

Introduction

On May 1, 2014, the directors of ADM (Aéroports de Montréal) announced a call for tenders to demolish the Mirabel terminal, putting a definitive end to the passenger transport vocation at this airport inaugurated with great fanfare in October 1975. But what happened? Who is responsible for this mess? Could it have been done differently? What about Dorval airport, now Montréal-Trudeau? How much longer will it be able to develop? What happened to the rail shuttle? What does the future hold for both airports? What lessons can we draw from this saga?

These are just some of the questions this book seeks to answer. The saga begins with the decision to build Montréal's second airport, Mirabel. The first chapter explains the decision, the choice of site, the Mirabel concept and the unfinished business. As with the other chapters, the aim is to draw lessons from this episode for today and tomorrow. The second chapter looks back at the decade of failure to consolidate flights at either airport, and explains why the original plan to transfer all flights to Mirabel was not realized in 1982.

The third chapter explores an important stage in this saga, when the newly-created organization managing Montréal's airports decides to repatriate scheduled international flights from Mirabel to Dorval, contrary to its own decision three years earlier. We also recount the events surrounding the Superior Court challenge to this decision and draw some lessons from it.

The fourth chapter examines the impact of ADM's decision on airport performance in terms of passenger numbers, investment costs and internal management issues at ADM over the period from 1997 and 2004. It was a turbulent period for ADM, culminating in the company's adoption of a new governance formula. Clearly, there are lessons to be learned from this turbulent period.

Chapter 5 recounts another saga in this story, that of the many rail shuttle projects that were put forward to connect Montréal-Trudeau airport to downtown Montréal. Here too, lessons can be drawn for today and tomorrow.

Chapter 6 addresses a key issue for Montréal-Trudeau airport, namely anticipated growth and its impact on the capacity of airport facilities, including ultimate runway capacity. We will see that this capacity could be reached much sooner than expected. We'll also look at environmental issues and the public's tolerance of them.

The final chapter looks to the future, addressing issues related to financing the investment projects required at Montréal-Trudeau in a post-pandemic context that has greatly affected the airports' financial situation. Suggestions are made for changes to the governance model, and for regulatory and control mechanisms to ensure the airports' long-term viability. As for Mirabel's future, it is essentially linked to the development of its industrial vocation, at least for the time being.

It concludes with the various dilemmas faced by decision-makers throughout the history of Montréal's airports and offers suggestions for the future.