

**FHBRO HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT
BCIT HANGAR, VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
RICHMOND, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

FHBRO Number: **06-107**
DFRP Number: **16781**
Resource Name: **BCIT Hangar**, Building T-131 at the Vancouver International Airport
Address: **5301 Airport Road South, Richmond, British Columbia**
FHBRO Status: **“Recognized” Federal Heritage Building**
Construction: **1957**
Designer: **Otto Safir**
Original Function: **Aircraft Hangar**
Current Function: **Aviation Training Centre**
Modifications: **Interior reconfigurations** (date unknown)
Custodian: **Transport Canada**

Description of Historic Place

The British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) Hangar is comprised of a two-storey high aircraft bay flanked by symmetrical, one-storey administrative wings at each of its long sides. It features thin, exposed concrete ribs that support a low arched roof and extend to either side. The exterior walls consist primarily of a concrete block and red brick base with full curtain wall glazing above. The principal façade is equipped with full-width retractable metal doors with smaller openings at the apex to allow for aircraft tail assemblies. The hangar is located within the middle of the South Terminal at Vancouver International Airport, situated on Sea Island.

Heritage Value

The BCIT Hangar is a “Recognized” Federal Heritage Building because of its historical associations, and its architectural and environmental values.

Historical value:

The BCIT Hangar is representative of the rapid expansion of Canadian commercial aviation during the mid 1950s as well as the development of passenger air travel. Although it was built for Canadian Pacific Airlines (CPA) to originally house turboprop aircraft, the hangar heralded a new era in jet travel and CPA's development through its later use to store long-range jets. By the 1950's, CPA had become a major international carrier with the Vancouver Airport as the hub of a network linking five continents. The growth of CPA is attributed to its president at the time, Grant McConachie, who was recognized for his former development of air service in northwestern Canada and as the author of the first circumpolar route, from Vancouver to Amsterdam. Built under his direction, the hangar is a convenient example of the third phase of the airport's development – the rapid expansion which began following the Second World War, when air travel had become an established mode of transportation and resulted in an increased demand for hangar facilities in the South Terminal. The building's impact on the development of the airport is attributed to its role as the main hangar for CPA until the creation of the North Terminal in the late 1960s.

Architectural value:

The BCIT Hangar conveys the Modernist industrial aesthetic through the simplicity and practicality of its design, and the well-balanced composition of its large-span, vaulted aircraft bay and adjoining administrative blocks. Uniformly spaced, exposed parabolic concrete ribs support the low arched roof and extend through to the exterior, signalling the stylistic focus on structural expression and defining the clean lines of the building's

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vaulted geometry. Its simple rectilinear plan, lack of ornamentation, and the horizontality of its brick and concrete base enhance this basic form. The transparency of ample curtain wall glazing provides an abundance of natural light and lends an artful lightness to the structure. The hangar was designed by German engineer Otto Safir who is associated with the modern movement in Vancouver in the 20th century. The hangar exhibits a versatile layout and a simple, highly competent engineering system that meets the functional clear-span requirements. The building was skilfully built with durable and good quality materials including a glazed curtain wall system, brick and aluminum cladding, and a pre-cast concrete and block structure.

Environmental value:

Located amidst a variety of building types, sizes and styles within the setting of the South Terminal, the BCIT Hangar fits well with the present, heterogeneous character of the area. The hangar is situated at the centre of the terminal and is surrounded by the paved surfaces of an apron to the east and circulation routes on the remaining sides. Although the hangar's functional relationship to the airfield remains, the relationship between the building and its site has changed through the demolition of buildings that were originally affiliated with its function as well as the addition of new buildings in the immediate area. The hangar is familiar to the nearby community of Richmond through the City's designation of the South Terminal as a heritage area and Docomomo BC's identification of the building as an important modern structure.

Character-Defining Elements

The character-defining elements of the BCIT Hangar that should be respected include:

- Its typical vaulted, single-span hangar design;
- Its Modernist style, popular in Canadian architecture in the 1950s;
- Its well-balanced massing, with a large, vaulted aircraft bay flanked on both sides by symmetrical one-storey administrative blocks;
- The horizontal expression of its brick and concrete block base;
- The absence of ornamentation;
- The monumentality of the principal façade with its narrow band of windows across the full width of retractable doors;
- The clean lines and lightness of its thin, parabolic precast concrete ribs that spring from the base and pass through the exterior side walls to support the low arched roof;
- Its simple, rectangular floor plan, with a column-free interior space, providing flexibility for the maintenance and storage of aircraft;
- Its curtain wall technology which creates planar surfaces, emphasizes uniformity and transparency, and lends an airiness to the structure;
- Its durable, economic and low-maintenance materials such as concrete, curtain wall, brick and aluminum cladding;
- Its location within the heterogeneous setting of the South Terminal; and
- Its identification as a significant modernist structure by Docomomo BC.

For guidance on interventions, please refer to the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*. For further information contact FHBRO.

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March 2008

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