**Transportation infrastructure is greater than the sum of its parts**

*By Daniel-Robert Gooch, President, Canadian Airports Council*

How we describe a trip tells us more about how we experience travel than the actual trip itself.

We say we “went to London”. We don’t bother to say we drove our car to the airport, parked, cleared security, got on a plane, landed, cleared customs, boarded the Heathrow Express train and checked into our downtown hotel. Unless, of course, something messes up, and then our seamless trip breaks down into distinct, and sometimes distinctly unpleasant, modal experiences.

Canada’s airports have been working with government and airline partners for years to smooth our journeys and create painless and efficient multi-modal travel.

There is no secret to how to make multi-modality work: all it takes is sustained investment in infrastructure and technology. But until 2018, that investment in Canada was unbalanced, with the federal government funding some modes, like roads and rail, but mostly staying away from airports in major cities.

This was a result of the transfer of 21 of Canada’s airports to private, not-for-profit user-pay funded corporations in 1992. This new user-pay model is unique to airports, which, unlike road or rail, pay for their own policing, safety and accessibility measures, expansions and upgrades.

In many ways, the user-pay system is a success, with airports investing over $27 billion in their infrastructure in the last quarter century. But the federal government has a role to play as well.

For example, it was always clear that small airports would not be able to generate enough revenues for all of their infrastructure needs. The government responded with the Airport Capital Improvement Program (ACAP), launched in 1992. However, this program is in need of a refresh. The funding envelope has not increased since its inception, yet airports are facing more complex and costly safety and accessibility regulations than in the past. The Canadian Airports Council and regional aviation associations have come together over the past year to call on the government to increase ACAP funding to $95 million a year, and support a simpler, more transparent and predictable program for eligible airports, which are those with fewer than 525,000 passengers a year.

Although ACAP has been in place for over twenty-five years, until 2018, there was no national infrastructure program for larger airports. That changed with the creation of the National Corridors Trade Fund (NTCF) in 2018. The NTCF is a welcome addition and addresses infrastructure development that ACAP cannot.

In 2019, the first year that funds were allocated, the NTCF invested almost $253 million into a number of airport projects, including cargo logistics initiatives in Halifax, Hamilton, Moncton, Montreal and Winnipeg, which allows these airports to boost air exports. The NTCF also opens the door to new investments in ground connectivity, like transit and regional rail.

The latter opportunity, transit to airports, is of growing importance to airports and their communities both as a convenient and safe transportation mode, and more importantly, to reduce the number of private vehicles on the road. For some, transit has become as important as airport infrastructure itself. In major cities, this includes transformation of regional transportation infrastructure with more investments in regional rail and transit in partnerships across all levels of government.

For example, airport-rail projects are underway in Montreal, Ottawa. In Southern Ontario, where demand is expected to grow by an additional 60 million passengers in the next 30 years, Toronto Pearson’s multimodal transit hub is being designed to support the flow of these travellers beyond the airport into the city and region beyond.

It is important to note that government support enhances, but does not replace, airports’ own responsibility to invest in on-airport infrastructure. Larger airports will continue to self-fund their own infrastructure but the federal government investments at small airports, airports in remote areas, and in ground connectivity will help take the traveller’s experience to the next level.

Canada’s airports look forward to working with the next federal government to ensure that all Canadians, no matter where they live, can expect a safe, efficient and respectful journey when they fly.