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The Hon. Pablo Rodriguez  
Minister of Transport  
Suite 485, Confederation Building  
Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6

January 26, 2024

**Re: Canadian government must review airport authority mandates and reassert oversight of developments on leased Transport Canada lands**

Dear Minister,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the increasing lack of oversight of airport authorities like Ottawa Macdonald-Cartier International Airport Authority (OMCIAA). The government needs to address this by, among other actions, reviewing the mandates of all airport authorities with the goal of strengthening accountability and oversight mechanisms.

Transport Canada must retake its traditional role in demanding transparency and meaningful public engagement from airport authorities, particularly when they approve developments and infrastructure projects on leased Crown lands. I recognise that current contractual obligations and laws permit significant independent decision-making on the part of airport authorities. This must change.

In the 1980s and 90s, the federal government began transferring management of airports to airport authorities. The government argued that taxpayers were paying \$135 million a year and should not be directly subsidizing airports. However, the new “not-for-profit” authorities have little incentive to be transparent about their decisions. These authorities operate remarkably autonomously.



The Canadian government has increasingly abdicated responsibility for regulating these airports. They are arms-length from Transport Canada. Indeed, Transport Canada has leased land to these authorities and essentially granted them free rein for development projects. In 2019, Aéroports de Montréal (ADM) much of the 19-hectare park and swampland in Technoparc near the Montréal Trudeau International Airport was slated for development. This threatened the biodiversity of the area, notably the smallest heron species in the world, the least bittern. Although environmentalists and activists pressured the authority to announce it would protect a portion of the land, ADM has since continued developments that threaten flora and wildlife, notably razing milkweed plants that serve as a crucial food source for the at-risk monarch butterfly.

I heard from the 'Save Hunt Club Forest' campaign regarding their opposition to OMCIAA's destruction of a 10-acre red pine plantation that became a beloved recreational space for the community. OMCIAA had unchecked authority to destroy living forests and wetlands spread across Ottawa's south end under a 1997 mandate from Transport Canada. The Save Hunt Club Forest campaign had successfully prevented clearcutting in 2021 for OMCIAA to develop a parking lot for a BMW dealership.

Unfortunately, my letter comes too late for this forest, which was just five years away from being classified as old-growth. Despite widespread opposition, OMCIAA's board of governors was fully permitted under Transport Canada's lease to award this massive tree cutting contract as a Sole source contract. This red pine plantation helped to offset the airport's carbon footprint. Clearcutting the forest with almost no notice, and with no community consultations while claiming the impact assessment meant the authority did its due diligence, was an extreme and unaccountable reaction at best and a poor excuse at worst.

Even the firm that conducted the impact assessment has stated that their report "included six recommendations on how to move forward with the red pines – ranging from "do nothing" to significantly thinning out the woodland but still leaving roughly 120 trees. None of the recommendations included clearing the land entirely": <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/hunt-club-forest-airport-clear-cut-ottawa-1.7036570>. This further shows the lack of accuracy in the authorities' public statements and demonstrates a need for government oversight.

While Transport Canada is contractually obliged to 'respect the independence' of the authority, this reality is unsustainable. The 1997 mandate of OMCIAA and the mandates of all other Canadian airport authorities clearly need to be reviewed. It is disappointing that you did not meet with the organisers of the Save Hunt Club Forest campaign before the airport authority moved forward with destroying the forest. The campaign initiated a petition that received nearly 23000 signatures. Their voices deserve to be heard. I encourage you to meet with Michael Vorobej, who helped organise this campaign and whose perspective on the lack of transparency or public engagement by



airport authorities will be very useful for you. Michael can be contacted at [michael.vorobej@sympatico.ca](mailto:michael.vorobej@sympatico.ca).

I appreciate you taking the time to read this letter. I reiterate my calls for a national review and modernisation of the mandates of airport authorities, which the government has the authority to do. This will help ensure airport authorities are not permitted to continue developing leased Transport Canada lands without meaningful community consultations. I am also calling for an immediate moratorium on developments and the further destruction of land, forests, wetlands and wildlife by the OMCIAA.

I would like to request a meeting with you to discuss these concerns further. Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to reading your response.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth May, O.C.  
Member of Parliament  
Saanich-Gulf Islands  
Leader of the Green Party of Canada

