

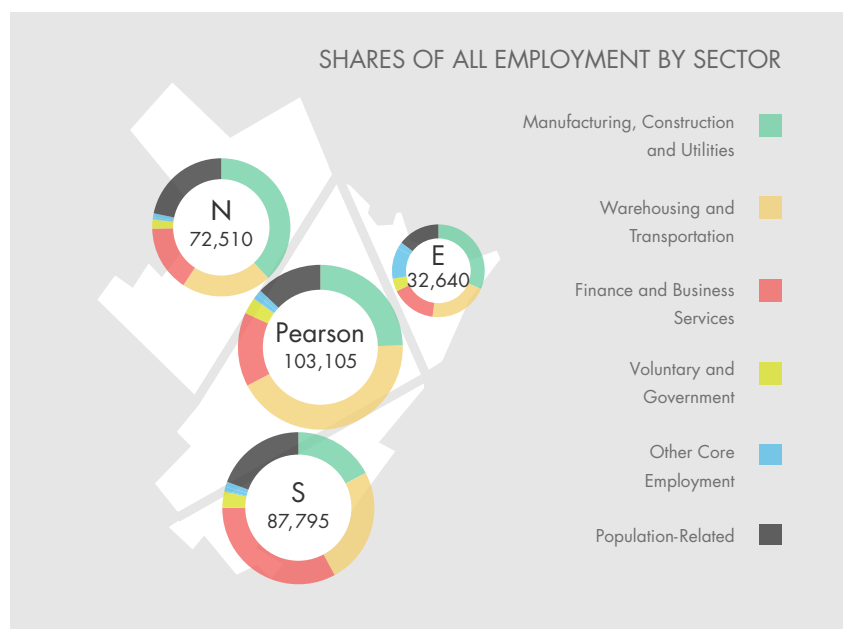
UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF THE AIRPORT MEGAZONE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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A Neptis Policy Brief

If we are serious about addressing the many imperatives that face the Toronto region, such as improving productivity and competitiveness, tackling congestion, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and preventing the continued spread of low-density employment, an integrated approach to planning the Airport Megazone (AMZ) is a good place to start.

Yet this regionally, provincially, and nationally significant employment zone is, in a sense, “invisible” to planners and decision-makers, in part because the area is governed by four municipal governments, as well as the Greater Toronto Airports Authority. It is also markedly absent in the Province’s Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, which ignores the real economic structure of the region.

This Policy Brief builds on an earlier Neptis Foundation report titled *Planning for Prosperity* that identified the Airport area as one of three suburban employment “megazones” in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The AMZ is the biggest and most important, about six times as large in area as downtown Toronto, containing 297,990 jobs in 2011, making it the second most significant employment concentration in the country after downtown Toronto, which had 464,650 jobs in 2011. The AMZ also contains one of the GGH’s five suburban knowledge-intensive districts.



The geography of employment within the AMZ

The Airport Megazone represents regionally significant concentrations of manufacturing, warehousing, and transportation employment as well as finance and business service jobs. Within the AMZ, the Pearson subzone – an area anchored by Pearson International Airport with a large associated employment area extending west to Mavis Road – contains the greatest number of jobs: more than 100,000, of which about 44,000 are in warehousing and transportation.

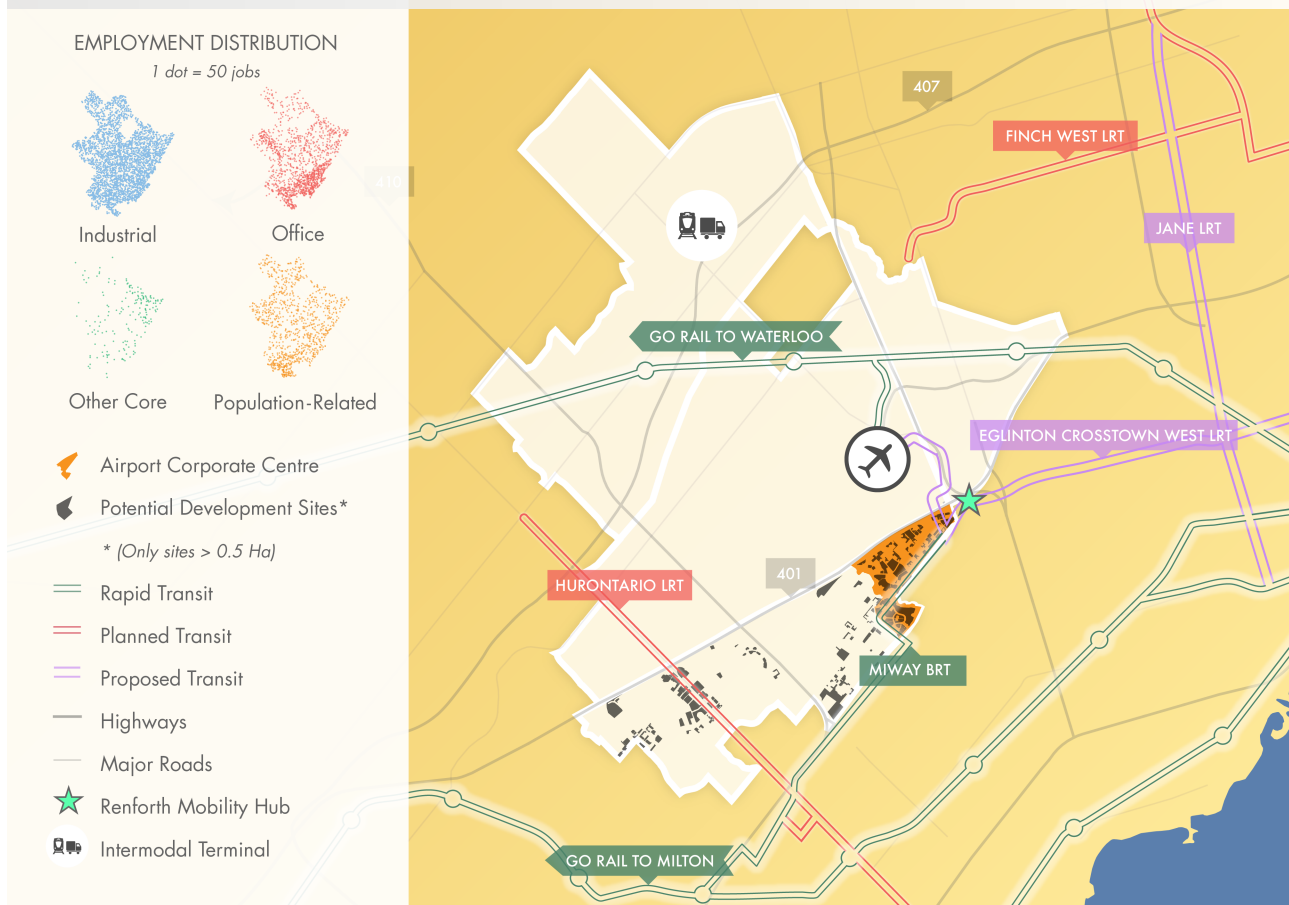
In the northern and eastern subzones of the AMZ, employment in the

manufacturing, construction, and utilities sector dominates, with warehousing and transportation playing a secondary role.

Less recognized is a regionally significant concentration of finance and business services – over 60,000 jobs and growing – found primarily in the South subzone. This compares, for example, with a total of 38,000 jobs of all kinds in the North York City Centre.

The AMZ lost more than 19,000 manufacturing jobs between 2001 and 2011. This change reflects the pattern for the entire GGH, which suffered a net loss in core employment

LINKING JOBS, REURBANIZATION AND TRANSIT IN THE AIRPORT MEGAZONE



in this period, mainly because of deindustrialization. But at the same time, the total number of jobs in the AMZ grew by 22,550; in particular, 20,725 new jobs in finance and business services were created in the area. Most of these new jobs are located in the office concentration in and around the Airport Corporate Centre south of Pearson Airport.

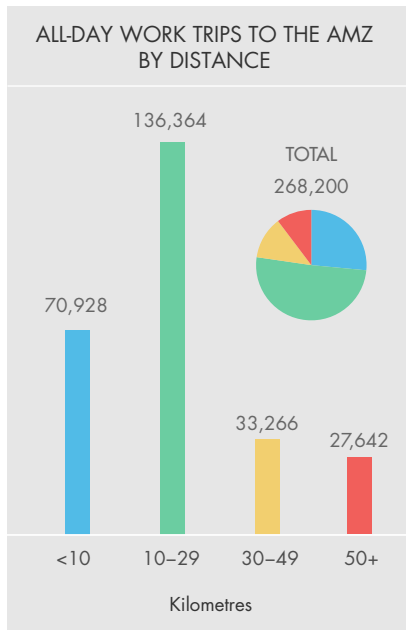
Reurbanization potential

A closer look at the AMZ also reveals opportunities to densify, add new uses, and update the area to support economic synergies and economically viable transit.

At a conservative estimate, the Airport Corporate Centre alone could accommodate 50,000 to 70,000 more workers, through the construction of new buildings on vacant sites and surface parking lots. This densification would build on and take advantage of existing economic assets, which include a number of head offices and anchor firms, a concentration of finance and business service establishments, and proximity to Pearson Airport.

This redevelopment potential cannot, however, be realized without good transit service to free up surface parking for development. Transit also needs to be supported by improve-

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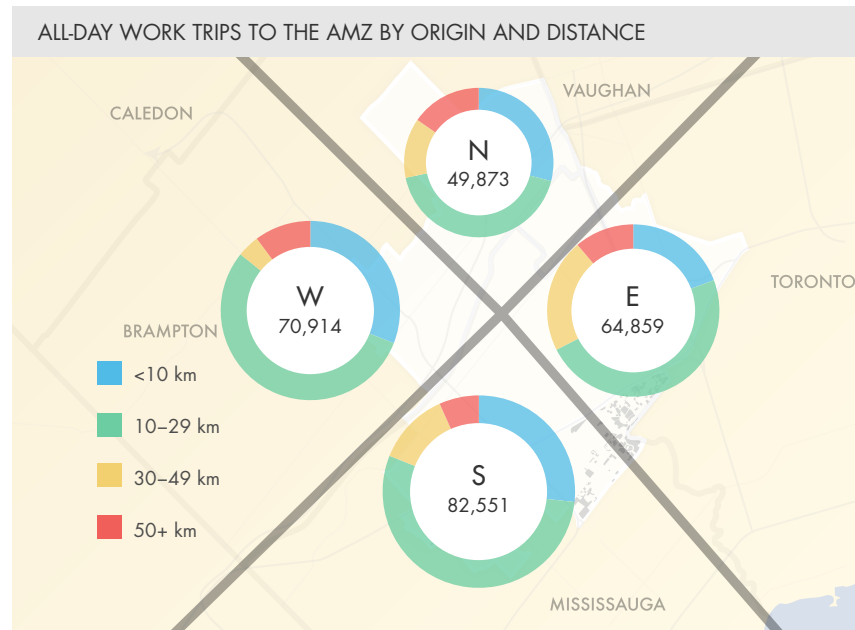


ments to pedestrian facilities. At present, the area is not conducive to walking and there is little in the way of a public realm. Integration of the area with existing and future transit routes, improvements to public space, the addition of new uses and amenities, and a plan to address the needs of knowledge-intensive activities and attract further investment are all needed.

Travel to the AMZ

The Airport Megazone attracts more than 250,000 daily work trips by automobile, more work trips by car than any other employment area in the region (including downtown Toronto, which attracts 133,000). Only 16,000 work trips to the AMZ are by transit.

One-way travel to the AMZ for all purposes (including work) accounts for 546,000 trips daily. When return trips are also taken into account, there are over one million auto trips per day to and from the AMZ.



The share of trips by automobile is high because transit service to the area is poor. Improvements are under way, such as the extension of Mississauga's MiWay bus rapid transit line. Most existing and planned transit emanates from east of the AMZ, especially the City of Toronto, and tends to focus on Pearson Airport, even though more workers travel to the AMZ for work from the south (82,000 trips) and west (71,000 trips) than from the east (64,000 trips), and these other trips tend to be shorter than those from the east.

Only about 33,000 (or 6% of daily trips to the AMZ for all purposes) are trips to Pearson Airport by passengers. To address the auto dependence of workers in the megazone, as well as this significant source of traffic congestion and GHG emissions, regional transportation planning needs to focus much more intently on developing a comprehensive approach better serving the whole AMZ by transit.

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