

Timeline: 1972-1975

Airport Announcement / People or Planes

Airport Announcement

1972

- **January** – An environmental assessment of the Pickering site is rushed through – in 72 hours, in the snow.
- **Mar. 1** – A federal-provincial agreement is signed.
- **Mar. 2** – The North Pickering Development Project, requiring the expropriation of 18,600 acres for a major international airport, and a further 25,000 acres for a new city to the south of it, to be called Cedarwood, is jointly announced by Ottawa and Ontario. Pickering is described as “ideal” and the logical choice. The public is not told that Pickering had formerly been deemed unsuitable in every way except for its proximity to Toronto.
- According to reports, the airport will cost \$300 million and the new city near the airport will have a population of 150,000 to 200,000.
- North Pickering and area residents get the news as they’re driving home from work or milking the cows.
- Local reactions are mixed. The residents of Claremont, on the northeast border of the site, resignation is the predominant response. Brougham, however, is angry and ready for a fight.

People or Planes

I hope that opposition to this affront against common sense eventually will be nationwide, the largest single protest movement in Canadian history. It should be. It can be.

~ Scott Young, Canadian journalist, 1972

1972

- **Mar. 3** – Some 80 local residents meet at Melody Farm (originally Ever Green Villa, home of Eli Barclay) to plan protests. **People or Planes** (POP) is born.
- **Mar. 6** – Pickering Township unanimously passes a resolution opposing a second international airport “at Claremont” in Pickering.
- The airport is slated to open in late 1978 or early 1979, according to federal officials. The federal and provincial governments have set a target of two to three years to acquire all the properties on the two sites. Local municipal politicians are unable to get clear responses to their many questions.
- **Mar. 25** – Prime Minister Plerre Trudeau, in Scarborough, says: “If the majority of people living in this area, even only 51 per cent, didn’t want this airport, then we wouldn’t proceed with it.”
- **Apr. 17** – Premier Bill Davis rejects opposition demands for an inquiry into whether the airport is necessary.

- **Apr. 24** – Stephen Lewis, Ontario New Democratic Party leader, airs doubts as to the need for a new airport, and backs the residents fighting the plan.
- **Apr. 28** – Results of a *Toronto Star* poll: “Are you in favor of the proposed new airport scheduled to be built in Pickering Township or are you against it?” In favor: 22%; Against: 57%; Not sure: 18%. A screaming headline in the May 18 issue of POP’s newspaper asks: “Trudeau, will he keep his word?” He doesn’t.
April, May, June – POP meets with federal and provincial ministers and initiates a barrage of media releases, publicity stunts, fundraising events, presentations, exposés, and legal arguments that will keep going, unabated, for 3 years.
- **Aug. 31** – Minister of Transport, Don Jamieson, just prior to a federal election, announces that public hearings will be held on the choice of the airport site.
- **Sept. 6** – Expropriation notices start going out to residents.
- **Nov. 23** – Toronto lawyer J.W. Swackhamer, Q.C., as commissioner, opens the public hearings under the Expropriation Act.
- **Nov. 27** – Jean Marchand takes over as Minister of Transport as the public hearings into the siting of the airport proceed.
- **Nov. 30** – Federal opposition leader Robert Stanfield calls for a halt to expropriations and for reconsideration of the airport site.
- **Dec. 29** – The Swackhamer Report criticizes the government’s decision to build an airport, and slams the choice of Pickering as the airport’s location.

1973

- **January, March, April, May, June** – Transport Minister Jean Marchand states many times throughout this period that an upcoming inquiry into the Pickering airport will address both need and location.
- **Jan. 15** – Out of the public eye, Transport’s Deputy Minister writes to the Minister: “In some ways the word ‘inquiry’ is misleading because it is meant to be more of an effort to harmonize formally the plans ... before initiating an airport.” On the same day, a Cabinet memo states: “Construction work will be undertaken during the Board’s deliberations.”
- **Feb. 20** – Ottawa tables estimates showing that the government has earmarked \$82 million for land expropriations in Pickering.
- **Apr. 28** – Landowners complain about the unrealistically low prices the government is offering for their properties.
- **June** – In Brougham, POP stages an “unofficial” but dramatic “equal opportunity” hanging-in-effigy of Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Davis who, they say, bear the ultimate responsibility for Pickering’s fate.
- **Aug. 13** – The federal government adds 10% and a \$3,000 relocation allowance to its offers to residents who have refused earlier offers and who remain on their land.
- **Oct. 3** – An Order-in-Council establishes the promised Inquiry. Mr Justice Hugh F. Gibson is to head a three-man airport review board. The terms of reference leave no doubt that this Inquiry is already an open-and-shut case and will find in the government’s favour.

- **Oct. 23** – Ottawa announces that the Gibson Inquiry into the expropriations will *not* consider need or location of the airport, despite Transport Minister Marchand’s months of assurances that it would.

1974

- **Jan. 18** – Federal planners submit a brief to the review board, pushing for a start on Pickering airport by mid-1975.
- **Mar. 15** – Toronto City Council votes to allocate \$20,000 to oppose the Pickering airport before the review board.
- **Apr. 1** – All 22 MPPs of the Ontario Liberal Party declare their opposition to the airport.
- **Aug. 21** – A City of Toronto report condemns the Pickering airport plan and prompts the City to make a last-minute intervention that delays the winding-up of the hearings.
- **Dec. 23** – The Gibson Inquiry Report is delivered to Ottawa.

1975

- **January** – The Gibson Inquiry Report supports the government side, says that construction should begin as soon as possible so that everything is built, equipped, and ready for when the airport is actually needed – and recommends, meanwhile, that Malton be expanded, adopting a dual-runway system. The Ministry of Transport is now in a bind, having long rejected dual runways as dangerous (although the U.S. uses them without problems). Clearly, some parts of the report will have to be finessed or suppressed. A number of departments and Cabinet ministers find other faults in the report and start to question its credibility.
- **Jan. 31** – The Gibson Report is made public. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Transport has enlisted the aid of the Secretary to the Cabinet, Michael Pitfield, to help craft the kind of pro-airport argument the Cabinet will buy.
- **Feb. 5** – Toronto Council votes unanimously to reaffirm its opposition to the airport and declares that the review board ignored the City’s views and planning objectives.
- **Feb. 15** – Pitfield turns over his pro-airport arguments to Marchand.
- **Feb. 20** – Basing his arguments on Pitfield’s paper, Marchand proposes, and gets Cabinet approval for, a 1-runway “minimum airport” instead of the earlier plan, construction to begin within the year, the target operating date to be 1980. Later expansion of the airport is not ruled out.
- **Feb. 28** – For the new, smaller airport, about 1,800 acres of the 18,600 will be needed. The federal works department announces plans to take possession of expropriated lands by May 30.
- **April** – POP’s lawyer, William McMurtry, meets with the Ontario Cabinet to show its members how Ottawa has misled Ontario.
- **Apr. 30** – While the Ontario Minister of Transport, John Rhodes, is in Ottawa trying (unsuccessfully) to get satisfactory answers from Marchand with regard to some of McMurtry’s warnings, POP holds a Bulldozer Tea Party to recruit members and teach them how to disable demolition equipment. More than 2,000 people sign up to lie down, if need be, in front of bulldozers to block construction.

- **May 14** – Trudeau tells the House of Commons that the Gibson review cost taxpayers \$764,153.
- **May 27** – Premier Davis meets with Marchand to voice his concerns about the new airport idea: Ontario would essentially be getting a “minimum airport” while still having to spend the full amount, several hundred million dollars, on infrastructure. Marchand’s bullying reply does not clear the air. Nor does he explain that the expropriation is nearing completion and development is about to begin.
- **Jun. 9** – Some landowners are still on their properties. Ottawa increases by 50% its expropriation offers on smaller residential landholdings (10 acres or less).
- **Jul. 10** – Provincial Transport Minister Rhodes alerts Ottawa, by telegram, that Ontario’s priorities do not “at this time” include another airport. He asks for a construction delay until a meeting with Davis can be held in Ottawa. Marchand advises Davis that Ottawa is completing plans for a full-scale airport development, perhaps as early as 1981. He writes: “Based on all the evidence ... Malton Airport will become congested again in 1981.”
- **Jul. 29** – The Ottawa meeting takes place but Ontario doesn’t budge. The Province asks that the bulldozers be held off until after the Ontario election.
- **Jul. 31** – Marchand, by telegram, tells Rhodes that construction will not start before mid-September.
- **Aug. 13** – Despite Ontario’s concerns and Marchand’s assurances, demolitions do begin. Barbed-wire fences and barricades go up to keep protesters off the site. Ontario complains to Ottawa.
- **Aug. 21** – Marchand orders the demolitions stopped. By now, the federal contractor has torn down twelve of the sixteen buildings in his initial contract, so Marchand has really saved only four. Another thirty-seven have been sold to private wrecking contractors, and those demolitions carry on. TV cameras capture the ensuing marches, confrontations, and demonstrations.
- **Sept. 15** – POP hosts a moving-out party for Ernie and Edna Mae Carruthers, whose farmhouse and barn are next in line for demolition. Using the party as cover, three POP women climb in a window and occupy the vacated farmhouse to prevent its destruction. Their actions attract Canada-wide media coverage. They will stay put for 11 days, and their protest will become known as The Last Stand.
- **Sept. 18** – Ontario re-elects a Conservative government, although a minority one. POP’s chairman, Dr Charles Godfrey, easily wins an NDP seat in Durham West.
- **Sept. 24** – Ontario announces its formal withdrawal from the airport agreement, saying it will not provide infrastructure for an airport whose need is unproven and whose full costs are unknown. Davis cites “negative information” as well as his displeasure over Ottawa’s demolishing of houses when no deal has been struck.
- **Sept. 25** – In response, a furious federal government shelves the airport plan “for at least two or three years,” according to Marchand, blaming Ontario’s unwillingness to cooperate. He says he believes the airport will still be needed by 1979 or 1980 despite recent declines in air passenger growth. And Prime Minister Trudeau says, misleadingly and petulantly, that he’ll be happy to send “the \$400 million slated for Pickering” elsewhere. The three POP woman open the doors to the Carruthers house, and some 200 POP members descend on the farmhouse to toast them and Charles Godfrey, and to celebrate their stunning victory.

“I’m thrilled; I’m incoherent with delight.”

~ Isobel Thompson, active member of POP (*Toronto Star*, September 26, 1975)

- **Sept. 26** – In the cold light of day, the fact remains that hundreds of properties have been expropriated and many family homes, barns, and heritage structures have been razed. Ottawa has announced that it will keep the land.

“The snake has to be killed seven times.

I have an inborn suspicion of anything federal. I don’t trust them one centimetre.”

~ Dr Charles Godfrey, POP president and spokesman (*Toronto Star*, September 26, 1975)

- **Oct. 5** – Mirabel: Phase 1 of the airport, nearing completion but late and massively over budget, is officially opened by Prime Minister Trudeau, who says that Torontonians will soon be “on their knees” and begging for a second airport. The high-profile opening is largely a face-saver. Planes won’t be able to land at Mirabel for another two months.

Revised 1 August 2023