



Lisa Raitt, Minister of Transport  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
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18 September 2013

Dear Minister Raitt,

On June 11, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty stated in an announcement in Claremont (at an event from which the public was excluded) that about 5,000 acres of the Pickering Lands, expropriated in 1972 for a never-built Pickering Airport, would be transferred to the new Rouge National Urban Park. Some 8,700 acres would be used for an airport, to be operational by 2027. And the remaining land – some 4,900 acres – would be used for “economic development.” The purpose of the announcement, he said, was to end the uncertainty of many years.

Two weeks later, Transport Canada held two “public information” sessions that offered little information to the public and, in some instances, contradicted aspects of Mr Flaherty’s announcement. So, if anything, the announcement has greatly *increased* uncertainty about the future of the Lands.

Transport Canada also invited the public to submit online comments on that portion of the Pickering Lands not assigned to the Park. The invitation read, in part:

The announcement included [...] plans to engage stakeholders, businesses and local communities on the future of the remaining Pickering Lands.

Delivering on its commitment to take into account the needs of the region and stakeholders in the development of a plan for the Pickering Lands, the Government of Canada is now seeking public input on the future management and development of the remaining Pickering lands still owned by Transport Canada.

The deadline was July 31. Transport Canada has since been silent. All we know is what was stated at the bottom of the submission form – that the Department “may elect to post summary findings of the consultation, and data will be aggregated.”

We have two fundamental concerns with this statement:

- First, that Transport Canada will deem the submission exercise to have fulfilled the government’s commitment to seek public input.
- Second, that the Department, if it releases information at all, will summarize and “aggregate” the contents of those submissions to the point where arguments will be simplified and neutralized, and perhaps distorted to serve the Department’s purpose. It’s common knowledge that Transport Canada has been pushing for this airport for more than four decades and is therefore not an objective party in the matter.

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Minister Raitt, the public information sessions and the online submission exercise cannot and must not be deemed sufficient public consultation for a plan of such magnitude and with such high potential for failure – because this airport is demonstrably *not needed*. Where public money should best be spent, how public lands should best be used, how Canada’s largest and fastest-growing urban centre can best be served – each of these issues must be carefully considered, in close collaboration with all levels of government and the affected communities.

Building an airport and a commercial and/or industrial complex on what is currently remote, unserved farmland will involve mammoth expenditure of public money. It is in the clear interest of the public that any case for a Pickering airport – whether put forward by the Government of Canada or by potential stakeholders – be exposed to close public scrutiny and debate. In 2011, Treasury Board President Tony Clement committed to releasing raw government data online for all Canadians to see. Since Transport Canada has a more than 40-year history of withholding information on the Pickering airport issue, it is of paramount importance that our federal government be fully transparent in its deliberations and actions now.

We respectfully request that the arguments for and against the airport/economic-development plan, including any formal letters the government has received on this matter, be made publicly available at the earliest possible date.

Canadians expect and deserve no less from their federal government.

Sincerely,



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c.c.: Prime Minister Stephen Harper; Thomas Mulcair, MP; Justin Trudeau, MP;  
Elizabeth May, MP; Chris Alexander, MP; Paul Calandra, MP; Colin Carrie, MP;  
Corneliu Chisu, MP; Jim Flaherty, MP; Erin O’Toole, MP; Gerry Ritz, MP;  
Olivia Chow, MP; John McCallum, MP; David McGuinty, MP;  
Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario / Minister of Agriculture and Food; Glen Murray, MPP;  
Roger Anderson, Durham Regional Chair; Dave Ryan, Mayor, City of Pickering;  
David Pickles, City Councillor, Ward 3, Pickering;  
Peter Rodrigues, Regional Councillor, Ward 3, Pickering