

VNC Santa Monica Airport Committee Report

The Committee held its first meeting February 12, 2010. This report highlights the activities and progress of the Committee since its inception. It also briefly summarizes possible actions on which we are seeking stakeholder input to make additional recommendations to the Board of the Venice Neighborhood Council.

One of the first activities was to conduct a survey of Venice residents, collecting data regarding the impact of Santa Monica Airport air traffic over Venice. More than 300 residents responded. The concerns can probably be summed up to be those that arise from the noise, those that arise from other environmental hazards, such as the use of leaded gasoline by airplanes flying in and out of SMO, and those that arise from the safety issues.

We have had regular meetings with Councilman Rosendahl's staff regarding our issues. Norm Kulla, District Director and Senior Counsel for Councilperson Rosendahl's office, has been instrumental in helping us obtain the information needed to advance our concerns. One of the main challenges has been to wade through the jurisdictional issues. Federal agencies and politicians have said the issues we raise are local and the local politicians have historically said that there is nothing they can do, as the navigation of airspace is a federal issue. We have worked hard to get through that maze and Councilman Rosendahl and his staff have been very helpful in promoting the idea that Los Angeles should exercise more authority over what happens at Santa Monica Airport. We have met with Congressman Waxman, to discuss the federal component, and he says for him it is also a jurisdictional issue with the FAA. Waxman's 30th congressional district includes Santa Monica and West Los Angeles. We also participated in a meeting with Representative Jane Harman and U.S. EPA Western Regional Director Jared Blumenfeld. Additionally, we have met with candidate Janice Hahn, and plan to continue the dialogue with her as our representative in Congress. We also met with FAA – Western-Pacific Region Airports Division representatives and continue to exchange follow-up information.

An out of the box idea has been for the City of Los Angeles to explore bringing a lawsuit against the city of Santa Monica or the FAA, on behalf of the citizens of Los Angeles who are adversely affected by SMO. We met with City Attorney Trutanich to discuss this issue. He promised to put a team of interns on the issue and to report back to us. It appears that there has been some delay in getting this done, due to city budget issues. Trutanich explained that he did not think the City had the resources at this time to pursue a lawsuit, but that he thought it was worth the exercise to consider it and to determine what the obstacles might be.

Other activities included a rally held at SMO on Earth Day, 2011 to bring awareness about the use of leaded fuel by piston planes flying in and out of the airport. The point made was that the EPA banned leaded fuel from automobiles with the Clean

Air Act of 1996. Yet, flight school operations, which account for half of all SMO operations, use aircraft that are fueled by aviation gasoline that contains lead. Other piston aircraft that are not part of flight school operations at SMO are also using leaded fuel today. We also sponsored an earlier protest at Rose and Lincoln during a temporary airport shut down. The "Peace and Quiet" vigil was designed to emphasize what life could be like without the noise from SMO.

We supported and encouraged the City Council resolution to include in the City's 2011-2012 Federal Legislative Program support for legislation or administrative action that would (1) alter the departure path at Santa Monica Airport (SMO) to enhance safety and reduce air pollution, and (2) close the flight schools at SMO. Councilpersons Rosendahl and Hahn introduced the resolution and it was passed by the City Council.

We are currently undertaking a petition drive to close flight schools at SMO that use leaded fuel, have all aircraft departing the airport fly to the north instead of the south, stop the use of leaded fuel in propeller planes flying out of the airport, and to ban jets due to air pollution, noise and the threat of a catastrophic crash. In addition, we are reviewing environmental practices of airports throughout the world for additional background information, researching the number of schools and children affected by SMO noise pollution and other health risks, and preparing material that summarizes the health risks to residents surrounding the airport.

The current agreement between the FAA and the City of Santa Monica expires 2015. A major goal is to have a plan of action for proposals for how the city of Santa Monica deals with the expiration of this agreement and to explore the possibility of closing the airport or at least implementing additional mitigating procedures post 2015. We are also focusing on short term solutions. We have reached out to other groups who are working on common issues, such as Concerned Residents Against Airport Pollution and the Mar Vista Community Council Airport Committee. We are in the early stages of planning a joint town hall for additional community input and discussion. Some of the possible actions that we are seeking community input on are discussed below.

1.) Close Airport

(Possibly replace with park and Area Emergency Center)

What authority does Santa Monica have to close the airport? Santa Monica Airport sits in a densely populated area and the concerns are that the buffers and safety zones currently in place are not safe. Some residents surrounding SMO live as close as 250 feet away from the airport. Congressman Waxman recently attached an amendment to the FAA Reauthorization Bill of 2011 instructing the FAA to cooperate with the Santa Monica City Council in addressing the lack of runway safety at SMO.

2.) Ban Jets/Ban Some Classes of Jets

Current flight paths utilized at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and SMO cause jets at SMO to idle on the runways while waiting for clearance by LAX air traffic controllers. FAA officials say departing aircraft from Santa Monica and LAX have a three-mile separation requirement and jets leaving both airports must be in contact with air traffic controllers. While idling on the runways, these jet aircraft spew high concentrations of air emissions into neighboring West Los Angeles communities, such as Mar Vista and Palms. Separate studies by UCLA, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) and a 1999 health risk assessment conducted by LAUSD have found evidence of very high levels of ultra-fine particles and black carbon linked to Santa Monica Airport.

At SMO jets are using a runway that is shorter than the FAA normally requires. Airports with runways like SMO's (about 5,000 feet long) are usually required to have Runway Safety Areas (RSA) beyond the main runway. The FAA waived this requirement at SMO. The FAA has apparently volunteered to assist in the financing of installation of an Engineered Material Arresting System ("EMAS") on one or both runway ends. EMAS is a bed of porous concrete blocks that collapses under the weight of an aircraft's nose gear and is designed to slow the aircraft, helping prevent collateral fatalities. The problem with this proposed solution is that it is insufficient to stop large jets and to prevent overshoots involving smaller planes.

3.) Eliminate Flight Schools

Santa Monica currently has six flight schools. They practice what is called "touch and goes," in which student pilots take off from SMO and circle around to the south of the airport and then head east, returning to the airport to land and then take off again. They repeat the same procedure over and over again. On weekends they practice "taxi back" procedures which simply mean they land and then go to the end of the runway before starting the procedure over.

4.) Ban Leaded Fuel At SMO.

Leaded fuel is used in all propeller planes including those used by the flight schools at SMO. Jet fumes and dangerous particulates spew into neighboring communities during idling and take off. Noise pollution from both jets and propeller planes are known to contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease and learning disabilities in children. Plans from SMO impact over 16 K-12 schools in Venice and Mar Vista alone and many more pre-schools.

5.) Ban Flight Training Procedures that Continuously Overfly Neighborhoods

(Specifically Touch & Goes, Stop & Goes, Taxi Backs)

6.) Require Limited Hours and Types of Operation

(For Example As Torrance Airport Does)

7.) Require Most Quiet Throttle Use For Take Offs

The maximum noise level for aircraft operating at SMO is 95 decibel single Event Noise Exposure Level (SENEL) as measured at two remote noise monitoring stations located 1,500 feet from either end of the runway. The placement of the noise monitors and the maximum allowable noise limit were established in Section 16 of the 1984 Santa Monica Airport Agreement between the City of Santa Monica and the FAA and was subsequently codified in Santa Monica's Municipal Code under Subchapter 10.04.04 (Aircraft Noise Abatement Code).

8.) All Departures Overfly Santa Monica/Fair Alternation Of Flight Departures Between Venice and Santa Monica/Limit Number of Flyovers

(For example monthly change turn from North to South as in Germany)

The SMO's recommended "visual flight rules (VFR) procedure for single engine aircraft departing Runway 21 are as follows: "Departures to the south are requested to turn left at Lincoln Boulevard (1 mile west) at or above 800 feet MSL" and continue their climb to 1,400 feet MSL. This so-called "Fly Neighborly Program" basically directs SMO's VFR departures to the west over Venice, and thus avoid disturbing Santa Monica residents.

The FAA tested a modification to the departure track for piston-powered aircraft departing from SMO under instrument flight rules (IFR). The FAA proposal routed piston-powered IFR departures on a heading of 250⁰ immediately after departure which routed aircraft over the Sunset Park and Ocean Park neighborhoods of Santa Monica, rather than Venice. Santa Monica residents complained and through lobbying efforts by the City of Santa Monica along Congressperson Waxman, the FAA's proposal is now on hold.

9.) Increasing LA.'s Role In SMO Decision Making.

It appears the city of Los Angeles has no formal role in decisions concerning SMO.

- Airport Commission. We believe there is wide support for some sort of LA representation on the SMO Airport Commission. Most people seem to acknowledge that Santa Monica will not designate LA status as a fully voting member of the Santa Monica Airport Commission and that perhaps it is more realistic to expect an *ex officio* role.
- Raising issue as to the role LA can play in formulating the RAND study and other various consultant studies commissioned by the City of Santa Monica.
- Creation of a formal role for the City of Los Angeles in the planning process for SMO post 2015.
- Exploiting jurisdictional argument based on portions of SMO that are in Los Angeles city limits. An eastern section of SMO is in the City of Los Angeles and the property is leased by L.A. to Santa Monica.

- Increase Los Angeles federal lobbying efforts to advance interests of Los Angeles residents.