

## JUSTIFICATIONS FOR AIRPORT EXPANSION: MORE REASONS TO QUESTION THE PROPOSAL

The proposal to expand the Haliburton / Stanhope Airport – in particular by the addition of a new, 1200 metre long cross-wind runway – has been promoted by the Municipal Council as being of unquestioned benefit to the economy and “life-style” of the people of Algonquin Highlands and the region in general; an investment. There are some serious questions as to whether it is a truly worthwhile investment, though, if some of the technical points are made clear.

Some of the more important “benefits” really do need to be questioned by all of us, and by the Council.

BENEFIT: *A longer runway would attract more and larger aircraft, possibly including small jets. Air charters, scheduled operators and MNR water bombers and air-ambulance service activity enhance revenues, tourism, business and public safety.*

POSSIBLY TRUE: However the runway being proposed will be, more than 80% of the time, subject to wind conditions making it risky or impossible to use.

This is a “cross-wind” runway which is designed for use when the existing runway is deemed to be too risky or unusable. All reports up to now note that the existing runway is in the best possible alignment and that it is usable more than 90% of the time.

Charter and scheduled operators of large and expensive aircraft are pretty unlikely to base operations at an airport where the only runway they can safely use is only available when the winds are “bad” for the unusable “main” runway. The Chief Pilot of Fire Suppression in Sault Ste. Marie said that though the proposed runway just barely meets the length requirements for CL 415\* air-tankers, it would be foolish to base these planes where they would likely be grounded by some of the most common wind conditions. Larger air ambulance craft, if they were available, would have to wait until unusual weather conditions were present before attending to an emergency.

\*The CL 415 is the main water-bomber of the Ontario fleet. They are currently based in Sudbury where BOTH runways available are 300 metres longer than the proposed new runway at Stanhope. Sudbury is less than 25 flying minutes from our area. Occasionally they operate from Muskoka and would refuel there if needed in this area. Muskoka is less than 7 minutes away and has a 5000 foot strip, as opposed to the 4000 feet proposed for Haliburton / Stanhope.

\*BENEFIT: *Pilot safety and usability will be increased with the addition of a crosswind runway.*

TRUE: There is no argument on this point; a cross-wind runway improves safety by giving pilots an “out” if wind conditions make use of the existing strip dangerous. Given that larger aircraft are unlikely to use the airport, it is logical that a runway of the current length would be adequate. In fact, the two studies (1984 and 2003) into runway alternatives state this clearly.

In the same way, it is true that availability would be increased. A gain of 4 to 6% can be achieved at a cost roughly triple the cost of the existing runway. Sounds like excellent investing doesn't it?

\*BENEFIT: *There would be a decrease in liability to the municipality (taxpayers).*

FALSE: The airport and Municipality face no liability, in accidents related to wind and weather conditions, or *pilot decisions* to take-off or land in adverse conditions (excessive cross-winds, wind shear, inadequate runway length for aircraft type or flight condition).

The airport and Municipality *would* face liability in cases where failure to meet maintenance requirements were not met, i.e. runways are not promptly and properly cleared of snow, where runway design or maintenance allows excessive water to collect due to poor drainage or if obstacles and oil spills are not promptly cleared from runway and taxi surfaces. We must all hope and assume that that airport management maintains these standards and will continue to do so.

\*For the last two points it must be said, even if it sounds a bit harsh, that pilots are trained and (presumably) responsible people. They are not meant to fly in conditions unsuitable to the capabilities of themselves or their aircraft. Pilots are meant to know these limits, and also the potential hazards of the airports at which they intend to operate. Hazard information is published in the Canada Flight Supplements which all sensible pilots consult before flying in or out of unfamiliar airports. **Pilots are responsible for their safety and that of their passengers.**

BENEFIT: *The airport as it exists does not meet current standards for “Municipal Airports” as regards length, number and orientation of runways.*

TRUE (ISH): A provincial study and report in 1988 identified some characteristics of “Municipal Airports” which include: “One paved and lighted runway of 1070 m to 1200 m in length with a width of 23 to 30 m”; “An aircraft parking apron of 7500 sq m area with an additional tie-down area of similar size” and “A terminal building of 150 to 200 sq. m. in area.”

So; Yes, it is true that these standards are not being met.

On the other hand the same report states “The typical range of annual aircraft movements is 10,000 to 20,000...” This was, in 1988, 8 to 16 times the volume at Stanhope and is still 3 to 6 times the volumes of today. We fail to meet that standard characteristic as well.

Fortunately, these “standards” are really just suggestions from the Province, which has no authority to regulate design, construction, operation or anything else to do with airports – otherwise the Municipality would have been in trouble for years.

We need to be clear on this point: “Municipal Airport” means an airport owned and operated by a Municipality. Period.

The airport has always and will continue to operate within every requirement and regulation in force for the type of aircraft that use it. It is licensed and certified by Transport Canada and, unless something is being hidden from us, has never been at risk of losing this status.

\*It is interesting to note, though, that the 1988 report states one characteristic that almost perfectly fits the situation at Haliburton / Stanhope: “In most cases, airports operate with annual deficits in the order of \$50,000 to \$100,000...in a few cases, however, the deficit exceeds \$100,000.” Our Airport is very frequently at the high end and in the “exceeds” category.

### **LOW AND MINIMIZED IMPACTS**

Council documents and presentations have stated that the new runways’ take-off and approach areas are “sparsely populated”.

While this may be true, so is the rest of the Municipality. In fact there are more dwellings closer to the ends of the proposed runway than to the existing one and all impacts on these dwellings will be far more severe.

Council has promised to reduce impacts off the property and maintain a green “buffer” around the new runway.

We certainly have the right to expect this. In fact, unless the council proposes to build a 1200 metre runway that has a usable length less than 1000 metres, the “green buffer” could only be possible at the north end of the runway, at Barry Line because of legal requirements and flight safety limits. This buffer could have a *maximum* height of 4.5 metres (about 15 feet) for nearly 200 metres along Barry Line and nearly 100 metres along Airport Road.

The Cross-wind Runway Study Report of 2003 clearly points out that unless trees are “trimmed” or removed from properties off the airport, the certifiable length of the runway could be reduced to 975 metres in one direction and 675 in the other. This would mean no larger aircraft advantage would be gained. We’ve already covered that one, but this just makes it more urgent to address.

I don't think that anyone believes that Council is going through all of this for a runway that is, in one direction, *shorter*, than we have now. SO – a further 3 of the Middleton's lots will have to be at very least seriously degraded to the shore of Little Cameron, The Tom Fitzgerald family will have the same impact, as will the Ball family at the corner of Barry Line and Airport Road. At the South end of the runway a similar situation exists, though I do not know the families or the extent of disruption.

It would be my recommendation, if it comes to this, that the owners of the affected properties force the Municipality to expropriate these shore-line properties *at the maximum possible value*. The rest of us with airplanes flying sometimes less than 100 feet above our heads should seek compensation and tax reductions. I am a taxpayer and I firmly believe that taxpayers should pay for what they get.

**WHAT I HOPE IS THE FINAL POINT:** Your Council and Reeve, have stated that the manner in which they have proceeded with purchase and expropriation of lands before further study or planning would be prudent. Some questions can be asked without great expense, however.

The initial 1984 Master Plan was a very thorough and professional report and has a number of sections which, if one reads them carefully, would have raised some serious alarms. Obstacles that exceed minimum limits for safe operations of aircraft are mentioned and shown on maps prepared for that study. These obstacles are “permanent” obstacles, hills not trees.

In an informal interview with an accredited professional specializing in airport design, construction and certification on August 9<sup>th</sup>, I gave the data for the proposed runway design and information from reports from 1984 to 2003 concerning the area surrounding the airport.

*Based on the data and the professionals' usual standards of interpretation, (he) agreed to the following statement:*

*“(He) would have serious reservations about the construction of the runway as proposed due to the permanent obstacle violation of the Obstacle Limitation Surface and the Approach / Take-off Slope at 1000 metres from the north threshold. (He) would advise that, at the very least, Transport Canada would almost certainly require a threshold displacement seriously reducing the usable length of the runway”*

Simply put, this is the same reason that trees must be cut at the ends of the runways, except that the hills are more in violation and can't be cut down.

I have made a request for an opinion on this issue from Transport Canada as well, and am waiting for their response.

This issue has been brought to the attention of Council and officials previously and I would have thought that they could make the same calls I did. No engineers on the ground, no charge and, just maybe, no expropriation. That would have been responsible handling of our taxes.