

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, aside from its proximity to Toronto.
- According to reports, the airport will cost \$300 million and the new city, immediately south of 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.
- Amid the watercourses and patches of woodlands, there are 126 working farms on the proposed airport site. There are three hamlets: Altona, Brougham, and Green River. The site marked out for Cedarwood is almost entirely agricultural. The agricultural land on the sites is Class 1, the rarest and best soil there is.
- Local reactions to the announcements are mixed. For instance, among the residents of Claremont, on the northeast border of the airport site, resignation is the predominant response. Brougham, on the other hand, is angry and gears up 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). They pass a resolution to oppose the airport, then form committees. Hugh J. Miller assumes the role of interim chair (Dr Charles Godfrey will be appointed chair by unanimous acclaim on March 11). **People or Planes** (POP) is born.
- **Mar. 6** – Pickering Township unanimously passes a resolution opposing a second international airport “at Claremont” in Pickering.

- According to federal officials, the airport is slated to open in late 1978 or early 1979. The federal and provincial governments have set a target of two to three years to acquire all properties on the two sites. Local municipal politicians are unable to get clear responses to their many questions.
- **Mar. 7** – A thousand citizens crowd into Brougham Hall and the main floor and basement of the nearby United Church (connected by two-way radio speakers) for the first public meeting. In his opening speech, Dr Godfrey says: “This will be the longest, hardest fight you have ever been in. We are taking on two governments.”
- **Mar. 17** – More than a thousand concerned residents pack the gym of a local high school to learn more from now-Chair Godfrey; Norm Cafik, Liberal MP of Ontario riding; Bill Newman, Ontario Conservative MP for Ontario South; and Clark Muirhead, an Uxbridge councillor and aeronautical engineer (who tells the crowd that Malton could easily handle any additional traffic into the foreseeable future).
- **Mar. 19** – POP retains a leading Toronto trial lawyer, J. J. Robinette, to help residents fight the airport.
- **Mar. 23** – Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, during a Q&A session at Stephen Leacock Collegiate Institute in Scarborough, answers Dr Godfrey’s questions this way: “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.” Godfrey finds this encouraging, being the first time that anyone in a senior position has said that the airport can be stopped. (Premier Davis is later quoted as saying that he finds Trudeau’s suggestion doubtful.) Trudeau is also more forthcoming than Transport Canada, explaining that “we seriously considered all the alternatives [...] it was the least bad of all choices, I suppose,” adding “It’s not out of malice or pressure from our members of Parliament that we decided to spend \$300 million on an airport. It’s because there has been a really strong demand from the whole Toronto area to build such an airport.” He also said that area MPs had been lobbying him “for a long time for a second airport, but not near their own ridings.” At a subsequent Q&A event he jokes that as a Montrealer he doesn’t think Toronto needs a second airport but is just “keeping up with the Joneses.”
- **Apr. 4** – At a public information meeting in Claremont of some 300 or 500 people (reports differ), members of POP (People or Planes) and members of POW (Progress over Welfare) nearly come to blows over their divergent positions on the airport. POP wins a no-airport vote by a 10-1 margin.
- **Apr. 14** – Provincial Treasurer Darcy McKeough admits that the Province hadn’t studied the need for a second airport. He and Premier Bill Davis had repeatedly said in recent weeks that the decision was purely a federal one, and that the Province was involved solely in the airport’s location.
- **Apr. 18** – Premier Davis rejects opposition demands for an inquiry into whether the airport is necessary. This time, he claims that Ottawa is responsible for determining need for an airport and where it will be built, whereas Ontario’s only role is to provide services such as sewerage. He also refuses to make provincial studies on the project available to the public.
- Since the announcements, media coverage has been non-stop, and largely critical of the airport and Cedarwood plans. As summed up by a *Globe and Mail* editorial:

“It has taken more than three years for the Ontario government to admit that those long negotiations with Ottawa on a new international airport for Toronto weren’t about an airport at all. They were about location. Queen’s Park evidently knew nothing, asked nothing, about airport plans and use.

Ottawa bought a location. [...] The Province has an airport site but not really just where it wanted it. Ottawa has chosen the site, but not where the federal Government wanted it. The people of Pickering have an airport site and they don’t want it.”

- **Apr. 24** – Stephen Lewis, Ontario’s NDP leader, airs doubts as to the need for a new airport, and backs the residents who are 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%. These results will prompt a screaming headline in the May 18 issue of POP’s newspaper, asking: “Trudeau, will he keep his word?” He doesn’t.

April, May, June – POP meets with federal and provincial ministers and, meanwhile, issues a barrage of media releases and stays in the public eye with highly creative 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. He also says, “The inquiry will not have power to stop the airport.”
- **Sept. 6** – Expropriation notices start going out to residents, who are also being warned by POP and others to beware of land speculators.
- **Oct.** – Copp Clark publishes *People or Planes*, by Charles Godfrey and Hector Massey – a small book with a big and distressing story to tell, recording what happened in north Pickering in 1972 and calling for the airport decision to be rescinded. Its preface:

This is a book about Pickering, an historic southern Ontario community now living under the sentence of death. It is a protest against what many Canadians believe to be an unfair decision, and an appeal by the condemned to Canadian public opinion. In the course of human events there are times when a beleaguered people must stand up and be heard or be forever silent. Such is the feeling of large numbers of people battling against the site chosen for Toronto’s second international airport.

- **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, which 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 – but 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 explain to its members how Ottawa has misled Ontario on the airport file.
- **Apr. 30** – While the Ontario Minister of Transport, John Rhodes, is in Ottawa trying (unsuccessfully) to get satisfactory answers from Minister 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** – PM 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 latest 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 women 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.

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