

## **GDA Recommendations on the future of the former approximately 9300-acre Federal Airport land holding in North Pickering**

Green Durham Association is a charitable organization whose mission has been to protect as much as possible of what we considered to be Toronto's "green door". This has been our continuous mission all these years, whether the land was within the 43,000 acres expropriated by federal and provincial governments in the early 1970's, or valuable farmland, or Moraine land further north and east. Green Durham Association's original name was Green Door Alliance reflecting that vision.

We and many of our members have a long history of continuous involvement fighting against the airport, combatting urban sprawl, and with land stewardship and conservation and passive recreation uses for more than 50 years now. Some of our founders and early members lost their land to the Federal and Provincial expropriations during the 1970's. GDA members were appointed to provincial advisory committees in planning the future of the Seaton lands and adjacent Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP) lands. We have supported research exploring and promoting the establishment of agricultural easements on provincial land sold, been involved in legal action to retain those easements, and have successfully promoted the use of conservation easements on private lands. Over the years we have been appointed to a federal advisory committee on the airport lands and have been parties to several Ontario Municipal Board hearings fighting urban sprawl.

In Uxbridge we have worked very closely with the Township of Uxbridge, with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and many other partners to significantly expand and better manage public conservation lands, create off-road corridors for the Trans Canada and Oak Ridge Moraine trails, and create nature/trail corridors connecting conservation lands to communities. We are a partner with the Province and the Township of Uxbridge in the Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park project, securing connections on private lands to enhance the publicly owned lands which will eventually become a part of this new park.

Protecting the great majority if not all of the 9300 acres of federal land and getting them transferred is very important to GDA, but so is protecting other nearby prime farmland and natural areas.

### **Our Recommendations**

**1: Consult First Nations peoples:** These lands are the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaty First Nations. Any future plan for these lands must ensure their rights to meaningful consultation.

**2: Transfer all or most of the 9300 acres to the RNUP:** The Federal Government in its 2025 announcement committed to transfer all 'high conservation value' land within the 9300 acres to the Rouge National Urban Park, and to also transfer the 'great majority' of the 9300 acres to the RNUP. Virtually all 9300 acres that might not be considered 'high conservation value' are prime agricultural land with "Class 1" soils. Most if not all of these lands should also be transferred to the RNUP, subject only to possible exceptions noted below in our submission.

**3: Revisit the RNUP management plan:** The plan for Rouge National Urban Park was prefaced on the belief that at some point an airport would likely be built. It thus made little sense to invest in buildings and in communities like Altona as they would be in high-noise lands when an airport was built. Now that an airport is no longer a possibility, **we believe the RNUP management plan for the existing park lands must be revisited**, and wherever possible be similar to the strategy for airport lands being added to the RNUP.

**Foster better linkages between RNUP and nearby lands:** Beyond the federal lands the landscape has changed since the most recent RNUP management plan was released. The next management plan needs to consider these changes and ensure there are linkages:

- to lands to the north where the Province is creating the Uxbridge Provincial Urban Park directly across the road from the current RNUP.

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- to east in north Pickering where a new urban area has received provincial approval, and where the Province may create links south from the Uxbridge Provincial Urban Park to this new urban area.
  - and to the south, better connect the federal lands via the Seaton Trail corridor to Whitevale, Seaton and the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve lands.

**Funding:** Adding additional land needs to come with adequate funding. According to media reports the RNUP has experienced layoffs and cuts to funding. As regular visitors to the RNUP we notice a deterioration in the state of the trails we love to walk. The recently announced Force of Nature Strategy is well-timed and could be applied to protecting and enhancing these lands.

Should both parties be willing, there could also be a unique and innovative opportunity for co-led approach with First Nations groups to the planning and management with Parks Canada; this is consistent with the Force of Nature strategy described in the press release (<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/nature/nature-strategy.html>).

**4: Long term renewable leases** should be used to revitalize the towns of Altona and Brougham, as well as agricultural lands in the countryside. If leaseholders are meeting lease conditions they should be able to renew them. These would give many lease holders a stake and an ownership interest and promote commitment to and investment in the long term much as Parks Canada has done in Banff, Alberta in both the town and countryside. This has been a long-held view of GDA, that a sense of ownership is important for stewardship. We believe this is critically important and should be flexible enough to allow agriculture-related businesses in the Park— such as an egg washing station, farm equipment store, large animal veterinarian operation, crop and seed supplies, or an agri-food operation such as nearby Willowtree Farm in Scugog Township where generations of farmers own/manage some 700 acres of land, operate a store, café, bakery, and farm animal 'zoo' on the site.

**5: Support agriculture:** The park's farming community currently relies on and contributes to farm support services, businesses and markets outside the park in the Greenbelt and beyond. We understand there are some contaminated land parcels on the federal lands, these could be dedicated to processing plants and appropriate businesses which support the agriculture system. At this time with the current global backdrop, supporting agriculture on these federal lands provides an opportunity to revitalize the agriculture industry.

To quote from the Agriculture Canada website: *Agriculture and agri-food is one of the sectors with the highest economic growth potential in Canada. Canada's key advantages can make us a leader in sustainable food production and processing. Demand is growing for the kinds of food that Canadian farmers and processors can deliver. Canada's reputation for environmental stewardship can lead to increased demand and price for our products. Taking advantage of key opportunities will ensure the sector is competitive, sustainable, resilient, and prosperous well into the future* (<https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/sector/overview>). If ever there was a key opportunity, supporting agriculture on the federal lands surely is an ideal one!

**6: No to housing:** We do not support housing on the federally owned whitebelt lands. This prime farmland is just as important to add to the RNUP as the lands protected for nature. Pickering already has a massive surplus of areas set aside for urban development in Northeast Pickering, and the ability to also accommodate much more population growth in South Pickering and Seaton. Under these circumstances, any federal effort to situate additional housing, far from amenities and on prime farmland will, we believe be **very** strongly opposed by the public, as the worst and most expensive form of sprawl.

However, it may make sense to transfer a **small** portion of the federal lands along Highway 7 to the City of Pickering to widen the highway and allow a narrow band of commercial lands on the north side. It may also make sense for Highway 7 to bypass Brougham slightly to the north in order to revitalize the hamlet of Brougham.

**This would only be acceptable if in return:**

- The Federal Government were to secure a connection across Highway 7 for the Seaton Trail and the West Duffins Creek and obtain a **comparable portion** of the conservation lands in Seaton. This would support a nature trail corridor following the Seaton Trail under the 407 through historic Whitevale, and

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south under busy Taunton and Steeles road and hopefully, also west through the DRAP lands to the RNUP; south to Lake Ontario; and west to the Meadowway

- The agricultural easements currently held by the City of Pickering are transferred to the RNUP, thereby ensuring that the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve lands adjacent to the Park will never be developed. By eliminating that possibility, it will support the overall agriculture system and as described above, foster better farming practices within this very large area of prime farmland adjacent to the Park. As long as these easements are held by the City of Pickering, they will be vulnerable to removal; we have direct experience of this and have fought several times to have the easements returned.

**7: ALTO Rail:** The ALTO high speed rail route has yet to be resolved but there is a real possibility that the route chosen will cross over the Federal airport lands proposed above for inclusion in the RNUP. At federal meetings recently held on the future of the former airport lands one of the main speakers represented ALTO, so this suggests that sections of the CPR line running through the airport lands are under strong consideration. The existing CPR line from west of Claremont to at least east of Ashburn, may no longer be used for rail or freight, if the ALTO line uses the CPR line as it enters Toronto. If unused, this line could become a very valuable hiking/cycling trail. This would create a situation through Pickering at least, where the ALTO line would replace the existing freight line and be a somewhat wider line but would not create an additional line. We believe support for the ALTO route in Durham would be greater if this portion of the CPR route not used for ALTO could become a rail trail.

The most likely Alto route may be to head east through the federal lands south of Claremont. The way in which the line maintains environmental and trail corridors as the line crosses Reesor Creek, the West Duffins Creek, Michell Creek, the Brock Road, the East Duffins Creek and the TransCanada Trail and other trail corridors will all be very important. GDA and other environmental groups will make their views known on the importance of ensuring these and other corridors are as robust as possible. Although ALTO would not be operational in this area for more than a decade, ALTO officials indicate the route choices will be greatly narrowed over the next year so it is important to comment soon.

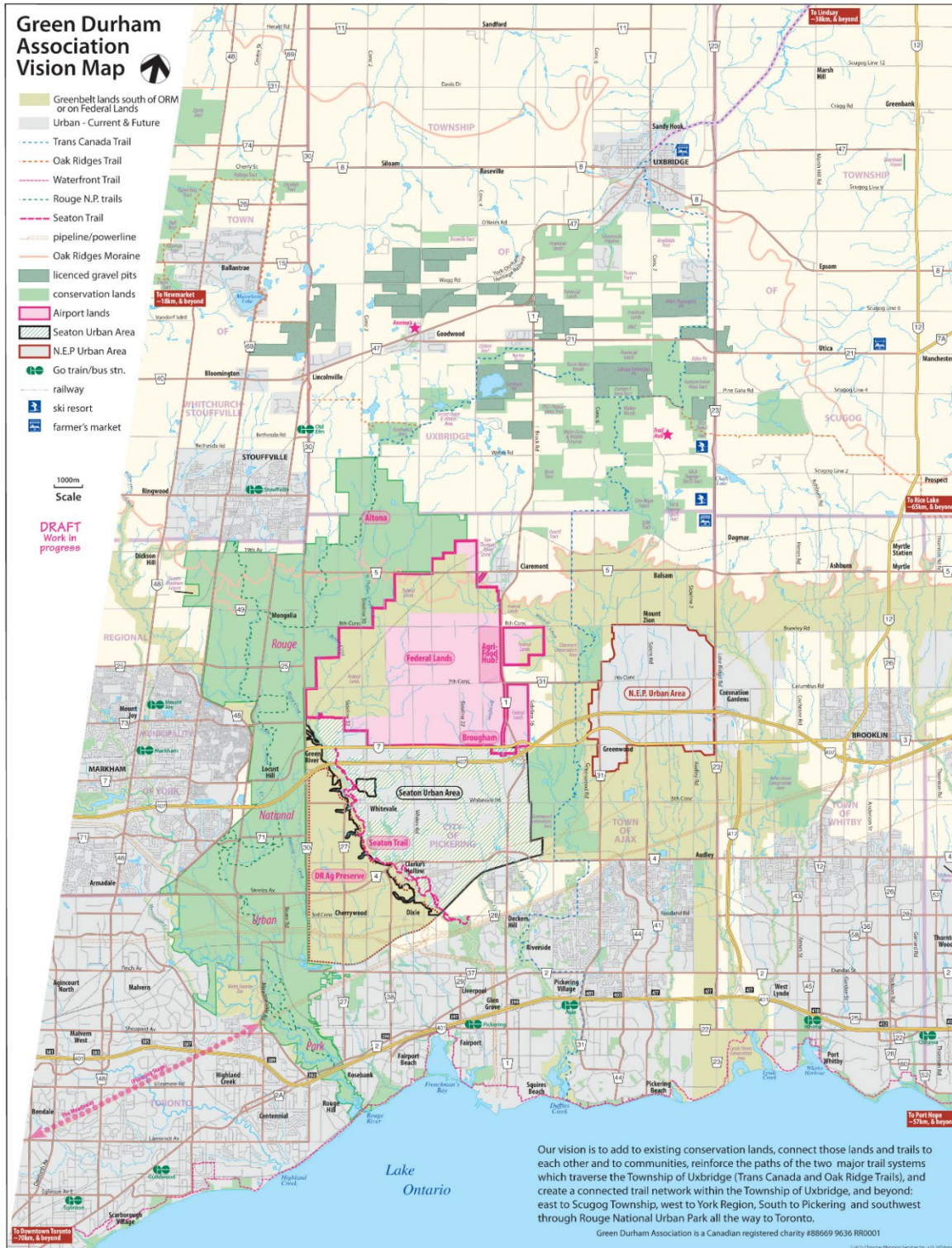
In addition, there has been some talk of creating a second ALTO stop on the urban fringe of Toronto, likely next to a major transportation route such as Highway 407. Passengers would thus not need to travel into Toronto to catch the high-speed train. This stop could also be used as a commuter line for entering and returning from Toronto. If such a stop is included it would likely be in west Pickering, possibly in the federal lands or perhaps just west in Markham on the edge of the existing RNUP. We believe it would be in Durham Region's interest if such a stop, is included to have it in Pickering or very close to it, rather than further west and south such as near the 401.

We have one final question on ALTO. If an ALTO route were decided particularly in the next year or so, across the federal lands, would it make sense to transfer these lands to the RNUP, now, or instead wait until that decision is made and then perhaps transfer any lands needed by ALTO directly to another federal entity?

On the page following we have included a map illustrating the current context of the federal lands. Our actions over more than 50 years have been focused on the 9300 acres of federal land under consideration today and also the adjacent lands and nearby prime farmland and natural areas to the north and east.

Submitted April 17, 2026 on behalf of Green Durham Association:

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A map of the federal land holding showing the context. The map depicts areas set aside for imminent and future urban area development (light grey). See also the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve and the Seaton Trail. This map does not highlight the Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park which when completed will touch the RNUP north of Altona and extend south just east of Claremont.