

# Canadian STOL Aircraft Experiment begins

by Jill Pound-Corner\*

Anyone who has travelled by air, for speed, between two cities, and then been frustrated by the journey time on the ground from airport to city centre will appreciate the Canadian STOL experimental programme which starts in March, between Ottawa and Montreal.

STOL – Short Take Off and Landing – is Canada's answer to a world problem of cutting down travelling time. Trains take you to city centres, but they take longer. Cars can do, too, if they don't get caught in traffic jams, and they take a good long time, and driving is tiring if you have work to do at both ends. The answer is to fly, not to an airport in the back of beyond, but in the sort of plane which can land on a short runway on the downtown parking lot, right where you want to be. And that is where the Canadian STOL comes in.

The world's first true STOL airline will operate six specially designed Twin-Otter, 11 passenger airplanes designed and built in Canada by de Havilland Aircraft of Canada Ltd., Toronto.

Airtransit, Canada's Twin-Otter service between Montreal and Ottawa, will cut the trip time between urban centres by forty-five minutes on the current fastest door-to-door timing. At the moment, from the Place Ville Marie office complex in downtown Montreal to the Chateau Laurier Hotel in downtown Ottawa takes 2 hours 35 minutes by bus; 2 hours 24 minutes by train; 2 hours 20 minutes by automobile; 2 hours by conventional aircraft; 1 hour 15 minutes by STOL.

Initially there will be 26 flights in each direction daily, Monday to Friday. Flight departures will be every hour on the hour from 7.00 a.m. to 11.00 p.m. plus additional departures on the half-hour during the peak travel period. Service on Saturdays and Sundays will start an hour later.

A large percentage of traffic is expected to consist of "briefcase" travellers on one-day trips, and due to the limited capacity of the aircraft, overall baggage weight restrictions per passenger will be imposed both for free allowance and chargeable excess weight. Underseat storage will accommodate carry-on bags, and there will be provision for stowage of coats and garment bags at the rear of the aircraft.

As the journey will be so short, and the aircraft is so compact, there will be no in-flight food service.

Everything is designed for bus-service simplicity. Check-in will be no later than 10 minutes before departure. Ground trans-

portation will be minibus or limousine service, but rented cars and private vehicles will be provided with public parking space. Driving time to the urban centres is 10-15 minutes. Consideration is also being given to bus services, either a minibus to the urban centres or the routing of municipal transportation to serve the STOL ports.

The actual sites for the STOL ports were chosen after a careful study of all possible locations. The Victoria parking lot – a car-park built for the 1967 World Fair – is located just minutes from downtown Montreal. It is situated on the banks of the St. Lawrence River with no residential buildings nearby.

The Ottawa location will use the existing runway at Rockcliffe Airport, about ten minutes by car from the city's centre. The site was judged most suitable after a study of several alternatives.

The reactions from the public to this two-year programme with the Twin-Otter are going to prove vital to the possible expansion of the STOL programme. Other countries will be watching before they take the plunge and give firm orders. If this service proves successful, then larger 48-seater DC-7 aircraft, a special adaptation, being built by De Havilland, Canada, in a joint project with Boeing Aircraft Co. of the United States, will come into production. Two of these re-production DC-7s are being built. The Canadian government has already poured millions into STOL development and pledged another \$88 million for these. However, for the DC-7 to go into full production a further \$280 million investment will be needed. A government study on this is due soon.

In a recent interview, Mr. R. A. (Sandy) Morrison, president of the Air Transport Association of Canada, said, "I would hope that the Government would follow through with their programme to test the validity of the concept and its acceptability to the travelling public before building a whole host of airstrips which are single-purpose air facilities."

There is concern in some circles that STOL strips alone would be built which could not handle other small aircraft.

However, STOL supporters feel it should be used as a system to link downtown airstrips with major international airports like Mirabel, located far from Montreal at Ste. Scholastique, Quebec. Other possible routes suggested as useful include across the border short hops between Toronto-Buffalo, N.Y., or Toronto-Rochester, N.Y.

Government sources say that the aircraft manufacturing industry would regard an order for 35 planes enough to justify production. So far Norway's Widerøe Flyveselskap A-S, an airline which operates a network of STOL runs in Norway, have placed a firm order for some DC-7s and American and French airlines have been suggesting they might be interested in another 15 to 20 aircraft.

There are clearly a lot of problems to be ironed out before Canada's STOL project really takes off, but it is felt that they can be overcome. One of the most important is the siting of the STOL ports, which by their very nature bring them closer into cities, bringing with them the environmental worries of residents of houses nearby, particularly in regard to noise levels.

While the Montreal site presents no residential problems, Rockcliffe in Ottawa is near the homes of diplomats, top government officials and the business elite of Ottawa. To test just how offended they would be, Ministry of Transport officials staged fourteen landings and take-offs in two days, after telling residents to expect the noise from the 11-passenger Twin-Otter plane.

Don Button, STOL project manager, said his office received only one adverse comment about "unbearable noise". And this judgement did not square with a noise meter check outside the person's home.

Rockcliffe Reeve Alan Gibbons, who watched the plane come and go on both days, agreed the Otter did not make much noise.

"I don't think one or two flights every hour are going to affect us adversely," he said.

If STOL pays off on the investment, if it can move many passengers quickly, quietly and puts them close to the centre of cities, Canada may see as much as \$500 million worth of aircraft exports – which means a hefty boost in the number of production jobs in further research and development projects. It is a project in which the commuter and Canada's economy appear to have an important stake.

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\*Jill Pound-Corner is a freelance journalist who has worked on the *Evening Standard* and *Evening News*. She was trained as a TV producer by the BBC.