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Tuesday, November 17, 2009

The Honourable Stephen Harper

Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

Discussions surrounding the use of federally owned land in the northern reaches of Pickering, Ontario have been plagued by unacceptable delays since 1972, when the federal government first expropriated 18,600 acres to establish the site for a potential airport.

It would be difficult to downplay the extent of these delays. British Columbia stipulated the need for a trans-continental railway when it joined the Dominion in 1871, and we know that Hon. Donald Alexander Smith drove the last spike on Nov. 7, 1885. In contrast, our community has seen 12 federal elections come and go, and still there is no decision on the use of the area that has become known as the "airport lands".

This is why the Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade – the voice of business in our community – is turning to the Government of Canada to ensure that the related research remains on schedule.

The latest stage in establishing an economically vibrant future for the site is a Needs Assessment Study, conducted by the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) and vetted by Transport Canada, which promises to address vital issues such as the forecasted demand for air travel and the capacity of existing airports.

We are calling on the Government of Canada to remain committed to the 2009 deadline that was established for the release of the Needs Assessment Study, which was launched in May 2007. While we understand that this issue deserves thorough study and debate, we would find it difficult to believe that the related analysis could not be completed on time, particularly given the exhaustive research that has already been completed.

Each and every delay in a decision concerning the use of this land represents a significant economic loss to our community, whether an airport is built or not.

Consider the economic impact that has been established by other regional airports in this region. The Toronto Buttonville Municipal Airport supports 29 private businesses and four government and service agencies, providing 550 direct and indirect jobs, representing a \$96 million contribution to the Gross Domestic Product. Looking to the east, another study has indicated that the Oshawa Municipal Airport contributes \$60 million in added-value Gross Domestic Product. In the process, the Pickering land has been blocked from any other use that could benefit the economic wellbeing of our community.

A decision on the use of this land would provide an undeniable source of economic stimulus.

As business leaders, we rely on long-term planning to establish the transportation infrastructure that will allow us to move goods and employees as effectively as possible. But we may also be running out of time to address congestion in the Greater Toronto Area. If an airport is not built in Pickering, we need to know about the alternatives that will address the transportation-related challenges that we face.

The future of the Toronto Buttonville Municipal Airport has been cast into doubt, and the Oshawa Municipal Airport is restricted in geographic terms. Pearson International Airport's Master Plan suggests that Canada's largest airport will reach its capacity of 54 million passengers between 2017 and 2023 – and a 1991 study indicated that it would take a full decade to develop an airport in Pickering.

If Pearson International Airport is allowed to reach its capacity before a solution is found, we know that travelers will be plagued by delays and traffic chaos in the transportation corridors that lead through the Greater Toronto Area. That would have an economic impact on every business in Durham Region and beyond.

For the sake of our economy, we ask you to demonstrate the leadership that will determine an ultimate use for the land that the federal government expropriated so many decades ago.

We thank you for your consideration, and look forward to participating in discussions about the future of this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John G. Smith', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John G. Smith

President

(WordSmith Media)

CC: **The Honourable John Baird, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities**
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