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# ***1. The Future of the Toronto Island Airport***

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This chapter examines the Toronto Island Airport (TIA) from its inception to the present, as it relates to the Toronto waterfront and as guiding principles, outlined elsewhere in this report, affect its operations. First, significant events in the Airport's history are highlighted, including the introduction of scheduled passenger service in the 1970s and Short Take-off and Landing (STOL) aircraft in the '80s, as well as the signing of the 1983 Tripartite Agreement by the City of Toronto, the Toronto Harbour Commissioners (THC), and the federal Minister of Transport.

The second section reviews submissions made by more than 50 deputants who appeared at seven days of hearings devoted to the Airport, which were held by the Royal Commission in January, February, and June 1989; it also assesses the issues raised at those hearings.

The third portion of this chapter has two parts: an analysis of issues examined by the Royal Commission, followed by final recommendations to the Government of Canada regarding the future of the Toronto Island Airport and related transportation services. Among the factors taken into consideration are the Airport's location on the waterfront, the needs of the travelling public and those of airline and aircraft operators, the effect of the Airport on the surrounding environment, and the comments made at the hearings.

## **1. Background**

The Toronto waterfront has played a part in Canadian aviation since 1909, when the first amphibious aircraft landed in the Toronto harbour. By the 1920s, use of the Toronto waterfront for commercial aviation was being seriously considered and, in 1937, the City approved construction of two municipal airports, one of which would be located on the Toronto Islands, the other at Malton. The

Toronto Harbour Commissioners were asked to manage the construction and operation of both airports.

The Toronto Island Airport, originally called Port George VI, is located approximately 2.4 kilometres (1.5 miles) southwest of the City centre and is served by a ferry with a terminus on the mainland at the foot of Bathurst Street, south of the intersection of Bathurst and Lakeshore Boulevard.

In the years after World War II, Malton (renamed Lester B. Pearson International Airport in the early 1980s) became the principal passenger airport for Toronto, while the Island Airport was used mainly for training, light private, and commercial aircraft.

In 1957, the City transferred ownership of Malton to the federal Department of Transport, in return for construction of airport facilities at TIA.

By 1967, TIA had become the fourth busiest airport in Canada, logging 240,000 flights; but only nine years later air traffic had decreased by 24 per cent. In 1971, Central Airways, a fixed base operator (FBO) at TIA, owned or leased 26 single-engine aircraft and employed about 30 people. It ran a flight training school and air charter service, and rented aircraft.

For a decade beginning in 1974, Air Atonabee offered scheduled passenger service from the Island Airport, using Canadian-built Saunders ST 27 aircraft; by 1984, it was carrying 25,000 passengers annually.

The Island Airport's operations were generally unprofitable and, in 1974, the federal government agreed to the Toronto Harbour Commissioners' request for a subsidy, subject to intergovernmental agreement on the future of the facility. In March of that year, the Joint Committee-Toronto Island Airport was convened with representatives from the federal, provincial, Metro, and City governments, as well as from local community organizations.



The Toronto Island Airport Intergovernmental Staff Forum (ISF) was established in 1975 to provide technical assistance to the Joint Committee and to evaluate alternative uses for the Airport site. After considering various possibilities, the ISF evaluated three in detail: a) using Airport lands for general aviation only; b) using them for general aviation and limited (Dash 7) STOL service; or c) phasing out the Airport and replacing it with recreational uses, with or without housing.

When the ISF tabled its findings in March 1977, the federal, provincial, and Metro governments favoured the general aviation/STOL option, while the City wanted general aviation only. Further discussions did nothing to bring the groups closer to a resolution of the matter.

Between February 1980 and March 1981, the Canadian Transport Commission (CTC), an independent body established to advise the federal Minister of Transport on the licensing of commercial air services, decided not to allow the operation of STOL services at TIA — both because the City opposed it and because Transport Canada was not committed to upgrading TIA.

The matter of the Airport's future remained a local issue until Toronto's City Council recommended in 1981 that a proposal by the Mayor be accepted; under it an agreement would be reached with the federal government and the THC to develop the Airport for general aviation and limited commercial STOL services — provided that the City's waterfront objectives could be protected.

In 1981, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the federal Department of Transport, the City of Toronto, and the THC, detailing conditions under which a limited STOL passenger service could be established at the Airport; in 1982, the CTC issued a licence to City Center Airways to operate a commercial STOL service between Toronto Island, Ottawa/Hull, and Montreal/Victoria STOLports, using deHavilland Dash 7 aircraft.

On 30 June 1983, a 50-year Tripartite Agreement, which superseded the MOU, was signed by the City, the THC, and the Department of Transport, providing for continued use of City land at TIA for a public airport for general aviation and limited commercial STOL service. Under the Agreement, jet-powered flights are banned except for medical evacuations, emergencies, and flights during the Canadian National Exhibition Air Show. Aircraft movements are limited to ensure that the actual 28 NEF noise contour is respected and contained within the boundary of the official 25 NEF contour for 1990. (See page 29 for a further explanation of noise standards.) The agreement was amended in July 1985 to permit operation of the deHavilland Dash 8 aircraft at TIA.

In 1984, Air Atonabee, a small airline serving Toronto Island, was acquired and renamed City Express. Its operating base moved from Peterborough to the Island Airport, where it has continued to provide scheduled passenger services. Its business grew rapidly: in 1987 City Express carried 350,000 passengers, more than 10 times the number Air Atonabee had flown only three years earlier. The airline now serves Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, London, and Newark, New Jersey.

### **A. Toronto Airport System**

For the Commission's purposes, the Toronto airport system is defined as comprising Pearson International, the Toronto Island, Buttonville, and Downsview airports. There are also facilities in Hamilton, Oshawa, and Barrie, and the potential for an airport at Pickering, but they are not part of this analysis. Of those examined, only Pearson International and Toronto Island have scheduled operations; Buttonville Airport occasionally accommodates scheduled passenger services.

## **Lester B. Pearson International Airport**

The two Toronto airports with significant passenger traffic are Pearson International and Toronto Island Airport. In 1987, Pearson had 314,000 flights, TIA 198,000; more than half of those at TIA were local, while the majority at Pearson were itinerant (i.e., travelling from one city airport to another).

## **Buttonville Airport**

Buttonville Airport, owned by Toronto Airways Ltd., is used primarily for general aviation and is currently the base for approximately 340 aircraft. Its main runway is adequate for short-distance commuter operations using small aircraft.

In 1987, Buttonville was the eighth busiest airport in Canada but generated revenues of only \$2.4 million. In the past five years, it has accumulated losses of nearly \$600,000 but, as a private facility, is ineligible for government subsidies.

The site is said to have a value of more than \$120 million, raising the possibility that it could be redeveloped for other land uses; if the airport is closed, some traffic will likely move to TIA. The current owner has asked the federal government to purchase the lands if it wishes to retain the facility as an airport.

## **Downsview Airport**

Downsview Airport is used primarily by deHavilland Aircraft Company of Canada and by military helicopters. It was examined in the 1977 Toronto Island Study Program as a possible STOLport but eventually ruled out because of Downsview's proximity to Pearson International. Part of the original airport has recently been designated by the federal government as a housing site.

## **Toronto Island Airport**

The majority of the scheduled aircraft operating at Toronto Island Airport are turboprops, which are generally slower

than turbojets — a significant disadvantage on routes of 322 kilometres (200 miles) or longer. However, because of the Airport's closer proximity to downtown Toronto's business district, turboprops operating from TIA can compete over longer distances with turbojets operating from Pearson.

Of the Airport's three runways, two are approximately 914 metres (3,000 feet) in length, and the third is 1,219 metres (4,000 feet). The longest runway is capable of handling turboprop aircraft carrying up to about 50 passengers over distances in the 300-to-400 nautical mile range, or one-and-a-half to two hours flight time. Small passenger jet aircraft, such as the British Aerospace Inc. BAe 146 can also operate over similar distances with reduced loads.

The largest aircraft now operating from the Island Airport is the 50-seat Dash 7, which competes with jets on routes of up to approximately 480 kilometres (300 miles). Recent studies have suggested the Airport's ability to handle between 800,000 and 1.2 million passengers annually in its existing role.

## B. Access to the Island Airport

### Ferry Service

Because of the Western Channel, which separates the mainland from the Toronto Islands, surface access to the Airport since it opened in 1939 has been by passenger and vehicle ferries. The first vessel was a cable ferry that pulled itself across the Channel along a steel cable, the ends of which were fastened to the retaining walls on either side of the Western Gap. In 1963 that vessel was replaced with a nine-passenger tug operated by the Toronto Harbour Commissioners. A separate City Parks Department vessel was used to transport freight.

In 1964 the THC purchased the *Maple City*, a ferry with a capacity for 100 passengers and four automobiles. The vessel continues to provide the main access to the Airport from a



landside slip at the foot of Bathurst Street. Its 100-passenger limit is set by federal marine regulations. The *Maple City* makes four round trips every hour the Airport is in operation.

In 1987, the ferry carried 800,000 passengers and 37,600 vehicles. Concern has been expressed regarding its continued use, particularly because of its age and condition.

*Windmill Point*, *Maple City*'s sister vessel, has the same capacity and provides service when the latter is undergoing emergency repairs or routine maintenance.

Commercial parking space for approximately 125 vehicles is provided on the mainland by the Toronto Harbour Commissioners. The lot was recently relocated to a site immediately east of the ferry slip and is heavily utilized by passengers and Airport employees.

### **Access Improvement Studies**

Improved surface access to TIA has been the subject of many formal and informal studies, including the 1965 Atkins Hatch Study, the 1977 Metropolitan Toronto Planning Department Study, the 1982 Access Study Group Report, the 1982 City Center Airways Proposal, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation Proposal, and the 1985 City Express Access Study. These reports are summarized in the Royal Commission's publication number 7, *The Future of the Toronto Island Airport: The Issues*.

The studies present many options for access to the Airport, including improved ferry service, a pedestrian and/or service tunnel, and a bridge over the Western Channel. To date, none of the many recommendations has been implemented because there hasn't been the unanimous agreement needed from all parties involved.

## C. Legislation and Regulations

The Island Airport is a certified public-use airport operated by the THC. The design, operation, security, safety, and inspection of airport facilities are governed by the *Aeronautics Act, 1970*. The Canadian Transport Commission is responsible for awarding routes and for licensing air carriers in Canada. Subsequent to the Tripartite Agreement, the Canadian Transport Commission was reconstituted as the National Transportation Agency (NTA) in 1987.

The operation of the ferry to the Airport is governed by the *Canada Shipping Act, R.S.1985*. Regulation of land use near the Airport is the responsibility of the City of Toronto. The policies of the provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs on compatible uses are contained in its document *Land Use Policy near Airports*; the Ontario Ministry of Housing regulates noise insulation provisions in nearby buildings.

The various zoning agreements and regulations controlling land use near the Island Airport include the Tripartite Agreement, Registered Airport Zoning, the Official Plan for Metropolitan Toronto (currently under review), City of Toronto Zoning By-law 20623, and the City of Toronto Official Plan (which is slated to be reviewed and updated).

The existing TIA terminal building has been designated as a significant architectural structure, which ensures its preservation under the *Ontario Heritage Act, 1986*, as well as under the Tripartite Agreement.

The 1983 Tripartite Agreement defines the role of the Airport as being primarily for general aviation and limited commercial STOL service. Under this Agreement, fixed-link access in the form of a vehicular tunnel, bridge or causeway is not permitted.

