

July 23, 2024

Toronto City Council
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

RE: IE15.2 - Toronto Island Park Master Plan – Section 4.6 Airport Lands

Dear Member of Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective of Nieuport Aviation, owner and operator of the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport passenger terminal. As President and CEO, I lead a team of 40 employees who have incredible pride in their work at Toronto's downtown airport. As an organization, Nieuport Aviation has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to help make Billy Bishop Airport a world-class facility. Our shareholder is a long-term, open-ended infrastructure fund, committed to continued investment in this wonderful city asset of ours. On behalf of Nieuport Aviation and our shareholders, I must express our serious concern regarding the lack of progress on securing the long-term future of Billy Bishop Airport.

Billy Bishop Airport is not just a hub of connectivity; it's an economic engine for Toronto and Ontario. Beyond the Nieuport team, more than 2,000 on-site workers provide much-needed injections into the downtown and waterfront economy. We can all agree that the goal of re-energizing our downtown is important, and that the airport's dedicated on-site workers are a vital piece of that equation. With the 2025 introduction of US Customs and Border Protection preclearance, Billy Bishop Airport could further support some 32,400 jobs throughout the Greater Toronto Area and Ontario, including aircraft manufacturers and hospitality, service, conference and hotel workers.

Since late 2023, we are aware that intense efforts have been made by PortsToronto to work with senior leaders at the City of Toronto's City Manager's Office and Transport Canada to build a process that would advance work on an updated governance framework. Core to their approach has been constructive consultation and data-based decision-making with timelines that would ensure compliance with the federal requirements for Runway End Safety Areas (RESAs), a nation-wide airport safety regulation that has been a topic of debate and discussion with the city since as early as 2013. As we understand it, PortsToronto has been clear that the Tripartite Agreement must be opened to, at minimum, enable additional land mass and extend the term of the airport's agreement to facilitate RESA implementation.

Billy Bishop Airport is a critical piece of transit and transportation infrastructure used by millions of people every year. Billy Bishop Airport is unique in many ways given its governance and ownership structure, its proximity to the community it serves and its overwhelming popularity. Understood to be a responsible neighbour and an important facilitator of economic and social benefits, the results of 2024 public opinion research conducted by Viewpoints on the airport speak for themselves. These results are very consistent with the annual city-wide public opinion research conducted since 2018:

- 78% agree that it makes sense for Toronto to have an airport downtown;
- 72% agree that Billy Bishop Airport is a good use of land; and
- approximately 80% support the addition of new destinations across Canada and the United States

Most relevant to the topic of this letter, 83% of Torontonians agree that the airport's governing agreement should be updated so that Billy Bishop Airport can continue to provide the connectivity upon which Torontonians depend. This sentiment is even more strongly held by those who reside along the water's edge from Etobicoke to Scarborough. This is in addition to the strong civic leader support that has come

together to call on “all orders of government to collaborate and agree to a long-term future for Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport”

Taking a step back, Toronto is truly fortunate to have an award-winning downtown airport that acts as the city’s front door for many. The airport’s connectivity drives trade and tourism; creates thousands of jobs, which will only increase with the addition of US Customs and Border Protection preclearance; and facilitates vital support for those requiring downtown Toronto’s world-class healthcare. For my part, having worked in more than 20 airport communities globally, my view is that Toronto has an unmistakable competitive and social advantage by having two airports providing complementary service, with Toronto Pearson focused on long-haul, international routes, sun destination charters and cargo, and Billy Bishop Airport providing regional connectivity that is efficient, convenient, friendly and prioritizes sustainability. As a city of global importance with the two airports, Toronto has fewer airports in its system than cities of a similar size and is economically dependent on both of them.

Returning to the reason for this letter, the current Tripartite Agreement, signed in 1983, is an already 40-year-old document. This outdated agreement, written pre-internet, is a barrier to investment, innovation and technology, hindering the airport’s ability to operate in a cleaner, greener and quieter way. This obsolete agreement limits choice for travelers and significantly mutes the economic, social and cultural benefits that Billy Bishop Airport provides to the communities it serves. By not moving forward with a modernized governance framework, the city is delaying opportunities to advance climate action and see further reductions to the airport’s operational impacts (e.g., noise and access to the island).

Billy Bishop Airport is a starkly different place than it was a decade ago. Today, it is one of Toronto’s economic engines, contributing to tourism and the visitor economy, trade, employment and cultural enrichment. It is also a social engine providing lifesaving access to healthcare, including ORNGE medevac services; tax revenue in the form of PILT; a talent attraction advantage for the city; and social connection to over 20 communities in Canada and the US. As such, we are alarmed at the lack of tangible progress where updating the airport’s governance framework is concerned. Put simply, an asset as important as Billy Bishop Airport should not be left to languish.

We request that the formal public consultations on Tripartite begin, as the July 2027 RESA deadline highlighted by PortsToronto is fast approaching. The future of Billy Bishop Airport is crucial, not only for Toronto, but also for the many communities that rely on it.

Sincerely,

Neil Pakey
President and CEO
Nieuport Aviation

Copy to:

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