

Timeline: 2020-

An “Aerotropolis” in a Time of Climate Change, COVID-19, and KPMG’s Conclusions?!

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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 wishful thinking on the part of a few. We cry foul, and our complaints prompt revisions to some articles.
- **Jan. 9** – In an op-ed on the website of the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association, a COPA member writes, supportively: “More opposition is coming from environmentalists, questioning the wisdom of building an airport when air transportation is a significant contributor of greenhouse gases.” 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 Canadian taxpayers’ money go to the U.S. for a logo for a non-existent Pickering airport? As we’re looking into this, the logo disappears from the site but 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 push for an aerotropolis; it would add massive amounts of new emissions to the Region’s tally. We explain that the prime farmland, which development would destroy, is a carbon sink that 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 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 – weak and reeking of climate-change denial – is dispiriting.
- **Jan. 24** – The *Sudbury Star* runs a terrific – and unexpected – piece by columnist Steve May, headed: “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.

We point out again 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 councillors, and the motion is carried, 23-2. The degree of actual 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 as to why vertical farming in North Pickering is unlikely to be successful. 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 for the protection of this farmland.
- **Mar. 5** – Transport Canada quietly releases KMPG'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's been 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 to note: While the report refers (once) to possible future policy changes concerning emissions, it includes no mention of climate change or how it will affect aviation worldwide. Had this issue 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 the finding would have been immediate. Will the Supply and Demand Report's unequivocal conclusion end that 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 being "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 changed. So the limbo continues, as does the uncertainty – but there is much less uncertainty now than before.
- **Mar. 6** – All the news is suddenly about COVID-19. Twenty confirmed cases in Ontario now.
- We learn from the results of a Pickering resident's Access to Information request that, in 2019, Pickering's CAO was busy seeking sizable contributions from other local governments to help the City fund a study to rebut our 2018 agricultural study – and some of the officials contacted were delighted to offer financial help.
- **Mar. 8** – On our Facebook page, Pickering Cllr 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's* report on the KPMG study blatantly misrepresents the study's conclusion, wrongly claiming 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 may be obliged to postpone our AGM.
- **Mar. 18** – Cllr Brenner asks Pickering staff to shift priorities from advocating for an aerotropolis to advocating for a Pickering station on the future high frequency Havelock line 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 KPMG 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 results of our Access to Information request (see Mar. 6). The CAO responds via e-mail (to short-circuit Council?). He does not answer most of the questions and his e-mail address does not accept replies...
- **Apr. 4** – The number of US air passengers has dropped by 95% in a month, thanks to COVID-19. The situation is the same 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. No 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 the global food supply chain is becoming evident as the effects of lockdowns are felt.
- **Apr. 27** – Cllr 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 (Fiaz Jadoon, 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 (the group is called Counsel) have been hired by Durham Region, and the Region will be expecting Pickering to help cover the costs. Who knew about this? Just staff? Or were Pickering’s mayor and only selected 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 the study went on report #4 and its “what if” exercises, which were apparently prompted by “anecdotal evidence” of support for an airport (see Type and Role report, p. 2) “that could support economic growth.” 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 construction 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 respondents felt would 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. He never did answer our questions (see Apr. 2).
- **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 are describing 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” to be built on prime farmland a few kilometres 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 the 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 (except for one Pickering regional councillor: Kevin 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 be seen again until 2024 (formerly, 2023). “The situation is deteriorating,” says IATA Chief Economist Brian Pearce.
- **Aug. 31** – Pickering announces plans to launch a local food strategy. A motion to begin the process had been introduced in June by cllrs Maurice Brenner and David Pickles. The City currently has no economic development strategy on the potential for produce grown within Pickering. Startling, given all the farmland in the municipality. Will the Lands be counted in? (No, as it turns out, the City’s excuse being that it’s federal land and therefore outside Pickering’s jurisdiction – which has never prevented Council from promoting an airport and indoor farming on those same Lands.)

- **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 the 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 summer dip, 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 doggedly promotes a Pickering “aerotropolis.” Today, he hosts (virtually) the City's “Second Annual Realtor & Developer Symposium.” In their contributions, the Mayor and staff ignore or distort the content and conclusions of the KPMG report as well as the pandemic's disastrous and potentially long-term impact on aviation. The City's “forward thinking” is 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 are, 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 recovery will not occur.
- **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 ensure transit connectivity. There are no calls for a Pickering airport.
- **Nov. 22**– GTAA president Deborah Flint, this time 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 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.” No acknowledgement of climate change...
- **Dec. 9** – The Stay Grounded Network publishes a world map showing the locations of no fewer than 65 currently planned airports. Pickering is among them.
- **Dec. 10** – In a letter to the editor of a local newsfeed, a frustrated Pickering resident calls for new local municipal leaders – “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 in this area and their limited range of products 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 news on the fate of the Federal Lands, and Ontario is one of many jurisdictions around the world now facing even tighter restrictions and broader lockdowns as COVID-19 cases continue to surge.

2021

- **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, even after 50 years, 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 lives on. As it does here.
- **Feb. 4** – A bridge repair on Concession Road 8 on the Federal Lands was supposed to start in 2010. Instead, the road was closed and access to the bridge was blocked by bulky 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 continues to wreak 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 50.5 million to 13.3 million, and aircraft movements from 453,000 to 175,000. Had Pickering airport been built or even started, it would now be another ghost airport or abandoned construction site.
- Pickering’s mayor is now pushing for an industrial airport: “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 focussing 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. It is expected that demand will continue to be depressed throughout most of 2021. The Canada-U.S. border is still largely closed, and quarantine 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 are 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** – The Region advises, in reply to our letter, that their webpage is being reviewed for inaccuracies, and corrections will be made if required. [As of March 10, 2023, there have been no changes – which means there won’t be.]

- **May 2** – Premier Ford appoints a new Greenbelt Council Chair, Norm Sterling. David Crombie 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. The report has little to show for 9 months of “outreach.” The project seems to have been mismanaged and there is a clear lack of understanding of the agricultural community’s needs, schedules, and pressures.
- **May 10** – At the request of Ontario Nature, we provide information on the Lands for a new Story Map, about areas of ecological and cultural importance in the province.
- **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 June People’s Summit: Protecting Areas in Ontario.
- **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. No airport is being “planned.” Two other delegations speak against an airport; one speaks for it. 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’s 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 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 federal Pickering Lands.

- **Jul. 8** – Wildlands League launches a new Call to Action page, asking Ottawa to save the federal Pickering 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 Pickering 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 video on the Lands’ history and farming potential.
- **Jul. 16** – Pickering Library promotes on its website a Learn-To-Camp feature under this heading: “The Rouge: Canada’s First National Urban Park.” It seems to be the 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 prove environmentally devastating and unsustainable even before scaling up to amounts sufficient to meet aviation’s global needs. They shine a spotlight on the fallacies that surround electric and hydrogen-fuelled flight, and they reveal offsetting to be “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 snap federal election.
- **Sept. 20** – Trudeau’s Liberals remain in power, with two additional seats. All the area MPs who support the protection of the Pickering Lands are re-elected, with wide margins.
- **Sept. 21** – Reviewing the City of Pickering’s Wikipedia page, updated as recently as August 24, 2021, we discover this: “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 full of inaccuracies.

- **Oct. 1** – We go public with our powerful new video: “The Accidental Oasis.”
- **Oct. 5** – We write 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 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 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 Lands are still in limbo and need to be protected.
- **Nov. 24** – 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 UPDATE #65. The newsletter was launched on July 7, 2013, just after the Flaherty airport announcement.

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- **January** – 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): “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 to Mr Jadoon?
- **Jan. 11** – We distribute 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 anniversary planning and 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. Addressees: the Prime Minister and 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, now 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,” which 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 Pickering Lands issue and to make the case for protecting this prime farmland. Patrick undertakes to, among other things, help 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 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 creating Ojibway National Urban Park. If they're transferring federal land in Windsor in 2022, why not here?
- **May 16** – The *Ecologist* picks apart and analyses the aviation industry's emission-reduction schemes for the coming decades and pronounces them a "greenwash climate plan."
- **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 Pickering Lands, which, ironically, would also be victims of this seriously wrong-headed decision if they hadn't been protected by their current airport zoning.
- **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 daily.
- **June 20** – In a *Durham Post* interview, Mayor Ryan says he "very strongly believes" another airport is needed in the GTA. He states, without evidence, that delays have been plaguing Pearson. He explains that "we need the airport in Pickering specifically because the lands are already set aside for an airport," and that "I would like to have an airport here rather than go across the city to pick up my wife every time she travels to see to her mother."
- **June 22** – 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 pandemic constraints). 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.
- **June 30** – *FarmOntario* reports on the fact that the province is losing those shocking 319 acres of farmland per day, almost doubling the 2016 rate. "The OFA is concerned that the accelerated loss of agricultural land could be catastrophic for Ontario's food sovereignty unless there is comprehensive and enforceable protection."
- **July 18** – In a *Durham Post* interview, Regional Chair John Henry urges Ottawa to make a decision on the airport and then get on with it. He sees the facility as focussed on the aerospace industry and (as usual) on vertical farming. He clearly hasn't bothered reading our research report on vertical farms and their severe limitations; he seems to think that year-round salad greens will "make sure that our residents have that food security."
- **July 20** – The *Toronto Star* points out that the amount of change needed before that critical climate deadline of 2050 creates "big issues" for the aviation industry. Says Jim Harris of aerospace consultancy Bain & Co.: There is no obvious solution, there is no one technology, there is no one set of actions to get the industry there." Jet fuel use by the four biggest U.S. airlines *increased by 15 per cent* in the five years leading up to 2019, just before the pandemic, despite aircraft efficiencies.
- **July 24** – Dr Charles Godfrey, renowned physician, POP's invincible leader, and LOL's inspiration and hero, dies at the age of 104. He fought the airport plan ("it was baloney then and it's baloney now") right to the end.
- **July 22** – In the *Guardian*: "Just hot air? For all the Farnborough talk, zero-carbon flying remains years away. Record heat reaffirms urgency to decarbonise, but technical challenge is far greater for aviation than for most other parts of economy."

- **Aug. 16** – In the *Toronto Star*: “U.S. drought creates opportunity for Canadian farmers. As it becomes more expensive to grow crops in California, for instance, and ship them, U.S. companies look to Canada as a place to grow.”
- **Aug. 17** – In *Novae Res Urbis*: Pickering’s “Employment Corridor Taking Flight.” A 23-hectare food processing facility will join the Kubota tractor factory on Hwy 7, just south of the Pickering Lands. Have these food-related companies been reading our website or is this just serendipity?
- **Sept. 24** – From CBC News: “Another discount airline takes off — but they may not all survive.” Says a former airline executive: “They’re all chasing a dream, but it’s not going to end well.”
- **Oct. 12** – Radio-Canada publishes an excellent feature article on the Pickering story, by senior parliamentary correspondent Marc Godbout: “The Other MLabel: The ‘Absurdity and Tragedy’ of Ottawa Indecision.”
- **Oct. 13** – From CBC News: “This former pilot [Todd Smith, co-founder of Safe Landing] says people need to fly less for the sake of the environment.” He explains: “...we could be hitting two degrees [warming] – that’s 99 per cent of coral reefs dead, rainforests turned into savannah, up to 700 million Africans displaced. If we’re going to continue to travel in the future, without taking proportionate action now, then we’re going to witness the decimation of the natural world. I don’t think that’s a future that most people would want to subscribe to. ... We need to recast the relationship between us and the planet, which is a living organism, the life support systems that actually nourish us and provide us with the air that we’re breathing – in the same way that the air in the cabin of aircraft does. This is a system failure – we need to divert and change course immediately to ensure survival.”
- **Oct. 24** – Municipal election day. Mayor Ryan is replaced by Mayor Kevin Ashe (pro-airport). Ward 3 (home of the Pickering Lands) sees no change in its city and regional councillors (both are pro-airport, although purporting to be otherwise). But the overall results translate into four progressive no-airport councillors against two pro-airport/pro-development councillors. In short, the balance of power has shifted.
- **Oct. 31** – Transport Canada confirms that a new state entity, a subsidiary of VIA Rail Canada but reporting directly to Transport Canada, will construct and operate an electrified “High Frequency Rail” (HFR) service along the corridor linking Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto – and crossing the Pickering Lands.
- **Nov. 29** – A unilateral move by the Ford government to remove land from the Greenbelt and make it available for residential development has created such a province-wide uproar that everything else seems to be taking a back seat. One of the tracts in play is the Duffins-Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP), adjacent to RNUP. RNUP has formally requested a meeting with the Ford government to discuss the fact that this unilateral decision breaks with a Memorandum of Agreement with Ottawa. We knew nothing about this Agreement, in which some of the Preserve appears to be earmarked for incorporation into RNUP. Our question: why is RNUP happy to accept non-federal DRAP land but apparently unwilling to consider actual federal land immediately to the north?
- **Dec. 9** – Yet another ultra-low-cost carrier – Canada Jetlines – takes to the skies, making its inaugural flight from Vancouver to Pearson.

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- **Jan. 10** – The *New Scientist* reports the results of a recent study: children living near a small airport in California have increased lead levels in their blood, the direct consequence of the continued use of leaded fuels by small aircraft. Legislating the use of alternative, unleaded fuels, however, would cause a different (if predictable) problem: such fuels are in short supply, and the path to achieving sufficient, sustainable supplies has not been figured out.
- **Jan. 15** – A team of researchers at the University of Illinois have learned just how difficult it is to harrass Canada Geese and get them to move on. The Canada Goose poses the highest risk to aviation safety. Here on the Pickering Lands, a place of relative dormancy for 50 years and counting, the geese have become well established and live on the here year round. Tens of thousands of them feast on crop residues here each winter...
- **Jan. 18** – *The Guardian* reports that more than 90% of rainforest carbon offsets by the biggest provider don't represent genuine carbon reductions. They are, in fact, "phantom credits," and could well worsen global heating. Example: airline companies are telling people they can fly without making the climate crisis worse, if they buy offsets. This turns out to be untrue The Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA), the program the world's airlines are supposed to be adhering to as they aim for net-zero, is once again shown to be largely greenwash.
- **Feb. 1** – France's Alstom SA bought Bombardier's rail division in 2021, and is now pushing hard for Ottawa to go full-on high-speed rail, like the French TGV, rather than settle for the in-between, high-frequency, Toronto-to-Quebec City service that's planned, in order to reduce car traffic and carbon emissions. (One downside for us is that high-speed would be unlikely to stop at Pickering...)
- **Feb. 27** – Despite a snowstorm, we are there in force in Pickering's Chamber as a dozen delegates argue for or against the motion before Council this evening: to rescind the October 10, 2017, resolution that supported a Pickering airport as part of a failed bid for the Amazon HQ2 contract. An illuminating evening. On the one side, proponents concerned about climate change, food security, lack of an airport business case, that Pearson's Ground Lease prevents an airport anyway. On the other side, opponents focussed on fear-mongering (Must build now! Investment will go elsewhere!), alternative jet fuels, an airport as part of an Advanced Enterprise Zone, delivering billions in revenue, tens or even hundreds of thousands of jobs... Two different worlds. Time eventually runs out and the vote is postponed to March 8 – again a public meeting but no more delegations allowed.
- **Feb. 28** – In the *Guardian*: A report published today – "Net zero aviation fuels: resource requirements and environmental impacts" – by the Royal Society (the UK's national academy of sciences) affirms similar findings elsewhere: that there is no single, clear, sustainable alternative to jet fuel that could support the current level of flying. The scientists studied green hydrogen (made from water, but green only if using renewable energy), biofuels (energy crops, waste), ammonia, and synthetic fuels (e-fuels)), in all cases finding production volume and/or sustainability posing massive challenges.
- **Mar. 8** – Before tonight's Council meeting to vote on the rescind-support-for-an-airport motion, Mayor Ashe tweets: I will not be supporting this motion." And in Chambers his words and actions make his bias clear. He cuts off councillor comments after the first three have said they support the

motion, and voices a jumble of concerns and innuendo. No surprise there. What is a surprise is Cllr Robinson's motion to defer the vote, which Cllr Pickles eventually seconds. (It will now be held on April 24). Her position during the election campaign last October had been anti-airport. The excuse for the deferral? They need more information... Ashe: "I think there's far too many unanswered questions as regards to this."

- **Mar. 15** – Discount airline Flair has had four of its Boeing 737s seized after having regularly defaulted on millions of dollars in payments over the past five months. A good time to remind that KPMG, in their 2016 Supply and Demand report to Transport Canada, stated, on p. 66: "The new low-cost entrants are inherently risky and suffer high rates of business failure." And that in their 2018 Type and Role report, KPMG stated, on p. 7: "LCC and ULCC operators [low cost carriers and ultra low cost carriers] in Canada have had a volatile past, with many new entrants beginning operations, experiencing rapid growth, and ultimately failing shortly after." Those thinking a Pickering airport could offer such services were warned to take past history into account.

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