

An Action Plan for Toronto General Aviation

The How and Why of initiating a new Executive Airport to replace Buttonville Airport.



By the Buttonville Flying Club Action Committee

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Index

An Action Plan for Toronto General Aviation	1
Introduction.....	3
The Challenge	5
A Solution	8
The Alternatives:.....	13
A Not-For-Profit structure	15
A Transition Plan For Airport users	17
Expected Airport users and Business	18
Revenue Streams:.....	20
Summary	21
Appendix 1 – Current GTA Airports	22
General Sources:.....	29

Introduction

Buttonville Airport is closing. This statement, made jointly on Oct 27th 2010, by the airport's private owner, Armadale Co. Limited and the land developer Cadillac Fairview Corporation Limited, signals the start of the final chapter of the long story of one of Canada's most important and busiest airports. For hundreds of aircraft owners, pilots, mechanics and the business men and women who rely on the airport, it raised a single question: "Where do we move to?"

Answer: Nowhere. Although there are a limited number of existing airports in the area, they do not serve the GTA as either a destination for travellers or a Toronto home for General Aviation (GA). Even if the money can be found to upgrade these airports to become viable alternatives, their location and existing constraints prevent them from accommodating much of Buttonville's activity. Consequently, a significant portion of Toronto's GA activity will disappear when Buttonville Airport closes. "The Buttonville airport hosts more than 170,000 flights annually, including many corporate flights important to Toronto's economy. This includes 10,000 flights of aircraft over 2000 kg (large Corporate GA Aircraft)

No existing airport will be able to replace Buttonville's critical economic role in Toronto's transportation infrastructure. (See Appendix 1 for a list of Toronto Airports and their capacity challenges).

The only viable Solution: Build a new airport.

It is critical for the survival of a large portion of Buttonville's existing activity that a new airport be built before Buttonville closes. Given that it normally takes several years to build and develop an airport, a decision on a replacement must be made as soon as possible.

Although it would make sense to place this new airport on land already zoned and set aside for aviation (the Pickering airport lands come to mind), it could be built on any 200-300 acre land parcel within a 20 minute drive of the current location of the Buttonville airport without diminishing its role.

With the help of Buttonville's displaced private businesses and aircraft owners, this airport can be created quickly and efficiently (for a fraction of the investment originally expected to be required to create Pickering airport, for example) while still being run as a not for profit public municipal airport. This new airport would generate millions of dollars in tax revenue, generate hundreds of jobs, and become the Executive airport Toronto desperately needs to replace Buttonville. Over time, if properly placed on the Pickering lands, it would be able to grow side by side with the large jet airport the Pickering lands were originally set aside to support. Examples of this include the Ottawa and Rochester airports, where separate runways and ramps allow General Aviation and big jets to co-exist in safe harmony.

The Challenge

The October 27, 2010 announcement of the closure of Buttonville airport was a watershed moment for Torontonians involved in, or dependant on, General Aviation (GA).

But this moment was not unexpected. A year earlier, the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) pulled its subsidy from the privately owned and operated Buttonville Airport. This action initiated a domino effect that has made the closure of Buttonville a certainty. Toronto is now faced with one less airport to serve its growing needs (see the City of Toronto's website for growth forecasts). This event will make Toronto the most aviation-poor major city in North America at a point in history where aviation access is a key driver in the global economy (reference 1).

Once, not that long ago, things could not have been more different. Toronto was a world leader in aviation technology, with easy and cost-effective access for all aircraft types and missions. But, over time, the pressures of urbanization, a big jet airport focus, and the lack of an effective overall strategy to accommodate all types of aviation missions has changed the face of Toronto aviation. In the last quarter century the greater Toronto area has seen a 40% increase in population (almost 2 million new residents) while losing four key GA airports. Maple Airport in Vaughan and King City Airport both closed in the 1980's, Downsview closed to public use in 1994 and now Buttonville is scheduled to be closed.

At the same time, uncertainty surrounding the Pickering airport project has directly stunted investment growth in the remaining Toronto Area GA airports. During this time, the aviation strategy for Toronto consisted of attempting to formulate a new big jet airport North East of the city (Pickering Airport), and building out Pearson Airport. Both of these on-going efforts have had a big jet focus. General Aviation is addressed in the plan for the Pickering lands only as a stepping stone to a larger airport.

The plan to close four airports to GA and open a new one was a death sentence for GA because it has been proven at other airports that a major airline airport growing out of a GA airport will lead to GA being forced out of the airport. What is needed is a purely-GA airport, like Buttonville, with equality of access for all aviation missions and to the business opportunities these create.

This benign neglect has led to the threat Toronto now faces. With Buttonville closed, there will be only one GA airport within an hour's drive of downtown Toronto with any sort of ability to expand to handle the level of aircraft traffic now flowing through Buttonville. This is Oshawa airport and, although its management team is both able and game to try, due to its location and limitations it will be hard-pressed to do so. The remaining three GA friendly public access airports (Toronto City Centre, Brampton and Burlington) are either unable to handle corporate jets or are at capacity and lack the ability to expand further.

Both Markham airport and Downsview are closed to public traffic for political reasons, and we do not expect that there is the political will to change.

It is vitally important to remember that the GA aircraft utilising Buttonville perform a wide range of missions. Private GA aircraft range from single engine training aircraft to trans-continental executive jets. Included in public General Aviation aircraft are Air Ambulance helicopters, Police surveillance aircraft and a variety of private charter aircraft employed by various levels of government and not for profit organizations. These aircraft - and the businesses that depend on them - provide air transportation links to smaller communities in central and northern Ontario and other parts of Canada, and generate hundreds of million of dollars of economic activity in the greater Toronto area every year. Buttonville alone generates \$96 million dollars of economic benefit and creates 550 jobs (reference 2).

The members of the BFC (Buttonville Flying Club) are intimately familiar with all aspects of GA in the Toronto area and understand the damage being inflicted by the lack of a GA strategy for Toronto. BFC members regularly utilize Buttonville airport for personal transportation business and pleasure to fly to many parts of Ontario (including northern Ontario) and Quebec that are underserved by the airlines. Other destinations include many US states, the Bahamas, west to the prairies and north to the Arctic Circle. Today we know and rely on freedom of

travel and movement unimaginable 100 years ago. With Buttonville set to close, this freedom and its social and economic benefits are in jeopardy.

With Buttonville closed, Toronto will have one less airport to serve its growing aviation needs (reference 4). This will weaken Toronto's economic and political ties to the rest of Ontario by increasing aviation transportation times and reducing aviation access to Toronto from smaller communities. With the recent revitalization of GA, by the introduction of new revolutionary aircraft including very light business jets, this oversight is quickly turning into a major economic blind spot for the city.

A Solution

So, what should be done? Ask that question to almost any pilot flying out of Buttonville (as we have done) and they will give you this answer...

Build a new Airport!

(A related answer was "Do something - anything! - about the Pickering airport.")

Our opinion, the best scenario would be to jump-start the development of the airport on land already zoned for aviation use - the Pickering lands. Developing the Pickering Airport as a GA-only airport now, on a portion of the land that

would also permit a separate but complementary airline airport on an adjoining portion of the land, has many advantages. These include faster development, cheaper operation, and a quicker road to profitability than what was proposed by the Greater Toronto Airports Authority for Pickering, or could be achieved on other land that has not already been designated for an airport.

Here are the steps we believe are required to get this airport going:

- 1) Support this proposal to launch and run a public “Toronto Executive Airport” on an appropriate site within 20 minutes drive of Buttonville. The site would need to be between 200 to 300 acres depending on the layout. For the rest of this discussion we will assume that we will utilize 300 acres of the Pickering lands, some of which can be shared with the future airline airport.
- 2) Incorporate the “Toronto Executive Airport” as a Not-for-Profit corporation with the structure outlined in the section “not – for – profit”. The mission of this corporation will be to develop a general aviation airport and to create a structure to organise private investments in the new airport, including the lease of airport lands to commercial and private aircraft owners and businesses for the construction of buildings and hangars.
- 3) Harness the extensive skill and expertise of the displaced business tenants of Buttonville, including Toronto Airways, Seneca College and the hundreds of private aircraft owners, to create a competitive aviation environment for the sale of fuel, flight training, and other aviation services. All aviation-related

tenants would be welcome. Public access would be a cornerstone of the airport.

- 4) Ensure the fast creation of the airport by supporting a clear mandate separate from, but supported by The GTAA (Greater Toronto Airport Authority) and other interested parties.
- 5) Support the development of a basic 6000 ft runway (able to handle executive jets), taxiway and road access to the airport with an initial 20 million dollar bond offering and a 60 year lease on the required land. This can be done in cooperation with the GTAA if they would like to participate to compliment their mandate. We understand the prospectuses for all the existing GTAA bonds clearly state that, as part of the protection for bondholders, no competing passenger airport will be built in the GTAA. This will not be a problem, as the Toronto Executive Airport, built on Pickering Airport land will be for general aviation only, with the ability to accommodate some non-airline commercial traffic. Like other public infrastructure projects that will generate revenue, the airport can be underwritten by a bond offering to use a secure capital source independent of the local taxpayers. This initial bond offering is not intended to create a gold-plated facility, but rather to kick start the creation of an economically viable general aviation airport with basic services.

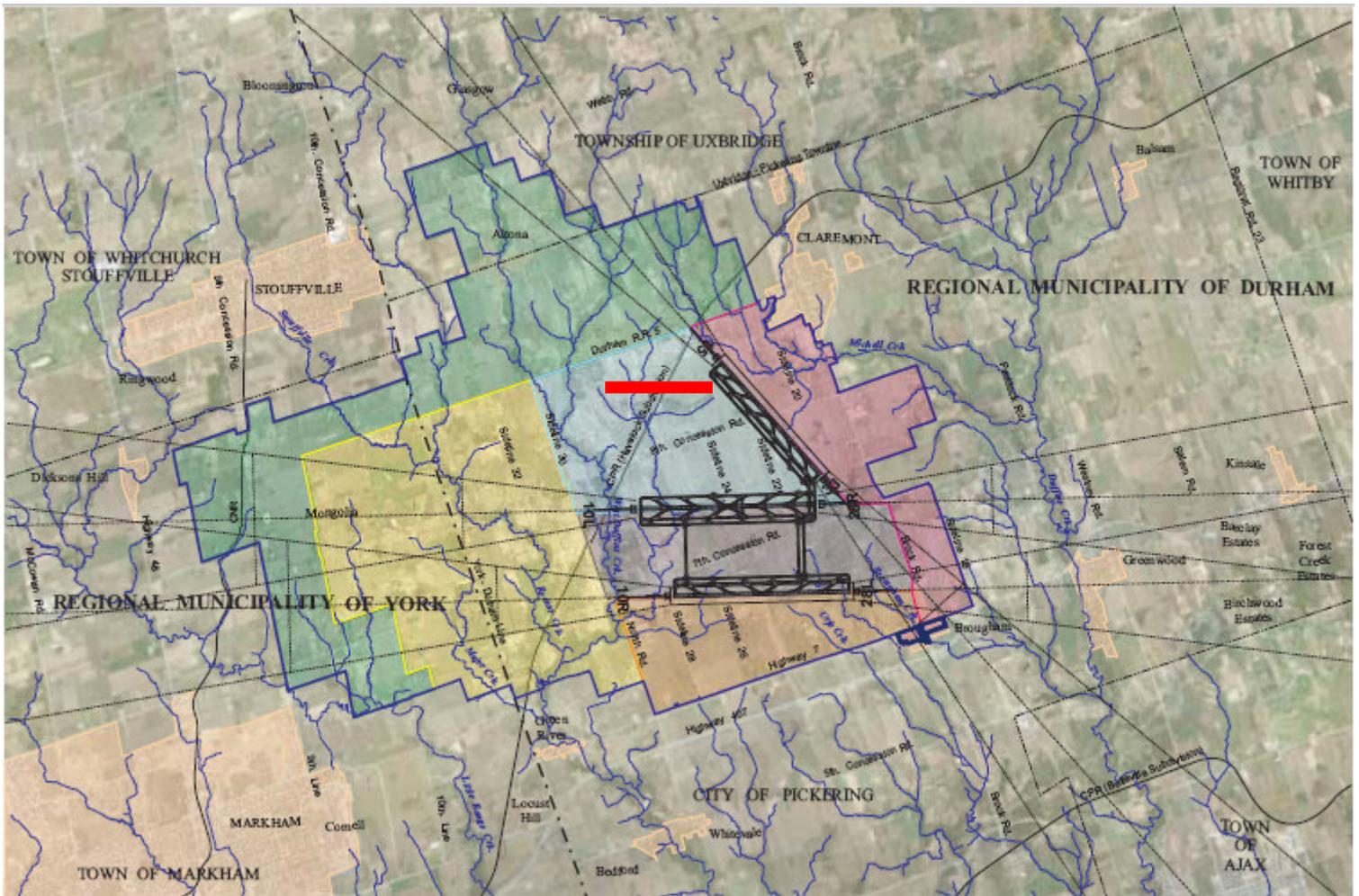


Figure 1: Original preferred Pickering Airport layout as proposed by the GTAA, with additional GA runway

The Toronto executive airport would be built around one 5000ft runway with 500ft overruns on either end to total 6000ft. An option will be open to add a shorter 3000 ft crosswind runway. If the Pickering lands are used this could be parallel to, but north of runway, 10L-28R. This separation will allow the GA runway and ramp to grow with the airport, even as new runways and facilities are built to accommodate larger jet operations. The construction of the other originally

planned runways can be undertaken at a later date, when needed, as the airport grows in volume.

The GA traffic circuit would be to the north, and would avoid the town of Claremont. The ramp would be to the south of the GA runway near the originally planned intersecting runways - this is separate from the airline/big jet ramp, which the long term plan calls for being placed between the parallel runways.

The size of the airport would start off at a fraction of the size of the old Pickering plan and grow as required. As long as the general aviation aircraft have a separate ramp and runway, we believe this is a well proven path to success.

Many of the worlds largest airports started off as small well run general aviation airports - a close-by example of an airport model like this would be the **Rochester** Airport in Buffalo (KROC), which serves both GA and airline traffic with separate runways and ramps.

The Alternatives:

Why do we think this is the best course of action? We have listed the other Toronto area airports in Appendix 1. As noted, some of them can be upgraded to handle at least some of the traffic from Buttonville. Consider some of these alternatives...

- 1) Provide a grant to the privately held Markham airport to repave and extend their runway in exchange for opening the airport to the public. This would remove the uncertainty currently stopping private enterprise and public institutions from investing in Markham airport. Additional infrastructure grants could be provided to both Markham and Oshawa airports to allow them to be rapidly prepared to handle the expected increase in GA traffic.
- 2) Downsview airport could be re-opened for public GA use. This could be done with minimal impact to the development plans for Downsview Park or interfere with existing main tenants (Bombardier Aerospace). Designating a small area of say, 50 acres, for a lease to a fixed base operator and/or flying club would provide a source of income for Downsview Park as well as handle a up to 100 or so GA aircraft. This assumes access to, and the appropriate user fees for, the use of the existing runway currently leased by Bombardier. At least one new Instrument approach would be required, and should be configured to minimize the traffic impact on Pearson.
- 3)_Brampton and Burlington Airports could be allowed access to additional federal infrastructure grants to assist in widening taxiways, runways, ramps

and improving basic lighting. This investment would be returned to the taxpayers many times over with increased tax revenue generated by the new traffic these airports will be able to handle.

- 4) Provide a multi-million dollar yearly incentive to the private owners of Buttonville airport to make good the opportunity cost of delaying the closure of the airport as long as possible. Unfortunately this is unlikely to halt development of the airport lands, but it is worth a try to at least buy enough time for a new airport to be built at some time in the future.
- 5) Do nothing and allow hundreds of jobs and a very large portion of general aviation and millions of dollars of socio-economic benefit to simply disappear.

A Not-For-Profit structure

As a **non-profit organization** the airport would not distribute its surplus funds to owners or shareholders, but instead use them to help pursue its goals of maintaining and growing the airport in the public interest.

As a corporation without share capital, the Toronto Executive Airport would have members rather than shareholders. These members would pay yearly dues set by the board and must have a stake in the airport, either by owning part or all of an aircraft or business that utilizes the airport. These members would elect a board of directors to govern the activities of the airport. In addition to seven elected members, there would be 7 non-elected members nominated by interested parties named below.

The elected Board would appoint five Directors, one each from nominations presented by interested regional municipalities of York, Durham, and the City of Toronto, as well as the Greater Toronto Airport Authority and, if they are willing to move to the new airport, Seneca College.

In addition, the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario would be entitled to appoint one Director each if they are financially committed to the airport.

In a structure similar to the GTAA, Directors would serve a term of three years and would be eligible to be re-appointed subject to a maximum limit of nine years.

This board would be responsible for the oversight of the airports construction and ongoing management. Both the initial construction and ongoing management should be by a tender process. The details of this structure would be described in a later document once the interested parties have been consulted.

A Transition Plan For Airport users

Developing a comprehensive transition plan, agreed upon by the various stakeholders involved, would require considerable discussion, given the wide range of current users of the Buttonville Airport. Here are the core tenets of a transition plan that would govern the airport management.

1. The common vision of all stakeholders:

- a. Toronto Executive Airport would be developed as a General Aviation airport.
- b. This airport must be opened BEFORE Buttonville closes.

2. Sound business practices:

- a. This is a pay-for-use airport, with the goal of being an engine for the development of General Aviation in the GTA.
- b. The Airport would welcome all business operators in a competitive environment.
- c. After the initial start-up phase, it is expected that the airport would be financially self sufficient.

3. Environmental sustainability. Specific consideration would be given to ensure that all airport operations will follow environmentally sustainable practices.

Expected Airport Users and Business

Based aircraft — It is expected that, if the airport would be located within a twenty minute drive of Buttonville, about 200 of the total of approximately 300 aircraft that are currently based at Buttonville would move to the new airport once the current airport closes. This number of aircraft and related support facilities would be adequate to make the airport sustainable from the day it opens. The remaining aircraft would move primarily to Oshawa (doubling the number of aircraft based there from 100 to 200 aircraft).

Scheduled service— No scheduled air carrier services would be required for the airport to be financially viable.

Charter and Corporate operators— It is expected that several operators currently doing more than a million dollars worth of business each year at Buttonville would move to the new airport.

Aircraft maintenance and overhaul companies— These companies (Leggat Aviation, Air Partners, and others) would follow their clients to the new Airport.

Fixed base operators—Three FBOs currently operate at Buttonville and

Oshawa, namely Millionaire/Air BP, Hammond Fuels, and Shell. All could be accommodated on the field, allowing a competitive business environment.

Flight schools—Toronto Airways is the flying school at Buttonville and also owns the majority of shares in the Canadian Flight Academy its counterpart at Oshawa. Seneca College also operates a key flight school at Buttonville. A probable scenario would be that both flying schools could be enticed by the opportunities at the new airport.

Air Ambulance / Police — Regional police forces, as well as air ambulance companies currently operate aircraft from Buttonville. These operators would be welcomed with open arms at the new airport. Air2, the York Regional Police helicopter, would find the central location of the new airport especially appealing. Responding to 1580 calls in 2009, response times are a critical factor for the Police.

Revenue Streams:

The businesses and aircraft based at the new airport would generate significant revenue, including parking fees, fuel services, and sub lease revenues. It is expected that a significant number of land plots can be sub-leased to private owners for the construction of hangars and other buildings required to support the airport's users. Landing fees would be charged on all visiting aircraft over 6000 lbs. This will be detailed in a separate document.

Establish minimum FBO and maintenance standards — Any FBO or maintenance company that is interested in operating at the airport would be allowed to do so as long as it meets Transport Canada standards and pays the established fees for the facilities it uses.

Provide rights of first opportunity and/or set-asides — The Airport administration may decide to use principles commonly used by real estate developers to establish a sense of scarcity and priorities for sub-leasing space. Specifically, as part of its transition plan and after establishing the fee structure and levels for a new airport, the current tenants at Buttonville may be given rights of first opportunity to develop the various types of facilities that may be available at the new airport.

Summary

We can create a new Executive airport for Toronto quickly and with only a fraction of the investment and land originally envisioned to build the Pickering airport. The new airport can build on Buttonville's vital economic role in the Greater Toronto Area by utilizing the skill and expertise of Buttonville's existing tenants rather than allow them to disperse or close down completely. The Toronto Executive Airport would save hundreds of jobs, ensure that millions of dollars in existing economic activity would continue, and that the GTA would continue to play a vital role in the Canadian aviation industry.

Appendix 1 – Current GTA Airports

After the announcement of the closing of Buttonville Airport there was a flurry of information presented by the mainstream print media, much of it light on facts and long on private aviation and airport operators looking for a way to promote their own interests.

Some on the aviation side have responded with little more than wishful thinking. A good example of this is the November 3rd press release from AMCO (Airport Management Council of Ontario), quoting an "yet to be published transport Canada capacity study", that Buttonville's role in General Aviation in Toronto can be absorbed by the "12 airports and aerodromes located in Toronto and the surrounding area". So, Toronto has 12 airports? Not by our count - but it does raise a good question, what are the airports available to someone trying to fly to Toronto in an GA aircraft?

It is expected that if you ask an airport owner if he thinks the airport in a neighboring town should be shut down and its traffic diverted to his airport, 9 times out of 10 he will say "yes". AMCO is simply reflecting the self interest of its members, and can thus be forgiven for its "optimism".

If you are sitting in Ottawa, maybe Peterborough, Simcoe Regional and Hamilton really do seem to be close enough to be considered "Toronto Airports". But of course we are only assuming that these are some of the airports being referenced, and can't debate the point because the transport report being quoted is unpublished.

While it is to be expected that current airport operators are viewing the death of Buttonville as a way to enhance their own business interests, it is important to see beyond self promotion to the actual reality.

Here are the facts, as confirmed by the experiences of commercial and private pilots who live in Toronto and utilise (or try to utilise) all the airports in the area...

If you currently base a light single engine aircraft at Buttonville, or use such an aircraft to visit Toronto, **there are a maximum of 5 airports** (not 12, as cited by AMCO) within an hour's drive of downtown Toronto that that are open for your use. If you operate one of the new generation GA aircraft such as a Cirrus, a high end single, twin engine Cessna or a jet, your choices diminish even more. . All of these choices are dramatically less useable than Buttonville and the new Pickering General Aviation Airport we believe should take Buttonville's place.

It is important to discount some of the extreme options mentioned in the Press. For example, this has included Peterborough airport. This airport is a 135km drive by road from downtown Toronto (90 minutes on a good day).

To give you an idea of the distance, This is more than twice the distance and drive time than Mirabel airport is from downtown Montréal, and Mirabel is considered a massive failure because it is too far away from the city it is suppose to service.

Simply consider a businessman from Chicago who lands at Peterborough believing he can make a meeting in downtown Toronto. He will need to spend at least 90 minutes and (about \$220 for a one way cab ride) to get to Downtown Toronto. He will spend more time in the cab, than in an aircraft. This is not a reasonable option.

The same holds true for Simcoe Regional, Hamilton and Barrie.

With Buttonville closed here are the airports in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) which are able to provide some level of service to at least part of the GTA:

CYTZ - City Center / Island, A great airport currently home to a mix of General Aviation and Turbo prop Air Carrier operators including Porter Airlines and soon, Air Canada. Because of its downtown location this would be an ideal airport to expand, but its waterfront location is prohibitive. A few external parking spots do exist for transient aircraft, but hanger space is scarce, even at \$1200 a month (2.5 times Buttonville's current rate). All hangers are full with a waiting list and no space exists to build additional hangers for General Aviation. Another limitation is that small jets are not allowed.

CYOO - Oshawa. This is the only real option for most of the larger or higher performance aircraft based at Buttonville today. The airport is well managed and has space. Plane owners and businesses are already scrambling to move there, with about 50% of Buttonville based aircraft expected to transfer to this airport. (Based on a January 2011 BFC Survey). These aircraft account for about 1/3 of Buttonvilles activity. Although almost double the distance from Buttonville to Pickering, it is still within acceptable driving distance. For many operators it's a 35 minute drive from Buttonville (in low traffic, more than a hour at peak rush hour), but this is acceptable. This surge of aircraft is expected to double the airport's volume and .

CYZD – Downsview. Closed to all GA traffic, it is only used by Bombardier Aerospace as part of its aircraft plant. The Canadian Air and Space museum is located on the field, and has managed to open the runway once a year for one weekend to GA traffic. We would love to open this airport for GA traffic year round.

CNU8 – Markham. With a small 2,000 ft runway, this is a temporary private airport, with no permanent structures and requires prior permission for use, which is rarely granted to local or visiting aircraft. The last 500 ft of the runway is on the Pickering lands and it is expected that this airport will close at some point in

the future, so no hanger or permanent buildings are present. The land is owned by the Thomson family.

CYYZ – Pearson This airport does not want GA traffic, with the exception of some executive jets. GA operators also find it hard to operate around flight path restrictions and other issues created at an airport that is geared for high traffic big jet air carrier operations.

CLA4 – Holland Landing. Also known as Hare Field, it's single 1,960,ft paved runway has a steep drop off on one side and rising terrain on the other, making this airport unable to expand and unable to handle anything other than one or two more low performance single engine Pipers or Cessna's. This airport is full.

CNC3 – Brampton. A nice private airfield on the west side of the GTA for small aircraft, but it is very busy, even on a slow day. Even freshly paved, the taxiways are too narrow to handle higher performance GA aircraft like a heavy twin or jet. Additional capacity appears to be limited by its current volume, the location of railway tracks on the airfield, and other problems include its proximity to Pearson, cramped ramp and run-up areas, and a need for a Control Tower to handle its current volume of movements.

CZBA – Burlington, A small but nice private airfield on the on the western boundary of the GTA. Suitable for the low end singles, but currently unable to handle much else.

The reality is that, once Buttonville is closed, the operator of even a single engine Cessna or Piper wanting to fly to Toronto or base an aircraft in the GTA has limited options. This is not about the hour's drive to access his/her aircraft. Even with allowances for excessive ground access times all of the airports currently able to service Torontos needs have a limited capacity to accommodate new resident or visiting aircraft. The only airports that have any room to expand at all are **Oshawa Brampton and Burlington.** Even taken together, it is expected that these airports will be unable to accommodate anything more than half of the activity currently at Buttonville.

For a visiting experienced operator flying a high performance single engine aircraft (such as a Cirrus, Cessna 210 or Piper Malibu), his safe options are limited.

If he is trying to get to Toronto in a high performance twin-engine or turboprop aircraft, only two of these airports - City Center and Oshawa - have long enough runways and wide enough taxi ways to accommodate him. Pearson is also a possible, but difficult, option with no 100LL fuel or other GA services available.

Anyone arriving in an executive jet has only two options, Oshawa and Pearson. Like Buttonville, Oshawa's runway is short, barely practical for some executive jets.

With Buttonville Closed, Toronto is no longer a welcoming destination for general aviation.

Only a New Toronto Business focused GA airport on the Pickering lands, closer than Oshawa, with easy access to hwy 407 and downtown Toronto would be able to handle the different GA aircraft types with the world class service that business visitors expect, and in the volumes needed.

General Sources:

- Demographic information for the City of Toronto
<http://www.toronto.ca/demographics>
- Aviation Role and Importance of Toronto Buttonville Municipal airport
(A 2009 report prepared for Toronto airways limited on the Economic Impact of the airport)
- Pickering Airport draft Plan (from the GTAA website)
- Economic Development Study, Regional Reliever Airport on the Pickering Lands (2004)
- January 2011 Buttonville Flying Club survey of pilots and aircraft owners.

Specific references:

- 1) Page 12, Aviation Role and Importance of Toronto Buttonville Municipal airport.
- 2) Page 30, Aviation Role and Importance of Toronto Buttonville Municipal airport.