

July 28, 2015

Ms. Kathy English
Public Editor
The Toronto Star
One Yonge Street
Toronto, ON M5E 1E6

Dear Ms. English:

I write to you today regarding the latest in a long series of inaccurate pieces highlighting Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport and PortsToronto by writer John Barber. While he was at *The Globe and Mail*, Mr. Barber's former employers had to deal with a defamation action in relation to his coverage of the airport and its governing body, in addition to the same kind of erroneous material that he is now peddling via the pages of your newspaper. It came as no surprise that Globe management removed him as a municipal affairs columnist following a settlement of that 2009-era legal action. While I appreciate the column in question falls under an "opinion/commentary" headline, I assume that you remain interested in i) accuracy, and would hope to avoid the appearance that ii) The Toronto Star is aiding one of your regular contributors in his pursuit of a biased vendetta that has lasted more than a decade.

I draw your attention to the following erroneous and/or misleading statements in the July 25, 2015 article:

"three century-old ferries so decrepit federal authorities have repeatedly threatened to decommission them in the name of public safety — and probably should. (Instead, Transport Canada has settled on the crude expedient of cutting the antique fleet's permitted passenger loads, presumably to limit losses from the anticipated disaster.)"

Mr. Barber declines to mention that the ferries in question are owned and operated by the City of Toronto.

"handsomely subsidized island airport"

Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport is not subsidized and receives no funding from any level of government. PortsToronto, as owner and operator of Billy Bishop Airport, receives no Federal grants (by law) and is entirely financially self-sufficient. In fact, PortsToronto paid \$2.4 million in gross royalty charges to the Federal government for 2014, and an additional \$2.9 million in Payments In Lieu Of Taxes to the City of Toronto. Rather than receive a "subsidy," as Mr. Barber claims, PortsToronto and Billy Bishop Airport are a direct net contributor to the public purse.

“...their almost-new ferry soon to be replaced by a brand-new pedestrian tunnel built by a public authority for more than \$80 million.”

The *Marilyn Bell I* ferry to Billy Bishop Airport, acquired in 2009 (without taxpayer dollars), is not being “replaced” by the pedestrian tunnel, given that the airport will still need to provide regular ferry access for Ornge ambulances, as well as catering, fuel and delivery trucks, for example. The new tunnel is required to improve the passenger experience, and became warranted after passenger traffic increased from ~25,000 passengers per annum a few years ago to more than 2 million.

Moreover, PortsToronto financed the \$82.5 million pedestrian tunnel under a Public-Private Partnership model, financed completely by Airport Improvement Fees collected from Billy Bishop Airport passengers. The use of the “public authority” language, when combined with the earlier “handsomely subsidized” claim, leaves readers with the impression that Federal taxpayers are subsidizing the construction of the tunnel. To be clear, there are no taxpayer dollars involved in the construction or maintenance of the tunnel. This is irrefutable.

In fact, it is Billy Bishop Airport passengers who subsidized the City of Toronto when PortsToronto agreed that new city water and sewer mains could be combined with the tunnel project, saving City taxpayers \$10 million on their own, previously-announced utility main upgrade project (which dated to the era of former Mayor David Miller).

“Or maybe the airport will have already gone bust by then, and Torontonians will finally realize they don’t need any ferries to reclaim this precious stolen property.”

Billy Bishop Airport was built on land that was largely a silty swamp in the early 1930s, reclaimed from Toronto Harbour by a predecessor agency to PortsToronto. It was “stolen” from no one, as is evidenced by photographs taken at the time.¹

It is my sincere hope that you will tackle Mr. Barber’s intentional and misleading falsehoods at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully,



Mark McQueen
Chairman

cc: Michael Cooke, Editor

¹ <http://www.portstoronto.com/getattachment/01abe7ac-d844-449a-9314-6c1488db19b7/Letter-to-Councillor-Glen-De-Baeremaeker.aspx>

The unfulfilled promise of the Toronto islands

The soon-to-be opened pedestrian tunnel to the island airport is a reminder of how much more could be made of our city's most valued, contested commons.



Courtesy of the YMCA of Greater Toronto

The Toronto islands were a sacred place of refuge and healing to the Mississauga and their predecessors.

By: John Barber Published on Sat Jul 25 2015

Ah, foolish me — imagining I could visit the beckoning, beautiful Toronto islands on a weekend afternoon to lounge on a hot beach by the cool waters of our great lake. The islands are such a blessing in the sweltering city, so close you can see them shimmering in the heat from the top of the building.

Such are the dreams that so often trump experience, which, if consulted, would have told me that the lineup for an island-bound ferry was going to be at least two hours long. As indeed it was: a

horrendous crush of unhappy families billowing out of the terminal into a thick swarm that reached all the way back to Queens Quay.

The private-sector alternative was no more appealing, with commensurate crowds of irritated beachgoers lining the dockwalls and waiting almost as long for a ride in a water taxi.

You can learn a lot about a country by looking at its public finances, but the city throws its politics right in your face. In Toronto, the question of who gets to use the islands — the city's most valued, contested commons — always punches above its weight.

Here are the sunburned masses consigned to a Communist time warp of infinitely long lineups in a concrete cattle pen to ride one of three century-old ferries so decrepit federal authorities have repeatedly threatened to decommission them in the name of public safety — and probably should. (Instead, Transport Canada has settled on the crude expedient of cutting the antique fleet's permitted passenger loads, presumably to limit losses from the anticipated disaster.)

And there is the briefcase-toting Nomenklatura gliding off to the handsomely subsidized island airport, their almost-new ferry soon to be replaced by a [brand-new pedestrian tunnel](#) built by a public authority for more than \$80 million.

Just imagine, for one fleeting moment, that Toronto was as progressive as it pretends to be, like some kind of northern European city. If actual democracy rather than naked political jobbery ruled these waves, the island airport would be long gone and the new pedestrian tunnel would open onto a sprawling Tivoli bordered by a mile-long beach.

No Torontonians would have to line up for hours both ways and pay to reach the city's most important public park. It would be truly accessible again, fully part of the city, and almost 100 hectares larger.

Our ancestors, native and settler alike, knew what the Toronto islands were all about. The islands were a sacred place of refuge and healing to the Mississauga and their predecessors. Ferries to the islands carried 2 million fun-seekers a year a century ago — twice as many as they carry today, in a city exponentially larger.

But capital staked its claim, and the city turned its back. Today we wait in line while lobbyists fly smoothly back and forth to Ottawa using our resources in order to arrange for new charges to appear on our cable bills and bank statements.

The good news is that hey, there's finally a tunnel, just like starchy old Sam McBride always wanted — and it will still be there when the airport finally disappears, as it is bound to do once Toronto finally decides to join the new century.

For evidence of that impending event, we have the tremendous success of recent mainland waterfront improvements. This is the other thing you see down there these days: the mass embrace of a revitalized waterfront. With this summer's completion of the new Queens Quay, and after decades of disappointment, the city-side central waterfront is now officially terrific.

Maybe when the glamorous yet unfunded new Jack Layton Ferry Terminal gets built, Torontonians will once again remember the islands — and the fact that nobody thought to include even a single desperately needed new boat in the budget for that lovely bauble.

Or maybe the airport will have already gone bust by then, and Torontonians will finally realize they don't need any ferries to reclaim this precious stolen property. Such are the dreams that persist, despite experience, on a would-be lazy summer afternoon.

John Barber is a freelance journalist. Follow him on Twitter @annegonian