

Pickering airport analysis in hands of Transport Canada

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DURHAM -- The analysis has been completed and now it's up to Transport Canada.

Toby Lennox, the vice-president, corporate affairs and communication for the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, said the group has finished the analysis on whether an airport in north Pickering is needed.

A confidentiality agreement meant he couldn't talk about the possibility of an airport in Pickering, Mr. Lennox told Durham Regional Council's planning committee on Tuesday.

"A decision on an airport, where, when and if it's constructed is up to Transport Canada and not the GTAA," Mr. Lennox stated.

The federal government continues to own the Pickering airport lands.

Mr. Lennox also outlined the benefits Durham receives from Pearson International Airport.

"The airport enables Durham businesses to succeed and grow," he said.

Half of all air cargo goes through Pearson each day, he stated.

"We think there's untapped potential here. We'll work with the Region."

About 25 per cent of Durham residents are visible minorities and were born outside the area, Mr. Lennox pointed out. That number of immigrants "starts driving traffic and it's driving traffic around the globe," he said.

Last year, passenger traffic dropped 6.1 per cent, with most of that domestic or 'trans-border' (U.S.) traffic. International travel was only off 1.6 per cent.

Travellers to Asia grew by more than 20 per cent in March alone, he noted.

"That's not families going back to see families. That's business," Mr. Lennox said. "We're seeing significant growth. We want to change how we do business to accommodate that growth."

The GTAA is "expecting to see a rebound" in travellers this year, he noted, but only by about half of one per cent.

"Pearson is becoming an international airport and not a domestic airport. We're trying to promote Pearson as a gateway," he said.

Mr. Lennox said the authority has lowered landing fees for three straight years.

He said they are still high, but added, "There's no correlation between landing fees and ticket prices. Prices are affected by the market."

Landing fees only make up about four per cent of the ticket cost, he stated.

"That doesn't mean we don't have an obligation to drive down costs."

Regional Chairman Roger Anderson said, "I'm glad to see the lower cost. It will have a long-term impact on prices."

However, the GTAA needs to lower its landing fees even more, Mr. Anderson stated.

"You'll lose a ton (of airport traffic) when Pickering is built, and I'll market the hell out of it, and you'll lose a ton to the island airport," Mr. Anderson said.