



# TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

(formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

*Advocating for Sustainable Public and Freight Transportation*

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Ms. Jennifer O'Connell,  
Member of Parliament: Pickering-Uxbridge  
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Via e-mail: jennifer.oconnell@parl.gc.ca

Dear Ms. O'Connell,

## A high-performance passenger rail option to Pickering airport.

Transport Action Ontario (TAO), a long-standing, not-for-profit advocacy group for rail-based transportation, has been a significant voice in questioning the need for, and desirability of, a new international airport in Pickering. Our position, based on environmental, social and land-use optimisation arguments, has been consistent over the life of this project. These arguments have generally mirrored and expanded the very valid concerns of other community and advocacy groups.

Recently, climate-change and social equity issues have escalated in discussions of public transportation investments, but they have yet to penetrate considerations of airport expansion and construction. It is TAO's position that the drivers of any new transportation investment must transcend standard facile economic and political groundings to include the maximum utility for all stakeholders. Recent statements by both federal and provincial governments appear to support this view.

Airports are vital for long-distance travel but the absence of federal and provincial transportation policy has allowed them to encroach on the realm of shorter-distance travel. In addition, there appears to be a belief that more airports equal more low-cost low-fare airlines, a reality that never arrives as the list of defunct Canadian airlines attests. More to the point, air travel has an enormously high carbon footprint per passenger kilometre. The carbon reduction agreement COP21 signed in Paris by Canada, as well as the carbon costs and constraints now recognized and being countered by governments in Canada, are in direct conflict with the laissez-faire approach to forever airport expansion. Air travel is not an insignificant part of carbon

emissions from the transportation sector of the economy.

Southern Ontario's airport inventory is already adequate but its overall efficiency is poor. Underutilised facilities in Hamilton, London and to a lesser extent Waterloo have the potential to accept more traffic without the disruption and environmental trade-offs posed by a new development at Pickering. These airports are also close to the population centre of the GTHA. A similar argument can be made for planned expansion at Pearson. Higher utilisation of existing airports by connecting them with high-performance passenger rail and transit would also provide greater distribution of economic opportunity and activity outside the GTHA and its immediate hinterlands, at much lower cost.

TAO's position, previously communicated to the federal Minister of Transport, calls for expansion and modernisation of the Montreal-Windsor rail corridor to substantially raise its public utility as both an intercity and inter-community transportation option. If executed properly it can connect existing airports in southern Ontario and Quebec to stimulate better utilisation while offering intermediate stopping points unachievable with short-haul air travel. This would be very beneficial to the communities on the eastern periphery of the GTHA by providing fast access to longer-haul flights while avoiding congestion, high parking fees and the loss of valuable agricultural land and green belt. Given that high-performance passenger rail has a carbon footprint per passenger/km up to 20 times lower than short-haul flights, it makes sense for enhanced personal mobility and the environment to invest in this mode of transport now. We can provide you with our submissions to the federal Transport Minister Marc Garneau, on request.

Our call is for a public/private upgrade of the existing CN and CP Lakeshore corridors to enhance the competitiveness of rail freight while providing passenger service of sufficient intensity to re-establish its role as a viable transportation option for both inter-community and intercity travel. In general, we do not support VIA Rail's concept of a new, dedicated passenger route between Toronto, Peterborough, Havelock and Smiths Falls on the grounds of cost, constructability and claims of short-term profitability. All modes of transportation require a public and environmental subsidy, whether obvious or obscure. The Lakeshore corridor with its cities is the obvious choice for passenger rail intensification.

Here is an analogy and vision to consider regarding the corridor Windsor to Montreal including Niagara Falls and Ottawa. We are all familiar with the popularity of GO Transit's Lakeshore rail service between Hamilton and Oshawa. What if this kind of high frequency passenger train service were applied to the network the full length of the corridors passing through southern Ontario? The addition of this service, familiar to many similar regions in other industrialized countries around the world, is advocated by TAO. The utility of the rail advantage is that it would be part of a more robust, integrated and balanced transportation system that is required if southern Ontario is to remain globally competitive with a sustainable quality of life. Such a system must be easily accessible by travellers of all ages and needs, at reasonable cost. It would help meet stated federal and provincial environmental objectives while enhancing social inclusiveness and economic opportunity.

Ms. O'Connell, TAO remains adamant that Ontario and Canada should not repeat the past mistakes of myopic and special-interest decision making. They embed high social cost and substandard public utility. Federal and provincial policies on issues such as public transportation must, therefore, demonstrate best value while avoiding hypocrisy.

If we can assist you on the Pickering airport file by emphasizing a better-option alternative in the form of enhanced passenger rail and its integration with other transportation modes, please let us know.

Sincerely,

***Ken Westcar***

Kenneth Westcar

Board Member: Transport Action Ontario