



Rod Gould
City Manager

Office of the City Manager
1685 Main Street
PO Box 2200
Santa Monica, CA 90407-2200

July 7, 2010

William C. Withycombe
Regional Administrator, AWP-1
P.O. Box 92007
Los Angeles, California 90009

Re: City of Santa Monica Response to the Federal Aviation Administration Test of a Proposed Instrument Flight Rules Departure Procedure for Piston-Powered Aircraft at Santa Monica Airport.

Dear Mr. Withycombe:

Airport staff has submitted the final comments and concerns received by the City of Santa Monica in response to the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) 180 day test ("Test") of a proposed change to the instrument flight rules (IFR) procedures for piston-powered aircraft departing Santa Monica Airport. From the comments it appears that the Test had a profoundly negative impact on the residents living in the area and on those who stand to be affected by the new flight path. Airport neighbors have retained a major law firm that has written to the City complaining about noise, pollution, safety risks, negative impacts on property values, and inadequate public review. That letter threatens litigation against the City. Moreover, responding to each of these comments proved to be one of the most time consuming and difficult tasks ever undertaken by Airport staff, which required an unprecedented amount of time and resources from staff as well as from the community. You should know that staff processed and responded to thousands of email comments and spent over a hundred hours on the phone with concerned residents addressing the Test's negative impact on the community.

At the outset, the City anticipated that the FAA would make a presentation to the Airport Commission and to the City Council detailing the reasons behind the need to conduct a test of the proposed new procedure. The City believed, perhaps naively, that the FAA was interested in receiving public input and having an opportunity to respond to community concerns regarding potential negative impacts prior to the implementation of the Test. Regrettably the FAA decided to forego a formal public briefing process and charged forward with the Test.

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Throughout the Test period, the FAA's decision received criticism from the City, from community leaders and local officials, and most notably from Congressman Henry Waxman for the agency's failure to include the community's input prior to the Test's implementation. Congressman Waxman urged the FAA to suspend the test, reevaluate its proposed change in the piston-powered IFR departure procedures at SMO, and embark on a more transparent and acceptable public outreach and educational program. Yet despite the Congressman's urging, the FAA declined to alter its position and continued with its Test.

In March 2010, aggrieved residents contacted the City to express their concerns about the Test and what they perceived as the lack of public outreach by the FAA. The City stepped in and promptly sent out over 17,000 informational postcards to residents and businesses within the affected area informing them about the test and how to file noise and operational complaints. The complaints and comments that the City received in response primarily related to excessive noise, flight tracks, safety, and frequency of departures. Some of the complaints specifically mention VFR air traffic flight tracks and express the belief that the test had altered the flight path for VFR traffic. It should be noted again that the City has recently received a letter from an attorney representing the neighbors who claims that the City may be liable for adverse impacts resulting from alterations of the established flight paths at the Santa Monica Airport.

It is our understanding that the IFR departure test was conducted in accordance with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and that following the 180-day test period the FAA would evaluate the operational data and public response to determine if the proposed flight track change would significantly improve safety and efficiency. After this evaluation the FAA would presumably determine its course of action under NEPA, and would do so prior to the permanent implementation of the new flight tracks.

It is because of the overwhelming negative impact on the residents living in the area affected by the Test that I respectfully and strongly urge for the FAA to conduct a full and complete environmental impact study of any permanent change to piston-powered instrument flight rules departure procedures at Santa Monica Airport. It is imperative that the City and its residents be allowed to participate in an open and transparent process in addition to having the opportunity to review and comment on any proposed change in IFR departure procedures before they are implemented. In that respect and for all parties concerned, I think it highly desirable that a meeting between City staff and the FAA be arranged at the earliest possible date to discuss the results of the Test and potential steps forward.

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If you have any questions or desire additional clarification regarding the City of Santa Monica's position regarding this matter, please contact me at (310) 458-8301 or our Airport Director, Bob Trimborn, at (310) 458-8772. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Rod Gould
City Manager

cc: Mayor and Council
Airport Commission
Honorable Henry Waxman
Honorable Jane Harman
Marsha Moutrie, City Attorney
Bob Trimborn, Airport Director