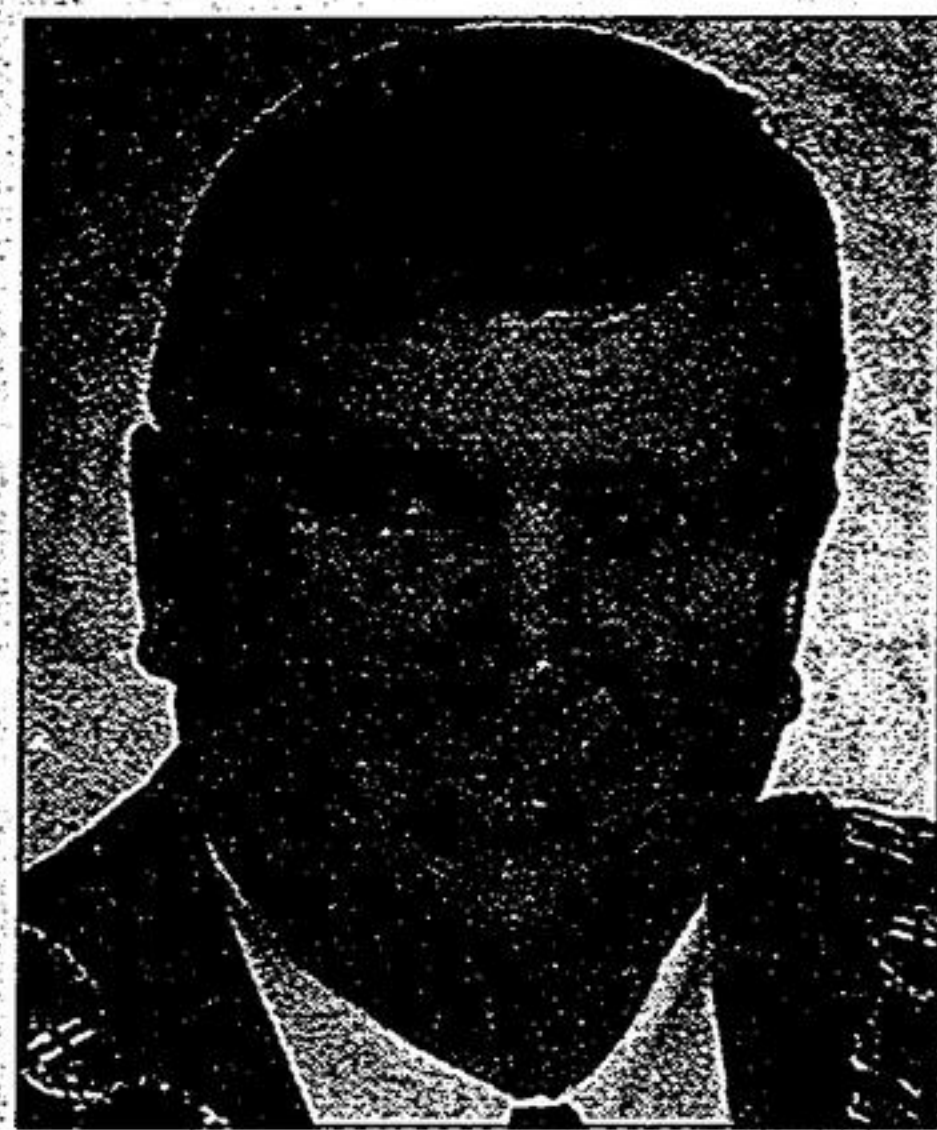


# Passengers could pay for new airport in Pickering/E. Markham

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer



**WAYNE EMMERSON:** Mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville is on advisory committee for planned airport.

Improvement fees charged to passengers could be used to build a major airport at Pickering, according to a "preliminary business model" released last week.

A \$10-a-head charge similar to one the Greater Toronto Airports Authority started levying at Toronto's Lester B. Pearson International last June, can cover 28.8 to 47.5 per cent of a Pickering airport's capital costs, which could amount to \$2.1 billion, says the report presented to the GTAA and an advisory group of politicians and residents.

It predicts an airport on the federal government's vast holdings in north Pickering and east Markham could serve as many as 9.7 million passengers by 2032.

Three scenarios were presented in which a Pickering airport opens as Markham's Buttonville Airport closes in 2012 and grows from a general aviation airfield to one with commercial air traffic and three runways. The GTAA, financing a \$4.4-billion expansion of Pearson, is not saying which scenario they find most likely or desirable.

"This was solely done as a financial forecasting exercise," spokesperson Peter Gregg said this week, adding the GTAA, over the next eight to 12 months, will plan a proposed airport's location, layout, and potential impacts before starting an environmental assessment which will take years to complete.

But Mr. Gregg suggested last week's findings show an airport is probably needed and "probably

forecasts are "based on rigorous statistical analysis." He added a Pickering airport would have to pay for its operations—but eventually, not immediately. "It's not like we're going by a dictated date when it has to pay for itself."

He acknowledged the business plan does not include any mention the GTAA would pay Transport Canada rent for using the land.

Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Wayne Emmerson, an advisory group member, wasn't worried about the forecasts. "They took a conservative approach and I don't think they're too far off," he said.

Transport Canada officials are coming to discuss the airport at 2 p.m. Tuesday at Whitchurch-Stouffville's council chambers. The GTAA will host open houses, from 4 to 8 p.m., on Oct. 30 at Cedar Grove Community Centre in Markham and on Nov. 7 at Latham Hall in Stouffville.

In the 1970s, the federal government expropriated 18,500 acres in Markham, Pickering and Uxbridge for what it believed would be Toronto's second international airport, a plan shelved in 1975.

"This airport was uneconomical in the 1970s, it's uneconomical today and it won't fly 10 years from now," said Jim Robb, a spokesperson for the Rouge Duffins Greenspace Coalition seeking to stop development on the federal lands and on most of the provincially-owned areas to the south.

Some of the 500 attending a rally in Pickering last weekend

heard Ontario Finance Minister Janet Ecker express support for the coalition's goal of "linking the lake to the moraine" through both the provincial and federal areas, collectively known to some as Toronto's Green Door. "I want to work with you to see if we can make that happen," she said.

Ontario's Tory government is preparing to hand some of the lands, called Seaton, to developers, and in recent years has sold thousands of acres in Markham and Pickering. Around 5,000 acres in Pickering were sold with easements blocking development but this year

Pickering decided to study development in the area, once part of an agricultural preserve that included 2,500 still-unsold acres in Markham.

Mr. Robb and other preservationists who have reviewed land records for Pickering say they believe most of the preserve lands sold there are in the hands of developers.

Ms Ecker said her position is that the protective easements in Pickering must stay.

The Rouge Duffins group wants the unsold parcels on the Markham side added to Rouge Park.

does make economic sense."

Opponents of the airport disagreed, arguing the business case is inadequate.

Federal Transport Minister David Collenette has promised an airport would not be built if it's not profitable, "and this obviously is not profitable," charged Stephen Frederick, president of Voters Organized to Cancel the Airport Lands, or VOCAL.

Mr. Frederick also accused the GTAA of exaggerating future demand for air travel.

Forecasts for the three scenarios assume air travel in the Greater Toronto Area will grow 3.6 per cent a year cumulatively between 2001 (a year which saw traffic decrease at Pearson) and 2015, before it falls to 2.5 or less.

"It's blatant statistical manipulation," Mr. Frederick said. "They front-end-loaded the growth in the early years, to substantiate the need for an airport."

Mr. Gregg, however, said the

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