

Paul Hellyer on jets at the Island Airport

Paul Hellyer's Presentation to Mayor Ford and Executive Committee
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TORONTO - My name is Paul Hellyer and I was, at one time, Minister of Transport of Canada. Also, in 1971 I taught Urban Planning at the Graduate School of York University.

Let me state my biases up front. I have lived on the waterfront for 33 years and I am a Bombardier shareholder.

In my opinion there are a number of valid reasons why it would be unwise to permit jet aircraft to fly in and out of Billy Bishop Airport.

The first is that there is no real need for it. Toronto is already well served with transcontinental air service and the long list of environmental, safety, and logistic concerns involved is too high a cost to pay, for something that is not really needed.

To begin, there simply is not enough vacant land on or near the site to accommodate the extra parking, terminal and hangar facilities required. If you look at the graph of increased use of the airport for the last five years, you will see that the growth is virtually exponential. That will undoubtedly continue *without* the addition of jet aircraft. So there will be lots of work for the taxi drivers and a continuing headache for the people responsible for expanding the facilities in parallel with the increased traffic.

If jets are allowed, that headache would turn out to be one horrendous nightmare, as Air Canada, Westjet, and at least one American carrier would feel obliged to launch major operations from Billy Bishop in order to compete. The result would be constant tension between the operators, officials responsible for accommodating their requests, and stakeholders. This is an impossible scenario! It would be comparable to Cinderella's ugly sister trying to cram a size nine foot into a size six shoe.

One can only hope and pray that even the inevitable expansion *without* jets will not result in tearing down the nearby community center and school, and bulldozing the park.

Then there are the many safety concerns and the one that worries me most is birds being ingested into the jet engines. The number of cormorants that fly through the bay when the smelt are running can be counted in the thousands. While eating at the kitchen table we see them fly by in waves of several hundred, followed by another wave, and then another, until we give up trying to keep track. In addition the numerous flocks of geese and other birds cannot easily be dismissed. Transport Canada insists that jets be able to fly with one engine. Good. But what if both engines ingested a cormorant or goose more or less simultaneously and both lost power resulting in a crash landing in the bay, which is normally dotted with sailing boats, ferries and pleasure boats, all at the same time. That could happen, and it could be disastrous.

We were assured that there would have to be a plan to control the birds. But I have never heard of one that would be effective in this marine environment.

Proponents of allowing jets don't seem to appreciate that the Bay and Islands are a unique Toronto treasure that can't be duplicated elsewhere. From our condo window we watch the dozens of kayakers, scullers and sailors enjoying the bay, as well as jam-packed ferries carrying thousands of working-class Torontonians to the islands for a day of rest and relaxation in close touch with nature. Can you imagine how much the pollution and smell of jet fuel might affect the air they breathe?

My wife and I usually take visitors for a sight-seeing boat tour of the islands and bay – the most recent time being just a few weeks ago. I noted the detour we made to avoid the 'no use' zone at the end of the airport

runway. It is already in the nuisance category, but tolerable. To extend it further would be a considerable degradation. I realize that the present runway must be extended to meet the new safety rules about to be imposed. But it would be good if it could all occur on the lake side, assuming that wouldn't unduly affect marine traffic through the western gap.

In my opinion the decision has to be based on the *balance* of benefit. Porter Airlines is a good carrier with a nice niche market that most of us use *and appreciate*. But the price of adding a few distant destinations is too high and the environmental and safety risks are too great. Consequently, if I were chief planner for Toronto I would make a strong recommendation to Council to reject the application. If I were still Minister of Transport, I would simply not approve the use of jets, and avoid the horrendous problems *before the fact*, rather than be faced with an impossible situation later.