



# YKF GROWTH PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION

The Region of Waterloo International Airport (YKF) is a vital mobility hub within the rapidly growing Toronto–Waterloo Innovation Corridor, generating over \$390 million in total economic output and 1,360 total jobs. As Waterloo Region prepares to reach one million residents by 2050, YKF plays a critical role in ensuring regional connectivity, economic growth, and access to global markets.

YKF supports a dynamic innovation economy, including a growing aerospace sector, tech industry, advanced manufacturing, and world-class post-secondary institutions. Since 2019, it has been the fastest-growing airport in Canada. In 2024, it handled more than 523,000 passengers. With a catchment of 3.4 million people within 40 km and ongoing congestion at Toronto Pearson International Airport, YKF is well-positioned to continue growing. Passenger volumes at YKF has the potential to reach one million annually within a few years. This 2025 Airport Growth Plan continues a “just-in-time” development strategy, ensuring infrastructure investments are triggered by real demand. Recent growth includes new Ultra-Low-Cost Carrier (ULCC) partnerships, positioning YKF as a competitive alternative airport in Southern Ontario.

The Growth Plan reflects consultations from 2023 to 2024 with municipalities, Indigenous partners, businesses, and aviation stakeholders. Priorities moving forward include attracting diverse investment, enhancing sustainability, improving the passenger experience, and supporting aviation and aerospace innovation.

In 2025, YKF marks its 75th anniversary. This milestone offers a moment to reflect on the Airport's past and reaffirm its forward-looking role in supporting a growing, evolving region.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

YKF is a full-service, regionally significant airport that currently supports a broad range of aviation activity, including scheduled passenger service, general aviation, flight training, aerospace operations, and emergency response. The Airport is equipped with modern airside, terminal, and support infrastructure that positions it well to accommodate near-term growth while planning for future expansion.

The airfield includes two asphalt runways, Runway 08-26 and Runway 14-32, supported by full parallel taxiway (Alpha) for Runway 08-26 and two taxiways (Bravo and Charlie) that provides direct access to the thresholds of Runway 14-32 and seven aprons. Apron III supports commercial airline operations, while the remaining aprons accommodate general aviation, flight training, and aircraft maintenance. Runway 08-26, at 7,003 feet, serves as the primary runway and supports a full range of commercial and corporate aircraft. Runway 14-32, currently 4,103 feet, provides important crosswind coverage and is used extensively by general aviation and flight schools. Both runways are supported by advanced lighting, navigation, and airfield systems.

The Air Terminal Building, expanded in 2021, provides 3,200 m<sup>2</sup> of space and is designed to support up to one million annual passengers (MAP). The terminal includes processing areas for arrivals and departures, security screening, baggage handling, and passenger amenities. Adjacent to the terminal are three categories of parking: Short-Term, Premium, and Value Parking Lot, providing a combined 1,700 parking spaces.

YKF also benefits from a robust set of support facilities. These include a NAV CANADA-operated Air Traffic Control (ATC) tower, an Airport Operations Centre (AOC) with Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) bays and maintenance facilities, and a Field Electrical Centre (FEC) that supports airfield lighting and navigation systems. The Airport is easily accessible by road, with direct access via Fountain Street and Airport Road, and strong regional connections to Highways 7 and 401.

Together, these existing facilities provide a solid foundation for growth. They enable YKF to deliver reliable service to passengers and partners today, while maintaining the flexibility needed to respond to future demand and development triggers outlined in this Growth Plan.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL & SUSTAINABILITY**

YKF is committed to sustainable growth that respects both the environment and the communities it serves. The Airport Growth Plan outlines a clear approach to environmental protection, cultural recognition, and long-term climate action.

### **Recognizing Indigenous History and Partnerships**

The Airport is located on land with a deep Indigenous history, with archaeological evidence dating back to between 8000 and 7500 BC. In recognition of this, YKF is exploring a partnership to create an Indigenous Landscape Project and outdoor gathering space. This space will reflect the cultural and ceremonial needs of Indigenous communities and support reconciliation through visibility, education, and engagement on airport lands.

### **Advancing Climate Action and Decarbonization**

YKF has committed to reaching Net Zero Scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2050, in line with the Region of Waterloo's climate targets. In 2023, the Airport achieved Level 1 Mapping under the global Airport Carbon Accreditation program. Ongoing actions include electrifying the airport fleet, applying sustainable development policies, collecting energy use data, and evaluating the potential for on-site renewable energy.

YKF views airport development as an opportunity to complement the natural and social environment through low-carbon design, energy-efficient infrastructure, and responsible land use. Long-term growth will be pursued in ways that balance environmental impact with economic and community benefits

### **Protecting the Natural Environment**

YKF is home to a mosaic of wetland, woodlot, and grassland ecosystems. To support these features, the Airport has developed a Natural Heritage Management Plan and



conducted extensive field studies to guide future development. All projects will include environmental assessments to minimize or offset potential impacts. For example, the planned Runway 14-32 extension will require land acquisition and habitat compensation to preserve environmental integrity.

### **Commitment to Responsible Growth**

As YKF continues to grow, sustainability remains a core principle. Future development will balance the needs of the Airport with long-term environmental responsibility. This includes careful planning, ongoing consultation, and investment in projects that benefit both the aviation sector and the surrounding ecosystem.

## **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

The Region of Waterloo International Airport is planning for growth through a **staged, trigger-based approach** that links infrastructure investment directly to passenger demand and desired level of service. This strategy allows the airport to scale operations efficiently, avoid overbuilding, and remain fiscally responsible while supporting evolving aviation and aerospace needs.

Passenger traffic at YKF has grown rapidly in recent years, increasing from 376,000 in 2022 to more than 523,000 in 2024. Updated forecasts indicate that the Airport could reach one million annual passengers within the next several years. Although timelines may shift depending on economic and operational factors, the Growth Plan positions YKF to respond quickly and effectively as conditions evolve.

Future development is structured into five progressive stages, each triggered by specific milestones in airport activity and capacity.

**Stage 1** includes projects that are either already complete or currently underway. These include the expansion of the Air Terminal Building in 2021 and updates to the Airport Zoning Regulations, which are currently underway.

**Stage 2** will be triggered once the 2025 Airport Growth Plan is formally approved. This phase includes several key initiatives such as the extension of Runway 14-32, design work for a future extension of Runway 08-26, preliminary planning for a new air terminal building, a minor expansion of the existing terminal, and implementation of short-term decarbonization projects.

**Stage 3** is expected to begin once passenger volumes reach approximately one million annually and the existing terminal can no longer deliver the desired level of service. At this point, a minor expansion will be undertaken to extend the terminal's operational life. Concurrently, detailed design work for a new terminal will begin, alongside the construction of the Runway 08-26 extension to ensure airside capacity keeps pace with passenger demand.

**Stage 4** will begin when the expanded terminal also reaches its capacity limits and annual traffic surpasses 1.5 million passengers. At this point, construction of a new net-zero air

terminal building will be initiated, along with supporting infrastructure such as aircraft aprons, parallel taxiways, and a realigned airport access road.

**Stage 5** is expected to fall outside of the 2025 Airport Growth Plan 20-year planning horizon. However, it is noted that ultimate improvements include the potential for an extension of Runway 08-26 to 10,000 ft. plus supporting infrastructure, further expansion to the Greenfield Terminal, and parking structure.

This staged model allows the Airport to manage growth incrementally, reducing financial risk while maintaining flexibility. It ensures that development occurs in alignment with real market demand, stakeholder input, and long-term regional goals. Through this approach, YKF is preparing to meet the future with infrastructure that is scalable, resilient, and ready to serve Southern Ontario's growing population and economy.

## **AIR TERMINAL DEVELOPMENT**

To support long-term growth, YKF completed a Terminal Feasibility and Site Selection Study to determine whether the existing terminal should be expanded or replaced. Six potential locations for a new terminal were evaluated, with the preferred site identified at the northeast intersection of Runways 08-26 and 14-32. This location was selected for its strong transportation connectivity, development flexibility, and alignment with long-term airside efficiency goals. While the 3,200 m<sup>2</sup> terminal expanded in 2021 remains adequate in the near term, passenger growth is expected to trigger further expansion and ultimately the need for a new facility.

Once passenger volumes approach one million annually and the current terminal can no longer maintain the desired level of service, a minor expansion will be implemented to extend its operational life. Full construction of a new terminal will begin once demand exceeds 1.5 million passengers and the expanded facility reaches its limits. The new terminal will be a net-zero building designed to support efficient operations, improved passenger experience, and enhanced environmental performance.

Terminal development will also require improvements to the surrounding transportation network. Planned upgrades include a new Highway 7 and Fountain Street interchange, extension of Ottawa Street, and realignment of Lonsdale Road and Menno Street to manage higher traffic volumes. The Growth Plan also protects for future transit integration, including potential connections to the ION light rail system and nearby Breslau GO Station. These investments will ensure that terminal access remains efficient, multimodal, and future-ready as the airport continues to grow.

## **AIRSIDE CAPACITY**

To ensure long-term operational flexibility and resilience, YKF plans to extend both of its primary runways. Runway 08-26 will be extended from 7,003 to 8,500 feet, enabling more reliable operations during adverse weather and supporting a broader range of aircraft types. Runway 14-32, currently 4,103 feet, will be extended to 7,000 feet to serve as a fully functional crosswind runway and provide a critical backup during maintenance or peak demand on the primary runway. These extensions will improve safety, reduce diversions, and enhance overall efficiency. Parallel taxiways will be constructed alongside

the extended runways to maintain fluid aircraft movements and support future growth in passenger, cargo, and general aviation operations.

## **AEROSPACE DEVELOPMENT**

Waterloo Region is home to a thriving aerospace sector with over 100 aviation and aerospace companies and more than 4,000 employees. YKF is positioned to become a central hub for this growing industry by supporting the development of an aerospace campus on airport lands. This future campus will focus on research and development, advanced manufacturing, sustainable aviation technologies, and emerging sectors such as drones and electric aircraft. Leveraging the region's innovation ecosystem, strong post-secondary institutions, and access to talent, YKF will play a key role in attracting investment, supporting workforce development, and reinforcing Canada's position in the global aerospace economy.

## **RECOMMENDED AIRPORT LAND USE PLAN**

The Airport Growth Plan includes a comprehensive Land Use Plan that identifies areas for aviation and non-aviation development, incorporating newly acquired lands and aligning with long-term growth priorities. This plan is designed to support operational efficiency, economic development, and environmental protection, while minimizing future land use conflicts and ensuring compatibility with surrounding communities. The plan provides the flexibility to accommodate different types of tenants, uses, and infrastructure over time, depending on market conditions and demand.

The land use framework includes designated zones for core airside operations, future terminal development, aerospace and MRO (maintenance, repair, and overhaul) activities, general and corporate aviation, and commercial development. It also provides areas for mixed-use flexibility and protected reserve lands. By clustering related activities and preserving space for future expansion, the plan supports synergies across tenants and enhances the airport's value as a regional economic engine.

Environmental protection is a key consideration. Environmentally sensitive areas have been identified and integrated into the land use strategy to ensure responsible development and the long-term preservation of natural features. Through this balanced approach, the Land Use Plan enables YKF to grow in a coordinated, sustainable, and economically viable manner, while aligning with the Region's broader planning and infrastructure objectives.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

The Growth Plan is designed to be flexible, responsive, and financially responsible, enabling YKF to adapt to changing industry needs while supporting the long-term goals of the Region. Its staged approach allows for capital investments to be timed appropriately, based on measured passenger growth and operational triggers. This framework reduces the risk of overbuilding while ensuring that infrastructure can be delivered quickly when needed to support future development and service expansion.

Over the next 20 or more years, the total capital investment required to implement the Growth Plan is estimated at \$616 million. Up to 67 % of this amount is expected to be funded through external sources, including federal and provincial government contributions and private-sector partnerships. The remaining share will be financed through airport revenues, capital reserves, development charges, and debt. Historically, the Region has provided an annual subsidy toward airport operations, which in 2025 equates to approximately \$30 per household. The Growth Plan projects that this level of support can be maintained even as the airport grows.

To ensure long-term financial sustainability, the airport will monitor revenue generation and adjust fees as needed to support growth. The plan also allows for adjustments in timing and scope based on market conditions, regulatory changes, or funding availability. By maintaining a phased and performance-based approach, the Growth Plan gives YKF the tools to deliver high-quality infrastructure, attract new investment, and remain a key driver of regional connectivity and economic prosperity.

## **POSITIONING FOR THE FUTURE**

As the Region of Waterloo continues to grow and evolve, YKF is taking deliberate steps to ensure it remains a key driver of connectivity, economic opportunity, and sustainable development. The 2025 Growth Plan provides a clear, phased path forward that balances strategic investment with fiscal responsibility, all while reinforcing the airport's role in Canada's most dynamic innovation corridor.

With strong foundations already in place and a clear framework for future expansion, YKF is well-equipped to meet rising demand and support new partnerships across aviation, aerospace, and regional transportation. This plan reflects a shared vision, one that embraces opportunity, respects the environment, and puts the needs of the community first.

Through ongoing collaboration with public and private partners, a commitment to long-term planning, and a focus on delivering measurable results, YKF is not only preparing for the future, but also helping to shape it.

