of the Local Food Strategy Project he’d been tasked with overseeing last August. Report has little to show for 9 months of “outreach” The project seems to have been mismanaged, and there is an obvious lack of understanding of the agricultural community’s needs, schedules, and pressures.
- **May 10** – At the request of Ontario Nature, we provide information for a new Story Map, about areas of ecological and cultural importance in the province. Policy
- **May 13** – We start our review of Durham Region’s Proposed Directions Report, as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review prior to updating the Region’s Official Plan. Lots to comment on with regard to airport references and requests for urban boundary expansions onto prime farmland.
- **May 25** – ClimateFast is putting together a webcast series on farming through a climate lens and we agree to be among the presenters on July 12.
- **May 27** – Land Over Landings is invited by Wildlands League (a chapter of CPAWS) to be part of the panel at the People’s Summit: Protecting Areas in Ontario, in June.
- **May 28** – We submit our formal comments to the City of Pickering on the importance of, and the problems with, their Local Food Strategy initiative.
- **Jun. 7** – At tonight’s (virtual) Council meeting, our Chair, speaking as a 40-year resident of Brougham, delivers a blistering criticism of Pickering Council’s public claims of a “planned” Pickering airport. Two other delegations speak against an airport; one speaks for. All protests are to no avail. Council votes 5-2 to embed the misleading wording in their contribution to the Region’s Comprehensive Review.
- **Jun. 12** – Land Over Landings is awarded the coveted Steve Houndsell Greenway Award by Ontario Nature, for “working to preserve the rich farmland and natural heritage features of the former airport lands in north Pickering.”
- **Jun. 17** – Our Chair participates in a Greater Golden Horseshoe panel hosted by Wildlands League at the (virtual) People’s Summit, presenting “The Accidental Oasis,” a memorable new video of the Lands and their history.
- **Jun. 18** – The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario proposes that “all prime agricultural areas (as defined by OMAFRA) be added to the Greenbelt.” This would include virtually all of the Federal Lands.
- **Jun. 26** – We submit our formal comments and recommendations during Phase 2 of Durham Region’s Municipal Comprehensive Review. Five other organizations endorse our submission and signed onto it: Ontario Nature, Pickering Naturalists, North Durham Nature, York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA), and Environmental Action Now Ajax-Pickering (EANAP). Our submission prompts Green Durham Alliance (GDA) to send in a strong submission of their own.
- **Jun. 28** – We begin work on a new save-the-Lands campaign with CPAWS Wildlands League.
- **Jul. 5** – Federal Transport Minister Omar Alghabra announces plans to build an all-new high frequency rail line connecting Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City. The procurement

process will start in the fall, once necessary consultations are completed. Dedicated routes in and out of city centres will be negotiated with partner railways. And although the routes haven't yet been announced (or maybe even determined), we can't help wondering if the Toronto-Ottawa line will be along the Havelock Line that crosses RNUP and the Pickering Federal Lands.

- **Jul. 8** – Wildlands League launches a new Call to Action page, asking Ottawa to save the Federal Lands by adding them to Rouge National Urban Park.

Ottawa announces that Peterborough will be a key stop on the new high-frequency rail line between Toronto and Quebec City, to be opened in 2030. So far, at least, Pickering will not have a stop, although the line will run through the Federal Lands.

- **Jul. 9** – Richard Florida, co-speaker at the “GTA’s New Economic Engine” aerotropolis event of April 9, 2019 (when he felt obliged to define “Luddite” as he denigrated those disapproving of the concept), tweets in response to former astronaut Chris Hadfield’s tweet about his first commercial flight in 16 months: “This is one part of work/life I am NOT looking forward to....” Hypocrite.
- **Jul. 12** – Our chair participates in Toronto-based ClimateFast’s Zoom event, “Groundwork: The Challenge and Promise of Regenerative Agriculture,” pointing the audience to Wildland League’s Call to Action and presenting our new video on the Lands’ history and agricultural potential.
- **Jul. 16** – Pickering Library promotes on its website a Learn-To Camp feature under the heading “The Rouge: Canada’s First National Urban Park.” A first pro-Park acknowledgement by Pickering. Are things changing?
- **Aug. 13** – The Waterfront Regeneration Trust sends a powerful letter to Johnathan Wilkinson, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, asking Ottawa to “banish the spectre of a future Pickering airport” and to “transfer the fertile Pickering Lands to Parks Canada’s stewardship.” The letter is sent by the Trust’s board of directors, David Crombie, Keith Laushway, Pauline Browse, and Ann Mulvale, and copied to, among others, Pickering’s MP, Scarborough’s MP, Parks Canada senior staff, Pickering’s mayor, and Land Over Landings’ chair.
- **Aug. 15** – Ottawa pledges \$200 million to help Canadian farmers cut emissions and boost resilience.
- **Aug. 27** – In two articles in the “Ecologist,” reporters Gareth Dale and Josh Moos write that “the aviation industry’s principal goal [is] its own continued growth.” They explain why “sustainable aviation fuels,” known as SAF, will be environmentally devastating and unsustainable even before a scaling-up to a degree sufficient to meet aviation’s global needs. They shine spotlights on the fallacies that surround electricity- and hydrogen-fuelled flight, and they reveal offsetting as “an outright scam.” They conclude: “The aviation industry cannot be given free rein to grow on false premises. Instead, it must be scaled down, and allowed to re-grow only if the life cycle of aircraft can be designed to avoid GHG emissions entirely.” This article powerfully supports our contention that a Pickering airport will not be needed in any foreseeable future.
- **Sept. 1** – We send out a mini-survey to all local candidates running for office in the up-coming federal election.
- **Sept. 20** – Trudeau’s Liberals remain in power, with two additional seats.
- **Sept. 21** – Looking through the City of Pickering’s Wikipedia page, updated as recently as August 24, 2021, we discover this statement: “A new airport is scheduled to be built and be operational by 2027. It will be built alongside lands for the future Rouge National Park.” Both statements are wrong.

- **Oct. 1** – We go public with our powerful new video: “The Accidental Oasis.”
- **Oct. 5** – We send a letter to Oshawa’s *Spark* magazine, to correct a September 21 article filled with misleading information. It quotes a local general-aviation pilot and the regional chair, John Henry. Both mischaracterize the findings of the KPMG study, and the pilot gives misguided information about farming near airports.
- **Oct. 6** – Our UPDATE newsletter alerts supporters to the coming 50th anniversary of the airport announcement, marking also 50 years of citizen action.
- **Oct. 26** – Potential good news. Omar Alghabra remains federal Minister of Transport and Steven Guilbeault (ex-Greenpeace, founder of Equiterre) becomes Minister of Environment and Climate Change.
- **Oct. 30** – Toronto Pearson CEO Deborah Flint, responding to a question about the pandemic’s effect on the airport, tells the *Toronto Star* that “right now, we’re at 1970s numbers. So I’ll be happy to get back to the 2000s.” She also thinks that virtual meetings have proven to be very effective, and therefore “a threat to the recovery of business travel,” and that 2021 will continue to see only “single-digit millions of passengers coming to the airport.”
- **Nov. 2** – It is reported that the GTAA is “relying heavily on loans to keep the operation [Pearson] running.” The airport suffered a \$746 million net loss since the start of the pandemic, adding “12.5 per cent to our pre-pandemic debt,” according to a board member.
- **Nov. 11** – At COP26, in Glasgow, Mira Kapfinger, of Stay Grounded, calls for taxes on jet fuel, bans on airport expansions, bans on short-haul flights, and the promotion of rail. She says that the sector’s “far-off targets for 2050 are not worth the paper they are written on,” that there need to be “strong emissions targets by 2030 to bring aviation in line with Paris,” and adds: “Relying on CORSIA to reduce flight emissions is like waiting for flying pigs.” And she makes a telling point: “By 2050, we will still be flying overwhelmingly with today’s aircraft – so flights need to be reduced as much as possible.”
- **Nov. 12** – We send letters of congratulations to all members of the new federal cabinet, and take the opportunity to alert or remind, as the case may be, each minister that the Pickering Federal Lands are still in limbo and need to be protected.
- **Nov. 24** – Our UPDATE #64 spotlights the Big Lie that some Pickering politicians, the regional chair, and a small number of general-aviation pilots insist on propagating: that KPMG said an airport would be needed by 2036. We’ve stopped pulling our punches.
- **Nov. 29** – We go live with “50 Ways to Say ‘No Pickering Airport!’” – a compilation of mini-videos submitted by supporters of all ages and from all over, including Dr Charles Godfrey, who makes clear that the airport “was political baloney then [1972] and I say it is still baloney!”
- **Dec. 13** – As part of Durham Region’s Municipal Comprehensive Review, Pickering Council votes to accept a staff recommendation that the Region “consider a scenario reflecting a future airport and the potential implications it may have in terms of population and employment allocation and growth.”
- **Dec. 31** – We publish our end-of-year round-up and holiday wishes in the 65th edition of UPDATE. The newsletter was launched on July 7, 2013, just after the Flaherty airport announcement.

2022

- **Jan. ?** – Curiously date-free, the second issue of Pickering’s “Your City” magazine arrives in our mailboxes. It claims to be educational and informational but is a transparently obvious self-promotion organ for the City and a glossy advertising opportunity for property developers. There are no airport articles but there are egregious airport references. Fiaz Jadoon, Director of Economic Development & Strategic Projects delivers this spin (implying to the uninformed that the project already has the green light): He states: “The federally proposed Pickering Airport site is expected to spur significant economic development and job creation in the city and across Durham Region. This significant infrastructure project will be the single largest economic catalyst and could generate hundreds of millions of dollars in new investment for aeronautic, transportation/logistics, high-tech, and other innovative sectors.” Readers are also told that “the City continues to listen to all stakeholders as those plans come together. [...] Fiaz and his team would love to tell you more about what makes the City of Pickering unique and to provide factual information.” What airport plans would those be? What does “factual information” mean in this context?
- **Jan. 11** – We send out a big media package on the upcoming 50th anniversary of the airport announcement. With the province still under Covid-19 restrictions, and with uncertainty reigning as to the situation in the coming months, we decide against in-person gatherings on March 2, and will bring this milestone date to public and political attention in other ways.
- We partner with Wildlands League to plan a program around March 2. It will involve an op-ed, an open letter, a mail-in campaign, and more.
- **Feb. 17** – David Crombie and Pauline Browne fire the first salvo at Ottawa: Waterfront Regeneration Trust sends a letter to the Prime Minister, signed by Browne, Crombie, and the other board members, advocating for the protection of the remaining Federal Lands by transferring them to Rouge National Urban Park. Parks Canada is copied in.
- **Feb. 26** – RNUP tweet: “Do you love farming and national parks? Are you interested in helping to preserve some of the last remaining farms in the Greater Toronto Area and promoting a vibrant farming community in the context of a national park? Parks Canada is looking to fill the position of Agricultural Specialist in Rouge National Urban Park, and this could be the perfect job for you...” We had nothing to do with this, but its appearance at this time seems appropriate.
- **Mar. 1** – The weeks of hard work bear fruit. The *Globe and Mail* carries our op-ed, “It’s time to ground the Pickering airport for good,” signed by Krista Long, Executive Director, National Farmers Union–Ontario; Carrie Gregory, President, Ontario Nature; and Dr Yannick Beaudoin, Director General, Ontario and Northern Canada with the David Suzuki Foundation.
- **Mar. 2** – **50th anniversary of the airport announcement.** The *Toronto Star* and the *Ottawa Citizen* carry our large, full-colour ads of the text of the open letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, which asks him, under the heading “Expand the Rouge,” to cancel the airport and transfer the remaining Lands to RNUP. The ads include a partial list of the letter’s 58 signatories – leaders and organizations from across the agricultural, environmental, and political spectrum.

The ads urge readers to access ExpandTheRouge.org and sign the letter in support of the land transfer to the Park; it is sent to the Prime Minister and copied to his ministers of Transport and Environment & Climate Change.

We issue UPDATE #67, with the details of the 50th anniversary roll-out and an article on the memories and hopes of eight local-area residents who experienced the 1972 expropriation and its aftermath.

There is also local coverage by the *Pickering News Advertiser*, the *Uxbridge Cosmos*, Durham News Radio, and the new farming magazine *Farmtario*.

- **Mar. 9** – Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra announces that “Canada has launched a Request for Expressions of Interest seeking advice and views ... on the High Frequency Rail project through Buyandsell.gc.ca.” The new “dedicated Corridor” line will be electrified.
- **Mar. 14** – Minister Alghabra announces \$142 million for Toronto Pearson to help fund critical infrastructure work, from airfield pavement rehabilitation to studies for a potential connection with Toronto’s Eglinton Crosstown LRT.
- **Mar. 22** – Stay Grounded, representing 180 organizations worldwide, sends its own version of the March 2 Expand The Rouge open letter to Prime Minister Trudeau.
- **Mar. 30** – *Novae Res Urbis* publishes a sizeable article, “Charting a New Path.” It gives prominent coverage to the Expand The Rouge initiative, features interviews with our Chair as well as David Crombie and Environmental Defence’s Tim Gray, and highlights our vision map of North Pickering Farms.
- **Apr. 25** – Dave Ryan announces that he will not be seeking another term as Pickering’s mayor. (The next municipal elections are on October 24.)

A *Cision* report: The Minister of Transport joins the GTAA’s President and CEO, Deborah Flint, for a ground-breaking ceremony at Toronto Pearson, launching “one of the largest runway rehabilitation projects in the airport’s history.” The airport’s second-busiest runway will be closed “to late fall,” allowing a “more sustainable approach.” That the GTAA is closing this major runway for 7-8 months is a sign of the degree of reduced activity at Pearson and the anticipated slow recovery.

Airside Magazine reports that there will be “no quick fix” for a shortage of pilots, likely constraining the airline sector in the U.S. for five years.

- **Apr. 26** – Three members of our exec, as well as Krista Long of NFU, meet on Zoom with Patrick Mangan, Ontario Regional Advisor and Parliamentary Secretary Assistant, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, to brief him on the Federal Lands issue and make the case for protecting this prime farmland. Patrick undertakes to, among other things, help us prepare a presentation for the minister.

In a *National Post* article, entrepreneur and politician Frank Stronach writes: “To begin with, agriculture should be considered an essential industry and a strategic priority on the same scale as national defence, water and energy.”

- **Apr. 30** – As part of Durham Region’s Municipal Comprehensive Review, we submit to Envision Durham our comments and recommendations on the necessity of approving the one land-use scenario that does not cause urban boundary expansion onto farmland.
- **May 3** – Toronto Pearson releases last year’s numbers prior to their AGM. Passenger numbers for 2021 were 12.7 million (down from 50.5 million in 2019), while aircraft movements were 174,588 (down from 453,041 in 2019).

- **May 10** – From the *Guardian*: “A report commissioned by the climate charity Possible assessed every target set by the [international aviation] industry since 2000 and found that nearly all had been missed, revised or quietly ignored.” Proof positive that airlines cannot be left to self-regulate their emissions reduction.
- **May 12** – Transport Canada agrees to transfer federal land from the Windsor Park Authority to Parks Canada, a step towards the creation of Ojibway National Urban Park. If they’re doing this in Windsor in 2022, why not here?
- **May 16** – An analysis of the aviation sector by the New Weather Institute, reported in *The Ecologist*, reveals that “the aviation industry’s climate impact will be the same in 2050 as now under its ‘Fly Net Zero’ greenwash climate plan”; its proposals for climate action “will fail catastrophically to align the industry with agreed international climate targets”; and the adopted scheme would “put global biodiversity at risk and compete with food production without actually reducing aviation’s climate impact.” In the circumstances, and with no real industry solutions in sight, governments are urged to “take immediate action to limit the growth of aviation through domestic, joint or unilateral measures, including an embargo on the further expansion of the industry.”
- **May 25** – A majority on Durham Regional Council vote to open over 9,000 acres of farmland to development, over the advice and objections of specialist staff, advisory committees, NGOs, and residents. The farmland in question is a short distance east of the Federal Lands, which would also be victims of this seriously wrong-headed decision if they weren’t protected by their current federal status.
- **May 27**– A *Globe and Mail* article quotes 2021 census data showing that, between 2016 and 2021 (only five years!), Ontario lost 4.7% of its productive farmland; that’s roughly 319 acres each day.
- **June 20** – In a *Durham Post* interview, Mayor Ryan says he “very strongly believes” that the GTA needs another airport – in Pickering, “specifically because the lands are already set aside for an airport.” When was this sufficient reason to build one?! Ignoring KPMG’s conclusion that no airport was needed, and ignoring the disastrous effect that building and operating a new airport would have on Durham Region’s CO₂ emissions, Ryan claims that a Pickering airport would provide passenger convenience and is “an economic imperative.” Oshawa’s Mayor Dan Carter also states, “I think the business case can be made” – even though Transport Canada recently paid \$800,000 in taxpayer’s money to have KMPG analyse the matter in depth. Their conclusion: no business case possible.
- **June 22** – Another *Durham Post* interview, this time with Regional Chair John Henry, who calls for Ottawa to make a decision on the Lands. To him, a decision means a green light. He then promotes his own pipedream, of vertical farms on the airport site, and insists, all evidence to the contrary, that their produce would mean food security for the GTA. Elsewhere, he misrepresents content in the KPMG report, stating as fact what its authors had cautioned must be treated as no more than an exploratory exercise from which no firm conclusions should be drawn...

We hold our first AGM in three years – not yet in person but via Zoom. No guest speakers this time, but a detailed review by our Chair of all that has happened since June 2019 (a surprising amount, despite the constraints of the pandemic). A revised Mission Statement is approved, allowing us to lend support to like-minded groups working to protect farmland and the environment. And we welcome three strong new members to our executive.

- **July 4** – Pat Horne, a founding member of People or Planes and Land Over Landings, has died. Whether it was driving a horse-drawn turnip cart to a hanging in effigy, sewing black cloaks for a

Bergmanesque march on Queen's Park, learning how to demobilize a bulldozer, or unfailingly taking part in protests well into the second decade of this millennium, Pat was funny or fierce, as the situation warranted, and determined to fight for these Lands from Day One in 1972.

- **July 20** – The *Toronto Star* runs a clear-sighted article on aviation's staggering emissions dilemma in the face of looming net-zero deadlines. Despite the sector's greenwashing efforts, the hard facts are these: "There is no obvious solution, there is no one technology, there is no one set of actions that are going to get the industry there." {See the May 16 entry above for more details on the trouble that lies ahead.}
- **July 24** – More sad news. The indomitable Charles "Doc" Godfrey, the inspired and inspiring leader of People or Planes, dies in his 105th year. We thought he would live forever, and our dearest wish was to be able to recreate, with him, that celebratory newspaper image from 1975, "POP Goes the Airport!" – this time for good. We mourn him, we thank him, and above all we celebrate an extraordinary life lived to the fullest.

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