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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

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● (0850)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Thank you, and good morning everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure, and Communities, meeting number 40. Our orders of the day, pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2), are to resume our study of innovative transportation technologies.

Joining us today from Nav Canada is John Crichton, president and chief executive officer.

Ms. Michaud, on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): This morning, I propose that we resume debate on the motion, which was adjourned from the last meeting. I would like to take a moment to explain why it is important to do this now. I apologize to the witnesses who are here.

I thought that we had agreed last time to debate the motion on the Aeronautics Act, which had been amended. After a comment, the debate was closed immediately. It is an extremely important motion for Canadian municipalities, not just for the municipality of Neuville, in my riding. I talk about that municipality a lot because it is a prime example of the problem that the Aeronautics Act currently poses.

We amended the motion that you had moved. The government told us about its concerns, and I understand them. With this motion, we aren't trying to harm the economy at all. I can understand that giving the municipalities and provinces absolute power to refuse any airport on their land is problematic. We are willing to negotiate and discuss that aspect. We have also already removed that part from the original motion in order to be accommodating and to compromise. But the essence of the problem remains, and the motion that was amended still does not resolve it.

What we are asking for here is respect for provincial and municipal jurisdictions, meaning that they be able to manage their land, protect the agricultural land and carry out urban planning, as they do. What I'm talking about now will be addressed at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities conference at the end of the week. This issue affects not only a few of my constituents, but also the municipalities across the country. They do not have the power to regulate in their own jurisdictions.

The Aeronautics Act currently allows any private developer to set up in Canada, anywhere they like…

[*English*]

The Chair: If I may say, Ms. Michaud, it's not a point of order but you do have the right to move to the debate. If that's what you want to do, then we can do that. But I think you're actually arguing your point as opposed to—

Ms. Élaine Michaud: I'm explaining why it's important.

The Chair: I'm telling you it's not a point of order. If you would like to move to the motion, we can do that. The committee has the ability to do that and then you can place your comments on the record at that time.

Mr. Holder, on a point of order.

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Thank you very much.

While I will not denigrate the importance of any subject that comes before this committee, I'd like to remind members that we have a guest here today who has made some effort to be here. There seems to be a growing trend, I've noticed, that we want to argue or discuss these issues at the start of the meeting. As a courtesy to our guests, why don't we honour that respect? Why don't we hear them for the limited period of time that we have them here? Then if a member of any side has an issue to bring forward, I think it's absolutely and genuinely their right to do so.

But I think out of respect and courtesy, which I think we would all like to show, it's appropriate that we hear our guests first. Otherwise, do a different scheduling of our agenda so our guests can respond accordingly. So I would respectfully suggest that this be handled after our guests have left.

The Chair: It's not a point of order, but it certainly makes sense.

Monsieur Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): On that point, because I think it's important, I might trust an individual member of Parliament but I don't trust the government, for one reason. Several times I have exercised that courtesy myself, including at one point if you remember, when there was one witness and I said we should go to the witness first. I don't have any problem with going to the witness first. But there is a tendency on the part of the government that every time we want to settle an issue, especially when it is my time to talk, that we adjourn the debate.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: No, it's not personal. That's why I'm telling you this.

Mr. Chairman, I would agree with what you said only if, after the witness, we come back to the motion. And if we are coming back to that motion, I am the first person on the list. If we agree on that, I don't have any problem. If not, we might have a long discussion.

The Chair: Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Chair, I just wanted to ask about your ruling on this. If the motion was adjourned from the last meeting in terms of the debate—I think that was the motion that was passed—technically the motion is still in front of us because the debate was adjourned. So any members who wish to bring the motion back up in order to speak have a right to speak, right?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Ms. Olivia Chow: That can occur any time in the meeting.

So if Ms. Michaud preferred to do it now, she could do so, technically. Am I correct in that?

● (0855)

The Chair: Any motion that's been deferred by a motion can be brought back at any time by any member. If we do that, we go back to the speaking list, which has Mr. Coderre first.

What I was trying to say to Ms. Michaud is that while she didn't have a point of order she's certainly entitled, as a member of this committee, to bring that forward when she has the floor. She cannot do it under a point of order.

Ms. Olivia Chow: All right. Thank you.

Ms. Élaine Michaud: I didn't talk about a point of order. I asked to speak. I didn't say "point of order" and you gave me the right to speak.

The Chair: I recognized it as a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: I would simply like to clarify why I am doing this now. We had already been courteous with the witnesses who were here. We were told we could debate it and, in the end, we didn't have the opportunity to do so.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I accept everything that you've said, I'm just saying that for it to come back onto the floor, somebody who has the floor has to move into that motion, and if we do, then it's Mr. Coderre who has the floor to speak on it.

So what I'm going to do is to open the meeting. I'm going to ask our witness to make a presentation, and when you have the opportunity to take the floor, you are certainly welcome to move into your motion.

I will advise the committee, though, that after we hear from our guest, if we move to motions—and I have no objection to that—I will ask our guest to go home, because I think his time is far more valuable doing what he does than sitting and listening to us debate.

Ms. Élaine Michaud: That's fine.

The Chair: So we will ask our guest to please proceed.

Hopefully, we'll get to hear everything you have to say in a short period of time. John, please.

Mr. John Crichton (President and Chief Executive Officer, Nav Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to appear before the committee as part of your study on innovative transportation technologies.

I'm pleased to be here to speak of Nav Canada's strong track record in this area and the technologies that we consider to be the most promising game changers in our industry.

Since assuming ownership of Canada's civil air navigation system in November 1996, our aggressive modernization program has been a major factor behind our ability to improve safety and service. In fact, we estimate that when you examine the impact of all the technology and service initiatives we have launched since 1997, customers have saved $1.7 billion in fuel costs, a number that will grow to $7 billion by 2020. This in turn will generate related reductions in greenhouse gas emissions of 20.6 million metric tonnes.

Because of our structure, we are able to make technological investment decisions quickly, and to get investments in technology operational and delivering benefits for customers and the environment. One of the biggest benefits resulting from privatization has been the speed of response and our ability to stay ahead of the innovation curve, especially in the areas that directly affect our customers.

Today I would like to talk about three technologies that I see as crucial to improving the air navigation system and service to our customers. The first is performance-based navigation, or PBN. PBN refers to enhanced satellite-based navigation that includes strict specifications for functionality and accuracy. The application of PBN in the design of departure and arrival procedures, airways, and airspace will help Nav Canada to improve safety capacity and airport accessibility, while at the same time providing for more efficient aircraft operations in terms of reduced fuel being burned and greenhouse gas emissions. It will also reduce the costs of maintaining an extensive network of ground-based navigational aids. In deploying PBN, a great deal of work involves collaboration with customers regarding equipage, and with Transport Canada in relation to regulatory changes.

The evolution of the system requires that regulations be in place dealing with design standards, onboard equipment, and training requirements. I am convinced that this technology has a great deal of potential, especially once we achieve the tipping point with respect to rates of customer equipage.

We are working closely with our customers to identify where the business case exists for implementation in the many different operating environments across the 18 million square kilometres of airspace for which we are responsible. In line with this approach, we are introducing PBN in phases to enable aircraft operators to equip in accordance with the navigation specifications of the airspace in which they intend to fly.

The second game changer that offers a huge payback to our customers is related to advancements in surveillance technologies. Traditionally, air traffic controllers have used radar to monitor aircraft movements. Now there are exciting new alternatives such as wide area multilateration, automatic dependence surveillance broadcast or ADS-B, and even video surveillance. These technologies can be more cost-effective and more suitable for specific types of deployment.

We have invested heavily in ADS-B, a cost-effective alternative to radar that provides surveillance of appropriately equipped aircraft. We first implemented ADS-B in the area over Hudson Bay three years ago. Previously, this vast stretch of airspace, which lies at a crossroads of polar flights and international traffic from North America to Europe, had been managed through less efficient procedural control methods.

● (0900)

Today 15 ADS-B ground stations installed in Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, and Greenland provide an additional 4 million square kilometres of surveillance coverage of domestic and international oceanic airspace managed by Nav Canada. This has resulted in major gains in customer service, allowing for the safe reduction of separation between equipped aircraft, from 80 nautical miles to five nautical miles, as well as more flexible, fuel-saving routes. Over 1,000 aircraft from 40 airlines are equipped and certified for ADS-B operations in Canada, and the number continues to grow.

Nav Canada is also working with Searidge Technologies, an Ottawa-based company, on promising video surveillance technology called IntelliDAR. This technology has the potential to improve safety and efficiency at airports by providing air traffic controllers with improved situational awareness of aircraft, vehicle, and other movements on the ground.

While advances in surveillance give us a broader picture of who is flying where in our airspace, our improved automated weather observation systems, AWOS, are casting a wider eye on the skies, and giving pilots a more comprehensive weather picture. With flying decisions being so dependent on the weather, AWOS also makes our top-three list of critical enablers.

Although these systems have been in existence for decades, recent enhancements have improved the accuracy and reliability of weather reporting across the country, and the addition of weather cameras allows pilots to use the Internet to see for themselves the actual weather conditions at their destination or alternate airport.

We are currently replacing older AWOS and expanding the use of this technology. As a result, Nav Canada is able to provide additional weather information around the clock. This has the potential to improve safety and allow for more efficient operations, particularly in northern and remote areas.

Nav Canada's adoption of new technologies such as PBN, ADS-B, and the new AWOS go a long way toward addressing specific challenges in our industry, namely: improving safety and efficiency in increasingly congested skies and airports; strengthening operational capabilities in the north; improving the cost-effectiveness of our customer's operations; and reducing aviation-related greenhouse gas emissions.

Our operational personnel manage 12 million aircraft movements annually. I would be remiss, therefore, if I did not mention a few of the emerging air traffic management technologies that help them in this work. A recent example is the introduction of controller-pilot data link communications in Canadian domestic airspace. It's a means of direct electronic communication, or text messaging, so to speak, between pilots and controllers. Because there is no need for voice communication and therefore read-back/hear-back of instructions, there is less chance of pilot-controller communication error.

We are also equipping controllers in our area control centres with a feature called minimum safe altitude warning. This involves the addition of electronic terrain maps to our flight management system so controllers receive alerts when an aircraft's projected flight path places it in a predicted conflict with surrounding terrain.

Many of the technologies we use have been developed in-house by our engineers and controllers. I want to take this opportunity to commend them and all our people for their work in this area. Their efforts have allowed Nav Canada to keep pace with many developments under way in aviation, and indeed to establish a global leadership position in several key areas. We have been selling our ATM solutions internationally for over a decade. Our technologies can be found in the U.K., Denmark, Australia, the U. S., the Caribbean, Dubai, and Hong Kong. It's a reason Nav Canada is regarded as one of the most technologically advanced air navigation service providers in the world.

And because we have no shareholders, revenues from these international sales are invested in Canada and contribute to keeping our air navigation charges in Canada low. I am incredibly proud of our people and our record, but we can't rest on our laurels if we want to stay out front. We need to ensure that our regulations and programs support the development and deployment of promising technologies that can make our system safer, more efficient, and cost effective.

Transport Canada has applied a collaborative method of developing regulations that is valued by stakeholders such as Nav Canada. However, the overall rule-making process can be lengthy and inflexible at times. We support a move to a performance-based model of regulation by Transport Canada that is harmonized with global standards. Essentially, this means drafting regulations so the emphasis is on the performance that must be achieved rather than the method that must be followed to reach the performance goal.

● (0905)

A good example is multilateration and ADS-B. Because the regulations specifically stated “radar”, we could not initially use ADS-B and multilateration for surveillance. After going through a process to prove to Transport Canada that these technologies actually worked even better than radar, we eventually received an exemption stating that we could use them as equivalent to radar for separation of aircraft. We believe a performance-based model of regulation would be more sustainable, giving Transport Canada the ability to create regulation that focuses on safety performance, but does not need amendment to reflect each new emerging technology.

Finally, I would suggest that the standing committee consider carefully the approach used for infrastructure funding programs, and the important role these programs can have in the facilitation of cost-sharing for technology deployments in areas of the country where there may not otherwise be a business case.

A case in point would be the installation of AWOS, the automatic weather-reporting equipment in the north. This equipment would be invaluable for operators in challenging northern areas of the country where it would deliver safety and efficiency benefits for aviation, more reliable air service for northern communities, and improved climatic reporting in the north for all parties. It's expensive technology to install in the north due to construction costs. Consequently, it may not be feasible to deploy on a wide-scale basis without government assistance.

With respect to transportation technologies, the government's approach should focus on encouraging development, facilitating adoption, and supporting deployment in specific cases where the economics might otherwise not be there. In this country, with its vast distances, air transportation is an important and strategic capability that provides a critical link to communities and markets across the country and around the world. In other words, air transportation is essential for the quality of life of many Canadians, and it is imperative for the economic vigour and growth prospects of our country. I certainly credit the committee for examining what can be done in this area.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to take questions.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you.

The performance-based model is really quite interesting. I see this Windsor-Toronto-Montreal airspace service project and the required navigation performance that is in your presentation here.

I have been getting an escalating number of noise complaints, whether from residents in and around the area of the Dorval Airport, or from in and around Toronto Pearson International Airport. Is it because the flight paths have changed? Because the flight paths changed, it has helped the airlines save fuel because of the new system. Is it causing the airplanes to be closer to residential neighbourhoods and therefore generating more noise complaints, and then costing the local residents who then try to soundproof their houses? Is that what's happening? It seems that the flight paths have changed. Now, it could be that the local residents don't understand the flight paths, but it seems that they're saying the planes are coming closer and that it's noisier. Is it because of this system?

● (0910)

Mr. John Crichton: I think each particular complaint would have to be looked at specifically. I can tell you generally that the implementation of these changes was done over, first, a consultation period that lasted a better part of a year. However, of all of the changes in the flight paths that were adopted, none of them resulted in aircraft flying at lower altitudes. In fact, most of them are at higher altitudes and therefore less intrusive from a noise point of view. I think what you may be hearing about is that with the change in some of the patterns, people now see airplanes in places they didn't used to see them. There's a difference between seeing airplanes and hearing airplanes.

We'd be happy to look into the specifics of any particular complaint but we've had surprisingly few complaints since the implementation of this system, which was back in February. Both Dorval Airport and Pearson have had the same experience. We need to look at the specifics.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Can you outline the whole project in terms of timing, implementation, and consultation. I didn't know about the consultation because I thought I would have heard about it. That's phase one. It's now implemented. There was a consultation period. What's the process? What is phase two? What's the timing? How will that be put in place?

For Transport Canada, once you've done that, I assume they would then have regulations to support phase two. Is that how it works?

Mr. John Crichton: The system was developed as a proposal. We worked in this case in conjunction with the airports in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. The material was published. We set up special websites. We held public meetings with the noise management committees in all three cities. A whole host of activities went on, I think for the better part of a year. I'm looking at my colleague—yes, it's something like that. It was pretty transparent and open.

We spoke to all the groups who historically had expressed interest or concerns about aircraft noise. Of course, the airports in all three cities are very sensitive about this, and they all have noise management committees with members of the public involved. It was pretty extensive consultation, and again we can provide that to you. But I can tell you, as someone who's been in this business all my life, there's less noise as a result of the changes we made than before.

Ms. Olivia Chow: What is phase two? Is there a phase two? I see phase one, with project being implemented in early 2012.

● (0915)

Mr. John Crichton: I'm not sure what phase 2 is. I'll have to check on that.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Okay.

In terms of the tonnage, when this project is done, I assume there will be an evaluation. Once the evaluation is done, is there a plan to implement it across Canada?

Mr. John Crichton: That really relates to the PBN initiatives that I was talking about in my testimony.

The Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal corridor was chosen initially because of the density of traffic in that corridor that produced a lot of positive results. However, performance-based navigation, satellite-based approaches, are much more efficient than the traditional methods. They allow aircraft from the top of their descent at 35,000 feet to throttle back, and the pilots never touch the throttles again until they hit the runway.

The amount of fuel savings is quite incredible given these modern technologies allowing that. So we are designing the airspace and the procedures to allow this to happen. Eventually—maybe in a long time, once we have everyone equipped and the technology deployed appropriately—we hope to be able to do this everywhere.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation.

Could you explain something to me? If we focus more on the performance than on the method, will we need to take certain collateral approaches into consideration as well? You spoke about noise. As an aside, I can make a distinction between seeing and hearing an airplane. For example, you might decide to go a certain way, so you can lower the ceiling so that it is more efficient and, in doing so, you will produce less greenhouse gas.

How do you see that regulation being implemented? I imagine that factors other than just performance need to be taken into consideration. How do you see this, from a feasibility point of view or…

[*English*]

the doability of those regulations?

Mr. John Crichton: I guess there are two distinct issues. The issue of whether you have a prescriptive regulatory approach, or a performance-based one, has been around in aviation for quite awhile. We're really talking about matters of airworthiness, and operation, and so on. Noise regulations are a much more subjective issue. Transport Canada does ultimately regulate noise at airports, and that's why we have noise-abatement procedures and a whole host of curfews in some places, and so on. I think the two are quite exclusive; I don't think one needs to affect the other at all. The performance-based navigation approach and a more modern way of handling aircraft, in fact, is much more noise-friendly, if you will, to people on the ground than the old way of doing it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I'm trying to understand what we can do to ensure that the regulation is made by Transport Canada.

You told us that the installation of an automated weather observation system is expensive. How much does it cost? What would the cost be to the government? How do you see the division of the costs? I imagine that the government's contribution is limited.

If we are focused on performance, do you think it would involve an investment over a number of years? Strictly from a budgetary standpoint, what are you asking of the government?

● (0920)

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: The only thing we're asking from government in terms of AWOS is capital assistance to initially put it in in the north, and by that I mean the three northern territories and northern Quebec. The reason for that is simply the very high site construction costs in these areas. I think, just to give you a rough order of magnitude, all 50 sites that we would have in mind in those areas—and these are all airports in small communities—could be done over a four- or five-year period with government assistance in the area of $40 million to $45 million. So it's not a huge sum of money. Nav Canada would pay for the equipment and subsequently maintain and run it. It's just that we can't find a way to justify in a small community, where there are two or three flights a day—albeit some are medevac flights required to save people's lives and so on—making those kinds of investments. And we don't even get revenue from a lot of these flights. But as someone who worked in the north for a very long time, I think this would be a really huge and smart infrastructure investment that we would urge the government to make.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: The reality is different in the context of an Arctic policy. It's not just a matter of being able to have a certain performance and that it be accessible. You spoke about safety. With the issue of the Northwest Passage, the whole satellite approach will also have an impact, for example, to protect our sovereignty or protect us from drug trafficking. I imagine, in this context, when you propose the plan, other departments could be approached, not just Transport Canada. A policy could be created that affects several departments. It could also affect National Defence, I imagine.

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: There's no question that what we're doing both in terms of AWOS and satellite navigation—and there are other things I haven't talked about in this regard—are all things that I think enhance Canadian sovereignty. We work closely with the military and the coast guard and so on, so it's all definitely a benefit to all involved.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I have one last question about regulations. NAV CANADA is working with organizations from other countries. What is the status of regulations in other countries? When it comes to standardization, could it lead to greater effectiveness? Are our standards lower than European standards? In any event, your corporation is governed by ICAO. With respect to what you said about the installation, what are other countries doing?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: Each country sets its own safety standards. Most countries belong to ICAO, and ICAO has recommended standards and practices. Canada is obviously a leading member of ICAO and like most developed countries adopts most of those standards and practices. Each country sometimes has reservations about individual ones, but I think Canada is seen from an aviation point of view as probably the safest country on earth, if not in the top two or three.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank our guest for attending this morning. Most of my experience as it relates to flight is of travelling from London, Ontario to Ottawa. I recall that just a few years ago we had Nav Canada involved. We had what was originally the London International Air Show, which then became the Great Lakes International Air Show. They made me president because I'd never been to an air show before and they thought that would be fun. It certainly gave me some insight into some of the very compelling dynamics that you have to deal with in terms of planes in the air and all the other issues that you deal with.

But I'm particularly curious, and I found this interesting. Mr. Crichton, when I heard your testimony today. First you talked about benefits resulting from privatization, and I want to compliment NavCan for having that approach. You've indicated that you feel that by virtue of being privatized you stayed ahead of the innovation curve. I've noted in your testimony some of the significant dollars in fuel cost savings that customers have been involved with because of changes in technology.

But what would you say the biggest advantage of privatization has been for Nav Canada?

● (0925)

Mr. John Crichton: Being in charge of our own destiny and having to, if I can use the vernacular, “produce or else” has unleashed the innovation and the ability of the people to rise to great heights. Nav Canada is now seen, without question, as the world's leading air navigation service provider, and that has come about because of our privatization, because of the structure that we're in and our ability to do things fairly quickly.

We're self-financing; we're not dependent on somebody else's budget. If you're part of government, you're caught in the federal government's budgetary policies and processes and so on. We're free from that. We're an independent private company and we finance ourselves in the public debt markets. We have to perform. If we don't, they'll replace me and get somebody who can perform.

Mr. Ed Holder: So without putting words in your mouth, did I hear from you that as the result of privatization, Nav Canada is streamlined, more effective, more technologically advanced and free from the fetters of government interference? Would those be your comments?

Mr. John Crichton: That's not just my opinion. Anybody who knows this business around the world will tell you the same thing. And there are many people who have noticed it; other countries are now looking and asking whether they should go there.

Mr. Ed Holder: Chalk one up for privatization.

I have a question for you, just so that I can understand a bit more. You talked about Nav Canada's technology and how you sell some of that technology to countries around the world.

How, ultimately, do you make your money? Is that what you do, sell your technology? Could you explain that a bit more for the committee?

Mr. John Crichton: The only difference between us and an ordinary business corporation is that we don't have any shareholders. You need to look at us as being more or less like a customer cooperative, if you will. To the extent that we make money, we do one of three things with it: we either pay down debt, use it to finance capital spending, or reduce our charges to our customers. So the dividend, if you will, would go back to the customers in that way.

That, I think, is an appropriate way of handling what we are as an air traffic control operation: a monopoly, and I would argue one of the few natural monopolies that you would find.

How do you bridge that gap? I think that's what's unique about Nav Canada. We've done it by saying we're going to set it up this way, as a non-share capital corporation. But the people who ultimately have to pay all the bills, who are the customers, get the benefit if the business runs properly.

Mr. Ed Holder: It's private, but would your books be on the public record?

Mr. John Crichton: Oh, yes, we're a public company in the sense that we're a public issuer. So we're just like any company that trades on the stock exchange. We're subject to the same disclosure rules. You can get all of our corporate documentation on SEDAR. So we're just like any other public company.

Mr. Ed Holder: How did you do financially this last corporate year?

Mr. John Crichton: We've done well. We've been holding our own and—

Mr. Ed Holder: "Holding your own" sometimes means just breaking even and hanging on for the ride. What would you say in your case?

Mr. John Crichton: We don't try to make a huge profit. How we ultimately judge how we're doing financially is whether or not we had to raise our charges to our customers. I can sit here today and tell you that we have not done that for eight years. In fact, over the last eight years we've reduced them twice.

At the same time we've made some pretty substantial investments in technology, and so on. We've gone through some pretty severe downturns in terms of traffic, which of course reduces our revenues, and we've still not raised those rates. We've managed to find innovative ways to run the business and to introduce new technology without doing that.

● (0930)

Mr. Ed Holder: To ask point blank, if I may, how much money did Nav Canada make in the last year before it decided to use those funds to do other things?

Mr. John Crichton: We do about $1.2 billion a year in sales. I've forgotten exactly what it was last year, but it was within $10 million of breakeven, or something like that.

Mr. Ed Holder: So with any of those profits that you make, there are always things one can do in business. If you felt this automatic weather reporting equipment was required in the north, might you make some investments in that, or have you done so already?

Mr. John Crichton: We already have and we're prepared to continue to do that. It's just that we can't justify the amount that would be required to do the whole thing. Because you have to remember that when we make an investment in a particular area, where the revenue cannot pay for it, then we're asking our customers in other parts of the country to pay for it.

Mr. Ed Holder: But I thought I heard you say in your testimony earlier, Mr. Crichton, that there are some areas of the country that really don't pay and carry their weight. So that's not something foreign for Nav Canada to invest in.

Mr. John Crichton: No, and we do invest and have invested heavily in the north. But I think to introduce a new technology of this type, a little government assistance would help because it does bring a lot more benefit than just to people flying airplanes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you also to our guests this morning. It's been very interesting to see some of the technologies.

I want to touch on that a little. In your statement you talked about many of your technologies being developed in-house by your engineers, along with the controllers. That's what I'd like to have clarification on first. Are other collaborative efforts that are ongoing? If so, how are those collaborations working and what type of groups are you collaborating with to bring forward further technologies that NavCan can bring out?

Mr. John Crichton: There are essentially two types of technology in our business. There is what we call CNS—communication, navigation, surveillance—which is typically hardware. We don't develop those. There is a large market of suppliers and a very competitive, very good marketplace. We just compete our procurements in those areas.

The other technology is what we call an ATM system—air traffic management—which is essentially software. In that area, we are distinctively probably the only ANS in the world that develops all its own ATM software. Other ANS groups typically use these large system integrator companies and so on. That's what the government in Canada used to do before we came along. We put an end to that. We find that producing it ourselves produces a much better product—a faster and lower-cost product, and so on. Because we produce it all ourselves, we own it, and therefore we can sell it to other countries. We build the systems through integrated internal teams largely involving our engineering people, our air traffic control people, and others in the company to develop these projects from start to finish, to implementation.

Since marketing these products around the world, we are now finding that we've developed a lot of collaboration with people in other countries in our business who have unique requirements. They'll say, "Yes, we want that here, but this is London Heathrow, and we have to do things this way. Can you change your system so that it will do that?" To which we can say, "Absolutely." The British, for instance, use our oceanic system. We had to adapt that to certain requirements they had on the European side.

We're becoming quite well known around the world as somebody who can do things and develop these products. This is really starting to develop into quite a business, which I think is great for us, great for Canada. It brings a lot of stability and in fact growing employment.

● (0935)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I assume there must be some real good cooperation and a great working relationship with some of your hardware providers in order to create what you're doing in the software aspect of things. Have you managed to establish those types of relationships where there's a real ability to work back and forth through those processes?

Mr. John Crichton: The ATM itself is largely just software. It's not really dependent on.... I mean, there's lots of hardware you can run the software on. That's not a problem. We do have relationships with particular suppliers where we will enter into cooperative arrangements with them to bid on work in other countries that we do from time to time.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I just wanted to go back a little bit to your comments regarding performance rather than method on the regulations and how that would work out in essentially an outcome-based solution. Rather than looking at regulations that say, "This is how you have to get to this point", you're saying that you just want to work with the regulatory bodies to say, "This is the outcome we want, and this is required performance", and then work within the context of that to get to that.

You gave us one example of that, but as you go through the process of your development, are you able to work with some of the regulatory bodies? You obviously worked through one of these situations. Is that something that is an ongoing process, where you're working with the regulatory body to try to change that mindset, and also to show, as you're going through the process, the capabilities you have, the changing capabilities, and how they can be adjusted to bring forward better performance in the end, without having to rely completely on a system where we're looking at everything from a methodology point of view rather than a performance point of view?

Mr. John Crichton: Yes, and let me be clear that our suggestion here on performance-based versus prescriptive regulation is not to be interpreted in a negative way towards Transport Canada. Transport Canada is very familiar with the concepts and the differences between the two of them. We have a very professional and productive relationship there. They understand these issues. I think they're very supportive of these issues in a lot of ways. There's a lot of dialogue going on there.

In our view, to really reap the benefits of the technology that can be available, we need to get over the old prescriptive way and start to embrace, perhaps, a little more the performance-based approach. But people are coming around to that. There's no question about it.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: You're saying there is a good relationship with the regulatory body as far as that goes. You're able to work through those processes.

Mr. John Crichton: Oh, yes. I'm not here to complain about anything like that.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: How does that work on the international front? Obviously, like you say, you're selling your software throughout the world and you run into some of those same issues.

Are you able to also work collaboratively on an international front to try to bring some of these ideas forward?

Mr. John Crichton: It's very interesting. Some countries are very, very prescriptive, and I think this is where Canada can have a real advantage. We run into this frequently.

We have to go through some hoops to demonstrate to other regulators in some other countries why our systems work. One of the advantages is that we are so well thought of, and Canada is so well thought of, that we have quite a bit of credibility when we go to do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Crichton for being here.

I want to go back to the noise contour issue, and the issue that I've heard a lot about as well. Perhaps you haven't had a lot of complaints about this because it's very difficult to find the number on the website of whom to complain to at Pearson airport.

As I understood the issue, to save the airlines fuel, Nav Canada was changing the arrival and departure runways in Toronto in order that they could use less fuel to get from the runway to the gates.

I understand flight path changes, but as we understood it, there used to be a distribution, a kind of even-handed distribution, of which neighbourhoods were going to experience the noise—depending on the weather, of course. If the wind is strong enough, you can't do this.

Can you comment a bit on whether that's something you've done and whether that has in fact changed the exposure patterns?

● (0940)

Mr. John Crichton: What has really happened, I guess, is a partial implementation of PBN, which allows the aircraft approaching Toronto to stay higher longer, thereby changing some of what we call the "bedposts" or final approach fixes for the different runways.

What it has done is that people will now be seeing aircraft in areas where they didn't used to see aircraft. But the aircraft are higher.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Not in my riding, they're not.

Mr. John Crichton: As I indicated before the meeting, we'll certainly meet with you and look into that. But I can tell you that I'm familiar enough with what was done that this should not have any noise impacts on anybody. In fact, it should lessen the overall noise.

But we'll look at the individual situation in your riding, and let's see what's happened.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: The complaint seems to be that they're more frequent, not that they're in a different place. They were always there; they're just incredibly more frequent. They're all through the day now, as opposed to being on some kind of cycling around the runways. In order to avoid the use of the aircraft engine on the ground to get from the end of the farthest runway, they're putting them on runways nearer to the gates. That's what we think is happening, but it's very difficult to figure it out.

Mr. John Crichton: I don't believe that's much of a factor. I think it's more that the approaches into the Toronto area have changed, and that means aircraft will be seen in areas where they didn't used to be seen. It's not really the ground movements.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Is there a requirement by Nav Canada for a regulation dealing with wind turbines? We heard about that some time ago, that radar can't see through a wind turbine.

Mr. John Crichton: Wind turbines can cause primary radar to detect false targets or mask a target. We're quite concerned about it in those areas where it could impact our primary radars.

We have been trying to work with the wind farm proponents to mitigate that. As I understand it, there are not any federal regulations to prohibit these installations from interfering with aeronautics and, quite frankly, I wish there were.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: We got the same message earlier, so that's something we should be looking at.

In addition to noise over residences in Toronto, we also have parts of aircraft coming down over residences in Toronto. Last week, as you're probably aware, pieces of an Air Canada 777 fell down. Is that something Nav Canada worries about on a regular basis, or is this a...?

Mr. John Crichton: I think the incident involved an engine failure of an aircraft. Some of the internal parts of the engine got blown out the back.

Obviously Nav Canada played a role, when the pilot declared an emergency, to deal with it, but I think that's really more of an airline issue.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: That has to do with airline maintenance, I guess, in some ways, which they have now moved offshore.

You talked about horizontal separation. You didn't talk about vertical separation. My understanding is that with modern GPS-based height systems, it becomes extremely accurate. An aircraft at 5,000 feet off the ground is actually 5,000 feet, not 4,980 feet, as might it have been with an analog-based system.

Is that more dangerous, when it might be that two aircraft are together, particularly when the vertical separations are much, much smaller, as I understand it, than horizontal separations?

Mr. John Crichton: The vertical separation in en route airspace is 1,000 feet. That is not so much a GPS factor as it is advances in altimetry. The 1,000-foot separation has been in use now for probably a decade around the world, and I'm not aware of any incidents. When it comes to the safety standards that have to be met by the regulators that certify this, including Canada, the U.S., ICAO, and all the other countries, some pretty rigorous mathematics are applied to that. I'm not aware of any incidents involving it.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your being here today. It's always nice to have expertise like yours.

I'd like to get a better understanding of your operation, your fee structure and that type of thing. My understanding is that Nav Canada was created in 1995 or 1996, somewhere around there. The idea was to allow the air navigation system to operate in a more businesslike fashion and also to ensure the elimination of the dependency on taxpayer funding. That's basically the genesis of Nav Canada. Is that correct?

Mr. John Crichton: Yes, that's correct.

I would just add that the system was not performing very well at the time. It was falling behind in technology. There were a lot of delays. It was understaffed, and technology projects were failing. Not too many things were running right.

Mr. Blake Richards: Just to help me understand this, there must have been a debate at the time about the model that was decided upon, the non-profit corporation type rather than an open competitive environment in how that might run—in other words, open competition for that service, opening it up to others to provide that service as well rather than just the single Nav Canada.

I'm just curious to know the debate around that, to know—if you can tell me—some of the pros and cons, the disadvantages and advantages, that were discussed around that time, and to know why it was decided to go with the model you are operating under at this time.

Mr. John Crichton: There were a number of different models looked at. There was broad consultation with all of the stakeholders in aviation.

Having an ordinary for-profit business corporation was looked at. The aviation industry itself was not in favour of that. It was more in favour of the non-share capital model because of the fact that ultimately any profits that would accrue in that model would come back to them. But you have to remember that this is a monopoly business; it's not feasible to look at this as a competitive business. You can't have competing air traffic control agencies where one is telling a pilot to turn left and the other is saying turn right. This is a natural monopoly business.

How do you deal with that and yet make it perform as if it had competitive pressures? We think ultimately that the non-share capital model and our governance structure, which sees our customers as having a big role—on our board, for instance—is working.

That's really the genesis of how we came here.

Mr. Blake Richards: No, I appreciate that. I just wanted to clarify it. I'm sure it's a question that people would ask. Obviously what you're saying makes complete sense.

To move on to the fees, the money you operate with is generated by fees from the traveller, in the end, essentially, those who fly and use the airlines. Is that correct? Perhaps you can tell me a little bit about how your fee structure works and where your operating money does come from.

Mr. John Crichton: Our charges are made to the owners and operators of aircraft. In the case of airlines, our charges are to them. The charges to the airlines are weight- and distance-related. The larger the weight of the aircraft and the farther it flies in the airspace we're looking after, then the greater the charge.

With respect to privately owned aircraft, general aviation aircraft, it's generally just a flat annual fee, much like you pay for a licence on your car. But it's not a big factor.

So in terms of formula, it's weight- and distance-related charges to the airline itself. Probably over 90% of the countries in the world use that same formula.

● (0950)

Mr. Blake Richards: Can you give me an idea of a typical fee? I'll use an example, but if you can't give me a fee for that exact example and you have something else you can provide in terms of an example, that's fine.

The flight I most often take, obviously, is Calgary to Ottawa and Ottawa to Calgary. What would it be for a typical flight like that?

Mr. John Crichton: I'll stand corrected, because I do recall a Toronto-Winnipeg one using, say, an A320. Calgary-Ottawa would probably be twice that. For the Calgary-Ottawa, our charge to the airline probably would be around $2,000 or $2,400.

Mr. Blake Richards: So it's based on the traffic and the weight of the aircraft, etc.

As well—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards. Sorry.

Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank you for being here this morning and for your presentation. However, I need to say that I had questions every 30 seconds or so, since I'm far from being an aeronautics expert.

You started your presentation by saying that significant savings in fuel costs been made thanks to the appearance of these new technologies. Feel free to get me back on track if you see I'm straying. First you spoke about performance-based navigation. You didn't provide more details about the technology itself, and I would like to know if this is a technology that, among other things, makes it possible to change landings so that they happen in a continuous line, rather than by steps.

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: Yes, that's a big part of it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Would this new airplane descent trajectory not be the main cause of the increased noise that the population is hearing? In the past, if the descent was done in steps, the lowest step, which was closest to residents, was probably done in a much shorter range than during a gradual descent. Is that right?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: No. With of PBN, you have to get into three-dimensional geometry of sorts. PBN allows aircraft to fly precise curves and arcs and to keep absolutely precise distances from each other, and to do this totally independent of anything on the ground, with no ground-based aid. It doesn't have to fly over a certain beacon at a certain physical location. They can now work in this beautiful choreographed area. The navigation is so precise. They can do all these smooth arcs. They no longer have to fly way out down there for ten miles, turn left, turn left again, line up with this beacon, and then come in. It all smoothly works in that way.

That's what people are noticing. They didn't used to see airplanes going around that way before. The airplanes had to fly these inefficient patterns and add miles and miles to the approach. Now they don't have to.

The point I was trying to make about the noise is that the aircraft are higher and they aren't causing a noise issue, in our view. Certainly where we've done this in other cities, and Vancouver was one example, we have literally put out noise-monitoring machines and proven that there's no noise. In fact, the noise is below the ambient noise level of the community.

So we'll see, but people do get emotional about this noise issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I would like to continue to discuss this same technology. You mentioned that not all aircraft are equipped with tools that would enable them to use this technology. You also said that a critical number of aircraft was needed in order to be profitable, but you didn't mention at what point it would become profitable.

Could you tell us how many aircraft are equipped with the tools needed and how many should be added to reach that economic viability?

● (0955)

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: In terms of PBN, at the major airports in Canada where we're really dealing with the airlines, we're probably only about five years away from reaching critical mass.

I think the real issue is going to be is with general aviation aircraft. To the extent they would interact at some of those major aircrafts, it could be an issue. Certainly in the en route phase, with ADS-B, we're now in the 65% to 70% equipage range and increasing that rapidly. We expect that within the next three or four years, we'll be in the 95% equipage range. Things are happening very fast.

Some countries have actually put in equipage mandates, saying it is absolutely mandatory that people be equipped. This is all happening, and it is happening quite fast.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

In my last remaining minute, I would like to talk about the automated weather observation systems.

With these new stations, can all weather measurements be taken, on the ground and aloft? In the northern parts of the country, is this automated system secure, given the weather conditions?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: Yes, as a matter of fact the new AWOS was developed by Nav Canada at our expense. We spent millions of dollars to do that in replacing the old legacy systems.

One place we tested it for a year and a half, which we had to do in order to satisfy the regulator that it worked, was Iqaluit on Baffin Island. We're quite comfortable with it. This is the best system in the world. We really developed it on our nickel, to make it happen.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, I'll thank our guests for being here today. We appreciate your time, John, as always. We're just going to take a two-minute recess while our guests excuse themselves, and then we'll come back for the remainder of the meeting.

● _____ (Pause) _____

●

● (1000)

The Chair: According to the orders of the day, we do have a notice of motion by Ms. Chow.

Then, depending on what the committee wants to do, we will then adjourn and move into the subcommittee. We'll see where we go.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I move that we consider the supplementary estimates (A) 2012-2013, and that the committee invite the minister to appear at his earliest convenience.

If the minister could come before June 7, that would be great, because that is the day that we have to send the motion back to the House.

The Chair: It is in order.

Are there any comments? Mr. Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I would like to talk about the other motion. I think we could proceed to the vote. This is standard.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: We have to oppose this motion, because the minister has already appeared before the committee and his schedule is booked for the rest of this session.

That being said, he will be back. There's no question that he will answer questions on the substance Ms. Chow is pursuing here.

The Chair: Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I have a question for you, Mr. Chair.

Am I hearing then that the minister is not available between now and when the House rises?

The Chair: That's my understanding, yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: That's too bad.

We could still study the estimates and have the staff here.

The Chair: Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder: Respectfully, through you, Chair, isn't there going to be a subcommittee afterwards? Wouldn't this all be part of the plan?

I find it bizarre that we're doing this when we've asked a subcommittee to take that responsibility.

The Chair: It's a motion that's been put forward by Ms. Chow. Proper notice has been given to the committee. It is committee business because of that, and that is why we're dealing with it.

Ms. Chow, any further comment?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Yes.

I believe it is in our mandate to study the supplementary estimates. That's one of the responsibilities of committee members.

If the minister is not able to come at that time we should still study supplementary estimates (A).

Maybe one of my colleagues can delete the part about the minister appearing. That would still provide us with at least one meeting to study supplementary estimates (A).

The Chair: I have Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder: Chair, I want to say this as respectfully as I can.

I don't think we need to be lectured about our obligations and our abilities to deal with them. I think we, as committee members, know all of that.

The point I was making is that the issues that are going to be coming up through this committee are in the purview of what is discussed at the subcommittee. While I'm happy to acknowledge that any motion is genuinely able to be discussed at the table, I come back to my point that this should be through the subcommittee, not at this level, and so I'll be opposing the motion.

● (1005)

The Chair: Is there any further comment? There's none.

Ms. Chow has requested a recorded vote.

I'll turn it over to Alex to call the question.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: I have Mr. Coderre on my list.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is this a point of order or just to comment?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: No, it's about the motion for which debate was adjourned. I would like to return to the issue concerning Neuville.

[*English*]

The Chair: Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, first, I simply want to emphasize that our committee is operating fairly well and that we are able to get along. I can understand that a debate can be adjourned because some committee members might be engaging in filibustering or because, out of courtesy, we want to hear from a witness. I understand that because I've done it myself from time to time. However, this should be an exception, not the rule.

Let's take the example of the Neuville issue. Not only does it affect the airport, but it affects all municipalities, as well. If we know full well that the government is going to vote against this type of motion while we are in favour of it, we will simply proceed with the vote knowing what the outcome will be. We shouldn't drag things out because it is a waste of time. We may win a battle, but at the end of the day, we won't win the war. It only adds fuel to the fire and creates a situation where there will either be a problem of confidence or extraordinary words, like the word filibuster".

In other words, it goes both ways. Sometimes we need to pick our battles. I'm not saying this to be paternalistic. I'm telling you simply and humbly, and sharing with you my 15 years of experience as an MP. I have been on a number of committees. Sometimes it was vicious, but we always played fairly and proceeded openly. We didn't engage in procedural wrangling.

That's why I want to come back to the debate on the relevant motion of my colleague Élaine Michaud. It is indeed relevant. I am going to vote in favour of that motion. You must understand that we are dealing with a situation caused by an interpretation problem. I know the minister well. He's a former mayor, so he should understand this. Under section 4.9, all he has to do is enforce the act. That means that the minister has a role to play, which is not strictly tied to security. Remember: when officials appeared, I myself asked questions. From the court's point of view, the outcome resulted in a legal vacuum. We cannot live in a legal vacuum that could leave the citizens and municipalities facing an excess or imbalance. Our role is to enforce the act. If it isn't enforced adequately, we have to find alternatives.

As for me, I agree and I am going to vote in favour of the motion because it may become a worthwhile solution. However, my role as a federal MP is not strictly to ensure respect for the other jurisdiction. In this case, it isn't a matter of respect for jurisdiction. Rather, it's a matter of a minister like the Minister of Transport—and I'm not making this personal—who must enforce an act giving him powers to take certain actions. Section 4.9 is clear: he is not there strictly for safety, but also for monitoring the setting up an airport.

Unlike what my colleague Mr. Poilievre said the other day, we are not dealing here with a "not in my backyard" syndrome. This legal vacuum could cause problems for citizens and in the enforcement of the act. It could have a negative effect on safety and on the environment we live in.

Since this meeting is public, I am once again asking Minister Lebel to play his part and enforce the act as necessary, despite the outcome. We did when we formed the government. We also resolved a similar problem in Saint-Augustin. There are regulatory measures and a directional power.

If the minister, for all kinds of reasons, including his interpretation of this act, thinks that he is only responsible for safety, the least he can do is sign an administrative agreement. He has already met with ministers in Quebec, but this is going to happen in other provinces, I guarantee it. We don't need to get into constitutional issues, into "constitutionality". We need to make sure that the minister is going to sit down with his peers in a federal-provincial-territorial conference. Right now, it can be done very quickly, as with Quebec. It can be asymmetrical or symmetrical, but we very certainly need to fill this legal vacuum because there are too many problems that could arise for the municipalities and for citizens. It will also have an impact economically and on people's peace of mind.

● (1010)

We have already given our opinion, the government, the official opposition and my party. We should proceed with the vote immediately to send a message, and not just to the people of Neuville. If there are other people who speak, I don't have the power to ask the committee the previous question. I know my procedure, I have checked it out.

This is a healthy and important debate. With respect to public life, we are mandated to protect the quality of life of individuals and to ensure a certain peace of mind, while respecting the economic reality. This doesn't mean opposing things, but ensuring that everyone can play their role fully.

Mr. Chair, I will vote in favour of the proposal, but I wanted my comments to be on the record. The act exists and can be applied as it is. I reiterate my wish, as I did before the people of Neuville, accompanied by some of my colleagues who spoke eloquently about signing an administrative agreement.

We cannot leave this legal vacuum. At some point, my colleagues opposite will experience the same type of pressures in their municipalities. They will again take action and the citizens will react, and there will be developers and all of that. So, we need to make sure we are playing our parts fully.

Sooner or later, we will need to reflect on this act because it may create problems, and we can do this in subcommittee. I commend my colleague Ms. Michaud for the relevance of her motion. I myself spoke to some members of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and they will adopt the resolution. They are in full agreement with how the city of Neuville is asking for the Government of Quebec or the Government of Canada to intervene.

At the federal level, we very certainly have a role to play. In that sense, we must support this motion to send a message. If the government does not play its role, it will have to find an alternative, and I think the agreement is the way to go.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Michaud.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to start by thanking my colleague Mr. Coderre for supporting the motion. This issue was raised in the House of Commons a while ago. We are trying to convey the rather valid concerns that municipalities have. I would like to thank him for the work that he is doing.

As mentioned before and again today, in the case of Neuville, there is clearly an opportunity right now to take action in order to reconcile the concerns of the constituents and the municipal council.

The minister could take action now under section 4.9. Direct action can be taken as to the location of the airport or the types of operations that are conducted there. Currently, the memorandum of understanding that the minister so often uses does not guarantee any respect for requests from the municipality. If he tries to at least control landings, takeoffs and flight hours, it does not necessarily mean that he will completely undermine the airport project. But if a municipality tries to make any arrangements like that, there are no guarantees that the developers will respect them.

It really has to be the minister who takes action, and he has the power to do so now. He has the power to resolve the issue that the Neuville constituents are experiencing and that others will experience elsewhere in Canada. Some constituents are already experiencing it. Just think about Lac-à-la-Tortue, where tourist float planes are constantly taking off and landing. Night and day, the constituents are subject to that dreadful noise. Seniors have trouble sleeping, just like children and families. That has a major effect on people's quality of life and their health.

The municipality is trying to help the constituents by imposing some regulations. It has not completely banned the traffic of float planes, but it has proposed a regulatory framework. It is not able to enforce it, because the Supreme Court rulings have confirmed that federal legislation takes precedence over municipal regulations and provincial legislation. In fact, there is a clear legal vacuum.

The federal government is currently not taking responsibility for its exclusive jurisdiction over aeronautics. On their end, the municipalities and provinces are not able to take action. Their hands are tied, though they would sometimes like to co-operate to come up with an equitable arrangement. That is the goal. Action has to be taken to fill this vacuum and to allow the municipalities to get involved. As mentioned, this issue will be addressed at the convention of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities this weekend, in Saskatoon. I think it will get a lot of support.

The motion that will be introduced asks that the federal government consult with municipalities on decisions related to land use in the development of private airports. It simply asks that municipalities be involved, which is currently not the case. I feel that this committee is the perfect place to study the issue and come up with development solutions. The provinces are generally responsible for land management and for protecting agricultural lands, which are increasingly rare. We have to acknowledge that aspect, which is very important.

In addition, I find it a bit odd that any other developers, other than those in telecommunications perhaps, have to comply with municipal regulations and provincial legislation when they design projects. Land developers, among others, have to comply with municipal regulations, and the economy still grows and the projects still get done. There are ways to reach a compromise.

I have personally talked to developers who were not aware of this legal vacuum and they felt they were being shortchanged, because their hands are tied when they try to carry out development projects in municipalities. They are not successful because they have to comply with certain constraints.

● (1015)

But developers who work in aeronautics have free rein. They can do whatever they want. Constituents have to get a permit to build a shed in their own backyard, in Neuville, but developers do not need a building permit on their construction site because it falls under federal jurisdiction. There are some major inconsistencies, and that is why I ask that we study the matter.

The motion being introduced is very clear. We are asking the government to amend all the provisions of the Aeronautics Act related to the development of new aerodromes. That means requiring consultation with local authorities and ensuring compliance with the legislation. The idea is not to prevent anything, but simply to ensure that the process of airport development is fair, that everyone is looked after and treated with respect.

For a federation to work, you need to have some flexibility. In the current case, it is possible to simply coordinate and harmonize the various jurisdictions. That is really what is at the heart of this motion and I hope that this is how it will be understood. As was said so appropriately, all my colleagues are more than likely going to have to deal with this problem one day. If we refuse to examine this motion, it will be difficult to live with that decision.

Like my colleagues here, I plan to support this motion and I hope that my colleagues on the government side will be open to the idea of examining this issue. As for Neuville, I am going to take advantage of this public forum to ask once again that the minister take action through regulations to solve this problem. The mayor has some solutions to propose for improving the situation. It would be worth consulting with him. He has been asking to have a meeting for a long time. It is time to honour his request.

Thank you for your time. I urge all my colleagues to support this motion.

● (1020)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, before I begin, is it possible for you to indicate how many people are left on the speaking list?

The Chair: None at this point.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

My concern with the motion is twofold. One is that if municipalities are given the power to reject the presence of an airport, then we won't have airports, because there's no community in the country that wants to have an airport nearby. Everybody wants an airport within a 45-minute drive, but nobody wants one within sight. Everybody wants an airport in somebody else's municipality.

So if we were to say that there's a particular municipality that doesn't want an airport and therefore we will block it from going ahead, we just simply won't have aviation in Canada. We'll be the one country in the developed world that doesn't have planes that fly, unless you can find a way for air traffic to occur without airports, and I'm not aware of one. We're currently studying innovation and technology, so maybe we'll get a witness who will come here and talk about how you can have airplanes that fly without having them either launch or land, but so far we haven't yet heard any testimony from a witness on how that can be done.

The second concern I have with this motion is this ongoing trend whereby members of Parliament bring forward studies on a highly localized issue, the discussion of which at this committee generates for them some media coverage in their local community, even though this committee has none of the powers to affect the issue in question. For example, this committee cannot decide whether or not there will be an airport in Neuville—or anywhere, for that matter. It can't shut down the Ottawa International Airport. It cannot move the Calgary International Airport. It cannot prevent an airport from opening, ask one to close, or have any power over where airports locate.

It's possible, though, for a member of Parliament to send out a press release in their community and say that they're taking it to the transport committee. Then they can have a front-page headline saying that the community's MP has gone off to Ottawa and is putting the matter before the transport committee, and then a second press release saying that the transport committee looked at it, and that if they had only agreed with the MP, then there would be no airport in their neighbourhood.

That makes for great local media coverage for that particular member of Parliament, but, one, it's inaccurate, because this committee cannot locate airports or prevent them from being located and, two, it takes the committee away from its mandate to work on matters over which it does have some jurisdiction.

Those are my two concerns with this particular motion. I think that's the reason we had sought to adjourn the debate earlier. It was in order to recognize the fact that as a committee we don't control where airports are located and, frankly, nor does the committee nor the people of this or any other community benefit from our pretending that we have that authority when all of us in the room know that we do not.

With that, Mr. Chair, now that we've heard from all of the parties on the question, I would move to adjourn the debate—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Poilievre —but in effect we're going to have an occasion to review it in subcommittee. That's where typically—

● (1025)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Point of order.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: If I could just finish my point...? Typically —

The Chair: No. I do have a point of order.

I'll recognize Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, my riding does not go as far as Portneuf. I know my riding covers a large area in Quebec, but...

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: This is not a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: In terms of defining the role, especially if we talk to witnesses about regulations and enforcement, as well as about Transport Canada's role, it is normal for us on the committee to have questions about how a piece of legislation is enforced and the minister' role in that.

I do not agree with the comment that it was just to make the front page in the local papers. It has anyway, and across the country. As far as I know, the role of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is also to study the Aeronautics Act, its implementation and the minister's role. That is why my questions for the deputy minister are relevant in terms of how this legislation is applied.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's not a point of order, I'm sorry.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay. I will just move that we adjourn, then.

An hon. member: I have a point of order.

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn debate. It isn't debatable. It is subject to the vote now.

Ms. Chow is asking for a recorded vote.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Ms. Olivia Chow: You can't do a point of order in the middle of a vote, and that motion is not debatable.

The Chair: Thank you.

The question is, shall the motion carry? I will turn it over to Alexandre.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 5)

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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