Toronto City Centre Airport – Chronology and Planning Issues Summary

Explanatory Notes:

The following is a chronology of events, decisions, issues and policies related to the history of the Toronto island airport, summarized by City Planning staff.

The number in brackets following each item is a cross-reference to the Bibliography.

1928

The City Board of Control asked the Harbour Board to report "on developing the West Island Sand Bar for a seaplane, flying boat, and amphibian airplane base". (8)

1937

The Harbour Commissioner agreed that "two airports should be built: a major one on the Island site and an auxiliary one at Malton". (8)

1939

Toronto City Centre Airport opened as the Port George VI Airport. (26)

1953

A traffic control system was installed at the airport to accommodate the increase of business training flights. This was updated in 1960 when a radio control system was installed. (8)

1957

The City transferred the ownership of Malton Airport to the Federal Government, which assumed the responsibility for it in exchange for providing improvements to the Island Airport, including a new 4,000-foot (1,220 metre) runway, the installation of navigation and landing systems, and lights to assist night flying. An airport ferry to the island was also put into service. (34)

1961

The improvements referenced above were implemented. They involved extending the site by adding landfill on the east and west extremities of the island, constructing the 4,000-foot (1,220 metre) runway, and a system of paved taxiways. A new twin-bay hangar was built at the same time, and the lighting to assist night flying was added. (8)

An agreement was struck between the City of Toronto and the Toronto Harbour Commissioners which included a 21-year lease for the City owned portion of the airport lands. This permitted the area to be used by the Harbour Commission for airport purposes. The agreement stipulated that if the lands ceased to be used for airport purposes, the City could request termination of the lease, the Toronto Harbour Commission would have to convey the lands they owned to the City, and the City could then use the land for park and/or aquatic purposes only. (1)

1967

A study by the Bureau of Municipal Research concluded that there was a need for the general aviation facilities at the Toronto Island Airport. In addition, an Extended STOL (Short Takeoff and Landing) service should be permitted. (11)

1968

A plan entitled "A Conceptual Plan for the Redevelopment of the City of Toronto Waterfront (A Bold Concept)" proposed moving the airport and building a residential development housing 50,000 people on the airport site. This would have required the site to be expanded by the addition of landfill. Due to a variety of issues including technical, political, and financial concerns, the idea was abandoned. (2)

1969

Excerpts from Toronto's Official Plan, Part I, 1969:

- "5.16 It is policy of Council that the Central Harbour be developed with residential, commercial, parks, recreational and public uses. Council will take any necessary steps to encourage the use of land created by filling the Lake adjacent to the Central Harbour for the aforesaid purposes.
- 7.17 Council will support and encourage the extension of the airport or airports as required, to provide adequate air service including the maintenance and improvement of an airport located in the Central Harbour, Toronto Islands, or the Port, or in their vicinity, to serve, the Central Area of the City." (3)

1970

The "Bold Concept" from 1968 was replaced by a proposal from the Provincial Department of Trade and Development that would see 400 acres of the lake filled west of the airport site for residential purposes. The projected population of this proposal was 60,000 people. A further 110 acres were proposed to create a Western Headland park system. (8)

The Joint Committee – Toronto Island Airport, was formed in March 1974 at the request of the Executive Committee to identify the range of possible uses for the Toronto Island Airport and to evaluate each with respect to physical requirements (ground access and on site), air side constraints, social and environmental impacts and sociological problems. The Committee included representation from all three levels of government, the Metro Board of Trade, the Ontario Aviation Council and the Toronto Harbour Commission.

This report also included a review of the issues related to alternative airport sites in Metropolitan Toronto. The issues included:

- 1. data related to demand and the introduction of STOL aircraft;
- 2. a review of noise and pollution, ecological considerations;
- 3. land use opportunities;
- 4. localized urban growth;
- 5. safety related to general travel demand;
- 6. capital costs; and
- 7. ground access.

The evaluation concluded that "in all likelihood, the consequences of closing Toronto Island Airport to aviation users would result in the need to develop an airport with similar facilities in a judicious location." (5 and 6)

1975

The Toronto Island Airport Study Program, developed by the Joint Committee, dated June 26, 1975 was amended to include an initiation of the appropriate City-based studies to determine possible alternative uses of the site. (7)

1976

The "Compatibility of Park and Aviation Uses of the Toronto Islands" report, by DeHavilland Aircraft of Canada Limited, studied parking needs and traffic impact generated by the airport and park uses and concluded that they occurred at different times. Therefore, airport parking could use many of the same spaces as those used for parks purposes, and the peak traffic impacts for each use would occur at different times. If any new parking spaces were created they would benefit both uses. (10)

The Executive Committee of the City of Toronto concluded that a STOL air transportation network for southern Ontario, including the Toronto Island Airport would be inappropriate. (9)

A resolution from City Council to the Federal Minister of Transport reiterated Council's decision that the Provincial government should abandon all further consideration of the Toronto Island Airport as a possible future STOLport. (12)

In its review of the local implications of a STOL network using Dash-7 Aircraft, the Planning Board concluded that the introduction of such aircraft would have unacceptable implications including:

- 1. increased use by corporate jets;
- 2. unacceptable noise impacts on recreational, residential uses, and wildlife in the area; and
- 3. increased passenger volumes that could approach those at large commercial airports.

The "Toronto Island Airport Study Program: Conclusions and Recommendations Report" from the City of Toronto Commissioner of Planning, examined alternatives for the airport site if STOL aircraft were not permitted at the airport. The options included continuing the use of the airport for general aviation, or closing the airport and using the land for parkland or a pedestrian community with parkland.

The report concluded that the city-wide need for parks and housing was not great enough at that time to warrant displacing the general aviation uses but that the need should be reviewed in the future. In addition, the report recommended that general aviation use should only continue, without a lengthening of the runways or the construction of new runways. The study also concluded that the largest benefit of closing the airport and constructing a pedestrian community and parkland was the financial benefit to the City of leasing the land.

The study also noted that the wet meadow and dune area of the Airport should be declared an environmentally sensitive area and protected, and the south-west beach should be made accessible to the public.

The report also studied how to improve access to the airport including the benefits and drawbacks of a bridge, a tunnel, and improved ferry service. The recommendation was not to support a bridge or a tunnel to the airport. (13)

1979

On June 11, 1979, City Council passed By-law 505-79 which implemented Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 115 which replaced Section 5.7.17 of the Official Plan. This OPA allowed the use of the Toronto Island Airport Lands for parks or parks and housing or general aviation purposes, and discouraged the use of the Toronto Island Airport for high frequency regularly scheduled passenger services. It encouraged the continued use of the Toronto Island Airport for general aviation as long as the lease for the lands contained conditions for termination that included the following: the extension of the runways; the introduction of jet powered aircraft or aircraft with excessive noise levels; and the construction of a bridge or vehicular tunnel access. A further condition was that the Minister of Transport of the Government of Canada consent to the conversion of the lands for parks or parks and housing purposes, in the event that the land was not used for an airport, a position supported by City Council. (14)

1980

The Ontario Ministry of Housing refused the aforementioned amendment to the Official Plan on October 10, 1980, citing conflict with Provincial Policy which supported the establishment of a scheduled air service from the Toronto Island Airport. (39)

1981

City of Toronto Official Plan (1981) excerpts:

Section 7 – Transportation

"7.17 Airports

Council will support and encourage the extension of the airport or airports as required, to provide adequate air service including the maintenance and improvement of an airport located in the *Central Harbour*, *Toronto Islands*, or the *Port*, or in their vicinity, to serve the *Central Area* of the City." (15)

A proposal on the future of the airport was proposed by Mayor Art Eggleton called for an agreement between the City, the Federal government and the Toronto Harbour Commission. The proposal to allow general aviation and limited commercial STOL services was adopted by City Council. It was conditional on the City's waterfront objectives being protected.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Toronto Harbour Commission, the City of Toronto and Transport Canada, detailing the conditions under which a limited STOL passenger service could be established at the Island Airport. This Memorandum of Understanding MOU was replaced by the 1983 Tri-Partite agreement. (34)

1983

The Commissioner of Planning reported to the Toronto Executive Committee on legal agreements concerning the Toronto Island Airport. These agreements contained a general provision that "the Airport operator is forbidden to do or permit anything that would constitute a nuisance to the surrounding area" which included maintaining the City lands "in a sanitary and reasonably clean condition" and the prohibition of water pollution. The prohibition of jets and excessively noisy jets was maintained as was the prohibition of enlarging the airport site or lengthening the runways. (16)

The Tri-Partite Agreement governing the airport was signed by the City of Toronto, the Federal Government and the Toronto Harbour Commission. This Agreement contained key conditions including the imposition of strict noise controls on flights to and from the airport, a ban on jet aircraft, and the acknowledgment that runways are not to be extended nor a fixed link built to connect the airport and the mainland. (27)

Scheduled commuter air service began at the Toronto Island Airport. (17)

1985

The Tri-Partite Agreement was amended to permit the operation of DeHavilland Dash 8 aircraft from the Toronto Island Airport. (34)

1988

By 1988, aviation activity had increased to the point that the noise limits cited in the Tri-Partite Agreement were "close to being reached". (17)

In response to the signing of the 1983 Tri-Partite Agreement concerning the Toronto Island Airport, the following amendments were made to the Official Plan as contained in the Central Waterfront Official Plan Amendment (#463 to the Part I Plan, By-law 527-88):

"5A.62 Toronto Island Airport Lands

It is the policy of Council that the *Toronto Island Airport Lands*, with the exception of the *Airport parklands*, shall be used in accordance with the provision of the lease agreement dated June 30, 1983 between the City, the Toronto Harbour Commissioners and the Government of Canada respecting the *Toronto Island Airport Lands* for aviation purposes and uses incidental and accessory thereto, and that the *Airport Parklands* shall be used for parks purposes; and

5A.63 In the event that the airport located on the *Toronto Island Airport Lands* is closed, it is the policy of Council to seek the immediate conversion of the *Toronto Island Airport Lands* for *parks* or *parks* and *residential* purposes, and uses incidental and accessory thereto."

These amendments were adopted by City Council in July 1988. As Provincial approval had not been attained at the time of the completion of Cityplan (the Official Plan), the amendments were included in the 1994 Official Plan with modifications. (18)

The "Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront" prepared a report entitled, "The Future of the Toronto Island Airport: The Issues" which focused on matters involving the airport and related transportation services, and developed strategic options to deal with aviation needs, the needs of the travelling public and the overall interests of all user of Toronto's waterfront.

The report was broken into 3 sections:

- 1. the airport history, noting significant stages of development;
- 2. a review of the submissions of some 50 deputants who appeared before the Commission during public hearings; and
- 3. a broad description of a number of approaches that could be used when making decisions regarding the airport. (19)

1990

A second report of the Royal Commission recommended that the airport should continue in its existing role (general aviation) and should limit commercial passenger traffic as governed by the Tri-Partite Agreement. The Commission rejected the view that the airport should be closed immediately, or expanded, and it agreed with the prohibition on jets and the construction of a fixed link. (20)

1991

In a study commissioned by the City of Toronto entitled "Toronto Island Airport Study", the potential impacts of various levels of airport development and commuter air service on the surrounding area particularly with respect to adjacent parkland and residential communities were raised. In response to these concerns, the following were studied.

- 1. noise levels;
- 2. air quality;
- 3. road traffic;
- 4. car parking;
- 5. ferry access;
- 6. passenger processing;
- 7. safety;
- 8. wildlife impacts; and
- 9. economic impacts. (21)

1993

In a report entitled "Intergovernmental Staff Committee Study of Alternative Access Options to the Island Airport for Emergency Services" it was identified that there was inadequate access to the Toronto City Centre Airport for emergency response vehicles. (22)

1994

City of Toronto Official Plan (1994) excerpts:

"S.14.48 Continued Use of the Toronto Island Airport

Council will support the continued use, for aviation purposes, of the airport on the *Toronto Island Airport Lands*, including protection of existing flight paths to and from the airport subject to Section 14.49 of this Plan.

S.14.49 Use in Accordance with the Lease Agreement

It is the policy of Council that the airport on the Toronto Island Airport Lands exclusive of the Environmentally Sensitive Area on the west side of the airport, shall be used in accordance with the provisions of the lease agreement among the City, the Toronto Harbour Commissioners and the Government of Canada respecting the use of the airport for aviation purposes and uses incidental and accessory thereto. Council may agree to revisions to the provisions of the lease agreement if it is satisfied that improvements to airport facilities and operations can be made without adverse impact on the surrounding residential and recreational environments.

In the event that the airport on *Toronto Island Airport Lands* is closed, it is the policy of Council to seek the immediate conversion of the lands on which the airport is located for *parks*, or *parks* and *residential* purposes, and uses incidental and accessory thereto." (23)

1995

The "Toronto City Centre Airport Viability Study" commissioned by the Toronto Harbour Commissioners indicated that certain constraints contained in the Tri-Partite Agreement should be relaxed to allow jet powered and other aircraft that conformed to the accepted noise emission standards. In addition, a fixed link to the mainland should be permitted, and if these changes were made, then the economic viability of the airport would be assured. (24)

In October 1995, the City of Toronto, the Federal Government and the Toronto Harbour Commissioners agreed to amend the Tri-Partite Agreement to permit the construction of a fixed link to the airport, subject to an Environment Assessment. (26)

The proceedings of the "Toronto's City Centre Airport: What is its future role?" conference included discussion of the following issues: the economic viability of the

airport, the options for a fixed link, to desire to restrict the runway length to its existing length, and the environmental impacts of the airport (including noise, pollution, impacts on flora and fauna). (25)

1996

Transport Canada, Public Works and Government Services Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada began to work with the then Toronto Harbour Commission to initiate the Environmental Assessment (Environmental Assessment) process for the fixed link, including the public consultation process. (30)

1997

A report entitled "Final Evaluation of Alternatives for a Fixed Link to the Toronto City Centre Airport" documented that the preferred alternative was "a twin leaf" drawbridge to be located at the foot of Bathurst Street. (30)

1998

City Council adopted a report by a Special Joint Committee of the City of Toronto on September 18, 1998. The report recommended a more complete assessment of the future role of the City Centre Airport and the means by which airport activities could be balanced with the other activities and uses in the waterfront area.

The report identified that the determination of the appropriate form of access to the airport required examination of matters not usually associated with land use planning including those related to the organizational and financial elements of the airport. The report also indicated that the airport's role in the vision for the City and its compatibility with other uses needed to be assessed.

Both the Fire Chief and the General Manager of Ambulance Services were concerned with the adequacy of crash rescue equipment and staff at the airport, and as a result, it was recommended that the capability of the bridge, tunnel and ferry to respond to an emergency be reassessed.

In addition, technological advances resulting in improved aircraft noise performance allowed Council to agree, in principle, to broaden the types of Type III turbo-prop aircraft that could use the airport.

The Toronto Harbour Commissioners considered the City Centre Airport to have the potential for many benefits including a stronger financial position; a strengthened downtown economy; and a bolstering of the City's Olympic bid. At the time of this report, however, the Toronto Harbour Commissioners saw the airport as "a lost economic opportunity." Only one airline, Air Ontario (a subsidiary of Air Canada), operated scheduled passenger service from the City Centre Airport and it was felt that increasing the number of passengers using the airport would help it become financially viable.

The report concluded that there was a need for a balanced approach to any expansion to the City Centre Airport in order to avoid conflict between the many diverse users of the island in attempting to generate additional income. (27)

1999

Based on the previous report recommending a bridge at the foot of Bathurst Street, the Toronto Port Authority (formerly the Toronto Harbour Commission) began detailed design of a bridge at that location.

The Toronto Port Authority concentrated on various aspects of the fixed link bridge project including a significant public consultation process. During the public consultation process a variety of issues were raised including the following:

- 1. noise and air quality impacts of the airport;
- 2. increase traffic volumes and idling vehicles around Eireann Quay;
- 3. impact of a fixed link on boating in the vicinity of the Western Gap;
- 4. affect of a fixed link on potential development in the area; and
- 5. details of a fixed link with respect to landscaping, structural integrity of the dockwall, lighting, traffic management.

The Environmental Assessment Addendum Report contained a further assessment of boating and related issues identified by the Canadian Coast Guard.

Transport Canada, Public Works and Government Services Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, determined that under subsection 20(1) of Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, the project was not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects provided all identified mitigation measures were implemented. (30)

2002

In October the Toronto Port Authority introduced a plan for the Toronto City Centre Airport. The plan included a design concept for a bridge, a new passenger terminal, a comprehensive business plan and an agreement with a second regional carrier (RegCo). The introduction of the second regional carrier did not require the extension of the runways or the use of jets. (34)

City Council at its meeting of November 26, 27, 28, 29 adopted Joint Report No. 2 (Clause 2) of the Planning and Transportation Committee and the Economic Development and Parks Committee which included a recommendation to "support expansion to the Toronto City Centre Airport to a maximum cap of aircraft movements as allowed under the NEF 25 contour, and authorize the Toronto Port Authority (TPA) to construct the fixed link..." The recommendation was subject to the Tri-Partite Agreement being amended and the securing of a number of conditions. (29) At the same time as the Environmental Assessment process was evolving the Chief Administrative Officer produced a discussion paper for the Waterfront Reference Group that included the following recommendations:

- 1. "Council recognize both the value of a regional carrier to Toronto's economic well-being, regional transportation infrastructure and delivery of emergency services, and the importance of maintaining an effective balance that achieves the proposed objectives of the Central Waterfront Secondary Plan for residential, cultural and employment revitalization."
- 2. A request for additional information concerning:
 - a. "a comprehensive set of measures to mitigate the environmental and health effects of any enhancement to Toronto City Centre Airport"; and
 - b. The results of a traffic management study that updates the impacts of Toronto City Centre Airport expansion, as well as a fixed link, on the Bathurst Quay and Harbour Front neighbourhoods;
- 3. A request for a new noise study be undertaken prior to City Council making a final decision on the expansion plans for the Toronto City Centre Airport; and
- 4. A request that the TPA consider an enhanced public transit service (LRT) directly to Toronto City Centre Airport. (29)

2003

In the "Proposed fixed link bridge to the Toronto City Centre Airport: Final Environmental Assessment Screening Report" the following issues noted as being points of discussion through the process:

- 1. potential disruption to boating activity;
- 2. potential increase of traffic along Bathurst Street;
- 3. associated pollution, access and safety concerns;
- 4. potential Toronto City Centre Airport aircraft related impacts; and
- 5. concerns related to the potential expansion of the Toronto City Centre Airport. (30)

The Environmental Protection Plan Implementation Measures coming out of that study included mitigation measures regarding:

- 1. erosion control;
- 2. terrestrial environmental protection;
- 3. aquatic environment protection;
- 4. a public safety and construction site management plan;
- 5. measures to minimize impacts on boating community;
- 6. the operation of the proposed fixed link bridge, public access to the waterfront including boating use of the channel, community impacts, natural environment impacts;

- 7. monitoring and follow-up measures; and
- 8. contingency measures (30).

At its meeting held on June 23, 24 and 26, 2003, Council received Policy and Finance Committee Report No. 5 (Clause 28) which included approval for the Tri-Partite Amending Agreement substantially in the form attached to the report. The Tri-Partite Amending Agreement reflected the recommendations in the report adopted by Council at its November 2002 meeting. (31)

At a Special Meeting of Council held on December 3, 2003, City Council recommended a re-instatement of the prohibition of a fixed link to the airport. (32)

2005

Current, in-force, Provincial Policy Statement (2005) excerpts:

- "1.6.7 Airports
- 1.6.7.1 Planning for land uses in the vicinity of *airports* shall be undertaken so that:
 - a. the long-term operation and economic role of *airports* is protected; and
 - b. *airports* and *sensitive land uses* are appropriately designed, buffered and/or separated from each other to prevent adverse effects from odour, noise and other contaminants.
- 1.6.7.2 *Airports* shall be protected from incompatible land uses and development by:
 - a. prohibiting new residential *development* and other sensitive land uses in areas near *airports* above 30 NEF/NEP, as set out on maps (as revised from time to time) that have been reviewed by Transport Canada;
 - b. considering redevelopment of existing residential uses and other sensitive land uses or infilling of residential and other sensitive land uses in areas above 30 NEF/NEP only if it has been demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on the long-term function of the *airport*; and
 - c. discouraging land uses which may cause a potential aviation safety hazard."

(The Toronto Island Airport lease states that the noise exposure parameters cannot exceed NEF 25.)

"1.7 Long-Term Economic Prosperity

- 1.7.1 Long-term economic prosperity should be supported by:
 - a. planning so that major facilities (such as airports, transportation/transit/rail infrastructure and corridors, intermodal facilities, sewage treatment facilities, waste management systems, oil and gas pipelines, industries and resource extraction activities) and *sensitive land uses* are appropriately designed, buffered and/or separated from each other to prevent *adverse effects* from odour, noise and other contaminants, and minimize risk to public health and safety." (33)

2006

Current, in-force, Official Plan for the City of Toronto (2006) excerpts:

Land Use Designation for the Toronto City Centre Airport lands: Parks, with a border of Natural Areas

Policy 2.1.1 (h) and (i) identifies Pearson Airport and Union Station as major regional transportation hubs.

Policy 3.4.21 – "Major facilities such as airports, transportation/rail infrastructure, corridors and yards, waste management facilities and industries and sensitive land uses such as residences and educational and health facilities will be appropriately designed, buffered and/or separated from each other to prevent adverse effects from noise, vibration, odour and other contaminants, and to promote safety. To assist in identifying impacts and mitigative measures, the proponent may be required to prepare studies in accordance with guidelines established for this purpose. The proponent will be responsible for implementing any required mitigative measures."

Policy 3.5.1.3 – Discusses the importance of public investment in key infrastructure to ensure competitiveness, and identifies Pearson International Airport. (36)

Site and Area Specific Policies

- "192 Public transit will be provided to the Toronto Islands all year round.
- 194 City Centre Airport Aviation uses are permitted provided that:
 - a) the use will be in accordance with the provisions of the lease arrangement among the City, the Port Authority and the Government of Canada respecting the use of the airport for aviation purposes and uses incidental and accessory thereto;

- b) in the event that the airport on the City Centre Airport is closed, it is the policy to seek the immediate conversion of the lands on which the airport is located for parks, or parks and residential purposes, and uses incidental and accessory thereto; and
- c) further, the continued use of the airport lands for aviation purposes will be supported, exclusive of the environmentally sensitive area on the west side of the airport lands, including protection of the existing flight paths. Revisions to the provisions of the lease agreement may be undertaken, provided that the City is satisfied that improvements to airport facilities and operations can be made without adverse impact on the surrounding residential and recreational environment.
- Bathurst Quay Parking and access facilities for the City Centre Airport Lands are permitted.
- 4 Bathurst StreetA "Ferry Slip" is permitted for the Ferry Services to the City Centre Airport.
- 187 585-659 Queens Quay West and 4, 5 and 10 Bathurst Street Surface parking lots that provide parking for the City Centre Airport are permitted. Such surface parking lots may be replaced by a permanent below grade parking structure containing not more than 400 parking spaces for the City Centre Airport.
- 189 5 Bathurst Street and 585-627 Queens Quay West
 - (iv) the provision of parking for and access to the City Centre Airport".(36)

Current, in-force, Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006) excerpts:

- "2.2.6 Employment Lands
 - a. Municipalities are encouraged to designate and preserve lands within *settlement areas* in the vicinity of existing major highway interchanges, ports, rail yards and airports as areas for manufacturing, warehousing, and associated retail, office and ancillary facilities, where appropriate.

3.2.4 Moving Goods

4. Municipalities will plan for land uses in *settlement areas* adjacent to, or in the vicinity of, transportation facilities such as *inter-modal facilities*, rail yards, airports, dockyards, and major highway interchanges that are compatible with, and supportive of, the primary goods movement function of these facilities. "(37)

2011

Toronto City Council at its meeting of July 12, 2011 adopted a recommendation to "revise its 2003 decision regarding a fixed link to the Toronto City Centre Airport (now called Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport) to permit the proposed pedestrian tunnel." (39)

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