

SUBJECT: City of Markham Comments: Future Uses of the Former Pickering Airport Lands

PREPARED BY: Patrick Wong, Senior Planner, Natural Heritage, Ext. 6922

REVIEWED BY: Mark Head, Manager, Natural Heritage, Ext. 2005

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the report dated April 14, 2026, titled “City of Markham Comments: Future Uses of the Former Pickering Airport Lands”, be received
- 2) That the City of Markham advise Transport Canada, through the ongoing federal consultation on the future of the former Pickering Airport Lands, that:
 - a. the City supports the continued current use of the Transport Canada–owned property in the City of Markham for agricultural and natural heritage conservation purposes, consistent with the City of Markham Greenway System and Greenbelt Plan Protected Countryside designations, and recognizes that these uses are compatible with the existing airport operations on the property in Markham;
 - b. Transport Canada be requested to consider long term future uses of this property that:
 - i. protect and enhance natural heritage features, ecological connectivity, and watershed health consistent with the environmental policies of the City of Markham Official Plan;
 - ii. provide opportunities for restoration, public access and nature based recreation where appropriate and compatible with ecological protection; and
 - c. upon confirmation by Transport Canada that the property is no longer required for the existing airport operations, Transport Canada be requested to transfer the property to Parks Canada for inclusion within the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP);
 - d. Transport Canada continue to engage with municipalities and other stakeholders on decisions regarding the future uses of the Pickering Airport Lands;
- 3) Parks Canada be encouraged to designate the property as part of the Rouge National Urban Park and manage it for ecological restoration, protected agriculture, cultural heritage conservation, and public enjoyment consistent with RNUP’s Management Plan;
- 4) That this report be forwarded to Transport Canada and Parks Canada prior to the commenting deadline of April 17, 2026, as the City of Markham’s comments in response to Transport Canada’s public consultations on the potential future uses of the Pickering Lands; and further,
- 5) That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

This report provides an overview and comments on Transport Canada’s review of the former Pickering Airport Lands.

BACKGROUND:

In 1972, the Federal Government (Transport Canada) acquired approximately 7500 ha (18,600 ac) of land in Pickering, Markham and Uxbridge for the purposes of developing an international airport. In 1975, plans for the airport were placed on hold and the lands were subsequently leased to tenants.

In 2015 and 2017, the Federal Government made two transfers of land from Transport Canada to Parks Canada to establish the Rouge National Urban Park, which were the first land transfers officially establishing the Rouge National Urban Park. Almost all the federally owned lands in the City of Markham were transferred in the 2015 land transfer, with the exception of a 21 ha (52 ac) parcel located north of Elgin Mills Road and east of Highway 48 (See Attachment A).

In January 2025, the Federal Government announced the cancellation of the Pickering Airport and that the remaining Transport Canada lands would be reviewed to determine their future use and ultimate disposal. Lands identified to have high conservation value are intended to be transferred to form part of an expanded Rouge National Urban Park.

Public Consultation on Future Uses of the Former Pickering Airport Lands

On March 2, 2026, Transport Canada launched a public consultation process to provide information and to receive public input on the future uses of the Pickering Airport Lands. A public consultation guide (see Attachment B) was released, and a project website was launched to solicit public feedback. Public consultation sessions were held on March 11 and 12. Additional sector-specific discussions with stakeholders, First Nations communities and municipalities were also held and are on-going.

City Staff from Planning and Urban Design and Sustainability and Asset Management attended a Local Municipalities Roundtable on March 16 to receive information on the consultation process. As Transport Canada requested that comments be provided by April 17, 2026, Staff recommend that this report be forwarded to Transport Canada prior to the commenting deadline, advising that the comments will be formally considered by Council on April 28, 2026. A Council resolution will be required to confirm the City's comments in response to the consultation. Should Council determine that any additional comments or modifications are required, Transport Canada will be advised accordingly.

Key considerations to be taken into account by Transport Canada include the following:

- a) Potential expansion of Rouge National Urban Park;
- b) Potential land requirements for federal projects such as the Alto High Speed Rail Project;
- c) Residential, commercial and other development opportunities;
- d) Alignment with provincial and municipal planning and development plans; and
- e) Indigenous reconciliation.

DISCUSSION:

The former Pickering Airport Lands that are currently under review consist of two distinct land areas in Pickering and Markham measuring approximately 3800 ha (9,380 ac)

- 1) Area A (City of Pickering): Approximately 3775 ha (9,328 ac) bounded by Rouge National Urban Park lands to the north and west, by Brock Road to the east and Highway 7 to the south (See Attachment A).
- 2) Area B (City of Markham): Approximately 21 ha (52 ac) located in the concession block bounded by Elgin Mills Road East, Highway 48, 19th Avenue and Ninth Line (See Figures 1 and 2).

The Markham Lands have important ecological and agricultural values that warrant inclusion in the Rouge National Urban Park

Portions of the land contain wetland and meadow habitats, while the remainder are currently under agricultural production in conjunction with other lands in the Rouge National Urban Park. An existing private airport runway on adjacent lands extends approximately 180 m into the southwest corner of the Transport Canada property.

These lands are entirely located in the Greenbelt Plan Protected Countryside and identified in both the provincial (Greenbelt Plan) and local (Markham Official Plan) natural heritage systems. They are strategically located along an ecological corridor that connects the Little Rouge Creek and the Oak Ridges Moraine, as envisioned in the original 1994 Rouge Park Management Plan and the 2019 Rouge National Urban Park Management Plan. These lands were included as part of the Rouge National Urban Park Study Area during the initial process of establishing the Rouge National Urban Park in the early 2010s. However, Staff understand that the lands were excluded from Park boundaries due to an existing lease with the private airport operator.

The lands are surrounded to the north, east and south by Rouge National Urban Park. They are landlocked and have no potential for urban residential or commercial uses due to their location within the Provincial Greenbelt Plan area. Their inclusion would represent a logical and appropriate extension of the Rouge National Urban Park to the boundary of the Greenbelt Plan.

Portions of the lands are currently farmed in conjunction with other lands in the Rouge National Urban Park, while the remaining areas contain natural heritage features that can be managed, protected and restored by Parks Canada. Future management for agriculture and natural heritage conservation purposes aligns with the objectives of the Rouge National Urban Park Management Plan and existing designations of the Provincial Greenbelt Plan and the City's Official Plan Greenway System. Staff recommend that the lands be ultimately transferred to form part of Rouge National Urban Park once the airport uses cease.

An active, privately operated aerodrome operated by Markham Airport Inc. extends onto the subject lands

This airport has recently functioned as a small- aircraft facility with a single paved runway, serving general aviation, flight training, and glider operations. Currently, Staff understand the airport maintains a lease with Transport Canada. The City's Official Plan recognizes the continued operation of the airport but does not support expansion.

Lands with natural heritage, cultural heritage and agricultural value should be considered for transfer to Rouge National Urban Park

At this time, Transport Canada identified that lands with high conservation value will be considered for transfer to Parks Canada and Rouge National Urban Park. However, clear direction has not been provided on how high conservation value lands will be identified. In Staff's view, measurable criteria should be established to guide the identification of lands suitable for transfer, including:

- Natural Heritage: the presence of natural heritage features, vegetation protection zones, ecological corridors, core habitat areas, habitat for locally, regionally and provincially rare species, species-at-risk habitat, watercourses and valleys, natural hazards; restoration areas;
- Cultural Heritage: the presence of listed and designated cultural heritage structures, sites or properties, and cultural heritage landscapes; and
- Agriculture: lands currently in agricultural production and having high capability soils capable of supporting ongoing agriculture.

Criteria used to identify the lands to be transferred should align with the governing mandate of the Rouge National Urban Park, which is to protect natural heritage, cultural heritage and agricultural landscapes. The Rouge National Urban Park is the only national park with legislation that encourages sustainable farming practices to support the preservation of agricultural lands (in addition to natural heritage and cultural heritage), as outlined in the Rouge National Urban Park Act.

The identification of suitable lands that support the mandate of the Rouge National Urban Park warrant consideration when determining the future ultimate use of these lands. Staff recommend that lands with natural heritage, cultural heritage and agricultural values be prioritized and given consideration, among other factors, for transfer to the Park.

Next Steps

Transport Canada will be reviewing all public feedback received prior to the April 17, 2026 commenting deadline and will summarize the comments into a public consultation report. Transport Canada has been advised that with direction from the April 14, 2026 Development Services Committee, this report and Staff comments will be forwarded before the comment deadline. Final comments will be considered by Council on April 28, 2026, and submitted to Transport Canada after the commenting deadline.

Currently, Transport Canada is not anticipating a second round of public consultation. As land use concepts and preliminary options become available, it is recommended that Transport Canada continue to engage with municipalities and other stakeholders to refine land use recommendations and to coordinate any requirements for municipal or provincial infrastructure and services.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Not applicable

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:

Not applicable

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

The potential expansion of the Rouge National Urban Park aligns with Objective 3.4 – Protect and enhance our natural environment and built form.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Real Property and Sustainability & Asset Management Departments were consulted in the preparation of this report.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Giulio Cescato, RPP, MCIP
Director, Planning and Urban Design

Trinela Cane
Interim Commissioner, Development
Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Map of the Pickering Airport Lands
Attachment B: Information Guide: Pickering Lands Future Uses Consideration
Figure 1: Location Map: Pickering Airport Lands in Markham
Figure 2: Context Map: Pickering Airport Lands in Markham