

NEWS TORONTO & GTA

# Debate over Pickering airport plan still rages 40 years later

BY SHARON LEM, TORONTO SUN

FIRST POSTED: TUESDAY, JULY 12, 2011 4:44:40 EDT PM



for four decades.

PICKERING - Lorne Almack is incredulous he's still fighting the federal government over a contentious 39-year-old plan to build an airport beside his farm in Pickering.

The 88-year-old engineering and businessman was an original member of the People Over Planes (POP) organization which convinced the feds after public pressure to cancel the Pickering airport proposal in 1972.

On Monday, the federal government released a March 2010 needs-assessment report to the public, saying the 18,600 acres of land (7,530 hectares) in north Pickering expropriated in 1972 should be kept as such, as a new airport will be needed within the Golden Horseshoe Area between 2027 and 2037.

The federal Tories said building the airport will stimulate job growth. The next step will be for the federal government to devise a plan.

"In 1972, the federal government claimed there would be 64 million people flying out of Toronto by the year 2000 and that didn't happen. They were off by 200% at only 24 million," Almack said. "They make up numbers to justify spending. Politicians are not very honest or clever, which makes for a bad combination.

"The land should be conserved for the future. We need that land to grow food," he added. "Building an airport in Pickering is a stupid idea and a colossal waste of money. The whole proposal since 1972 has been grossly planned."

Almack said a variety of crops at high yields on the land.

"In Saskatchewan they will grow 30 bushels of wheat per acre, whereas Pickering's land can grow 80 bushes of wheat per acre. The land can be used for not only grains, but vegetables and fruits," said Almack, who is now a member of the Green Door Alliance, the successor group to POP.

"By not building the Pickering Airport in 1972 and expanding Pearson airport, that move solidified Toronto as the international gateway to Canada, surpassing Montreal," said Almack.

Mary Delaney, spokesman for the environmental group Land Over Landings, said "it is stunning how short-sighted the federal government is when the world is facing the destruction of ozone, fresh waters, rainforest and farmland.

“It is stupidity on a grand scale to suggest we need an airport when people are starving and we have good farmland to grow crops and feed people,” said Delaney.

In 2010, 31.8 million passengers travelled through Pearson International Airport.

Hamilton’s airport handles about seven million passengers per year, while Waterloo has 4.6 million passengers travel through the airport annually.