To: Hamilton City Council and Mayor

Dear City Councillors and Mayor Eisenberger of Hamilton:

In the interest of protecting the prime agricultural lands around Hamilton's airport in Mount Hope for future agricultural activity, I call upon you to cease plans for the development of the Airport Employment Growth District (formerly called Aerotropolis) and, as a logical alternative, to promote employment growth in the already developed parts of Hamilton closer to rail and water transport.

After six years of studying the peak oil phenomenon, I am firmly convinced that airport transport and economic growth in general are entering a lengthy period of retraction, perhaps even permanent. As food transported over long distances becomes ever more expensive, demand for less expensive local foods will increase and so will demand for farmland. Because of my age, peak oil will more affect my children and grandchildren than me, but now is the time to prepare for a future far less bountiful than what we have experienced to this point. It seems unconscionable to me to that politicians would favour short term growth at the expense of the future health of our descendants.

On Dec. 23, 2008, former mayor Larry Dilanni reiterated his support of the AEGD in his weekly blog spot on Chris Ecklund's website. (Enter: Chris Ecklund, Larry Dilanni as a Google search title, and in the next window, enter Dec. 23, 2008). In doing so, he grossly misrepresented the conclusion of Richard Gilbert, the Toronto-based energy/transportation consultant who wrote a peak oil report for Hamilton in 2005. It was released finally in 2006 after Gilbert changed his first draft in accordance with revised terms of reference sent to him by the City. (One has to wonder what he was forced to cut out of the first draft, the one I was denied access to.)

Ideally I would have responded directly to Larry Dilanni, but with no return address for him, my only choice was to reach him through you, knowing that political allies on Council would continue to keep him in the loop. More importantly, I'm writing to you because I fear you might share Dilanni's misunderstanding of Gilbert's conclusion.

Here's what Larry Dilanni said about Richard Gilbert: "Those on Council who thought that Gilbert's study would discourage the development of the lands around the airport for job-creation were surprised and disappointed that Gilbert came to no such conclusion."

Here's what Richard Gilbert really did say, and unlike Dilanni, I offer you a direct quote: "...the view that I hold is that air freight and air passenger transport, but business would be more related to air freight, does not have much of a medium and long-term future. And you can see the strains already in the
terms of energy prices...what I did not do for this work was a systematic analysis of what your alternatives are for this kind of development. You have the Innovation Park, you have lots of unused land in the Port - I know there’s a brown field aspect to many of them – between the Port and downtown, and you have other lands...I’m saying two things. Don’t tie your future to air freight and if you’re going to develop these lands, do it as an energy intensive cluster. But my own opinion, but not an opinion based on expert research, is that you have a huge opportunity for developing lands for this kind of purpose between where we’re sitting now (Me: presumably City Hall) and the harbour. I’ve walked around there, and around the harbour, and I’m just impressed by the opportunities for the kinds of industrial development that I’m talking about- which is very knowledge intensive, very rich in small scale activity.”

And here is what Richard Gilbert has said even more recently in his 2008 book Transportation Revolution. He recommends the following: increased use of electric motors where feasible and increased use of rail and water transport rather than trucking. Regarding air transport, he says no new breakthroughs in fuels are on the horizon to replace the high energy kerosene used today. Air transport will shift toward fewer flights with much larger airplanes and will focus mainly on intercontinental flights, with high speed rail replacing most intracontinental flights. “Aviation will have a future,” he argues, “but it will be a different future” than the way business operates today.

Not only will aviation be scaled back but so will the businesses that used to depend on it. Here’s what Daniel Lerch, author of Post Carbon Cities: Planning for Energy and Climate Uncertainty, says about the future of business (and, incidentally, you might remember he talked to Council in person in the fall of 2007): “It is starting to dawn on many that, should oil prices and demand remain low for an extended period, new investment in oil production will fall (Me: It already is.) to such an extent that, with worldwide depletion, now thought to be in the range of 5% - 6% a year, there simply will not be enough oil to power an economic recovery.”

I trust that the good sense of my demand to cease plans for the AEGD and to promote employment growth in older sections of Hamilton close to rail and water transport is crystal clear.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Reble

Richard Reble

Copies to:
1) Mr. Victor Doyle
   Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

2) MPP Paul Miller