



MARK PESTRELLA, Director

# COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

*"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"*

900 SOUTH FREMONT AVENUE  
ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA 91803-1331  
Telephone: (626) 458-5100  
<http://dpw.lacounty.gov>

ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:  
P.O. BOX 1460  
ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA 91802-1460


April 7, 2022

IN REPLY PLEASE

REFER TO FILE:

AV-0  
10348-1-1

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Mark Pestrella, PE   
Director of Public Works

### **BOARD MOTION OF JANUARY 25, 2022, AGENDA ITEM 8 WHITEMAN AIRPORT FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION FIRST STEP**

On January 25, 2022, the Board approved a motion instructing Public Works to collaborate with the Chief Executive Office to report to the Board in 60 days on information that may need to be gathered and assembled to prepare an initial step for the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) application process, how that data and documentation may be gathered, and the overall cost of gathering the information, including:

- a. The history of the airport, how the land was acquired, previous Federal grants, and Federal obligations.
- b. The airport's multiple roles in the community and regional airport system.
- c. Appraisal of the fair market value of the land and existing improvements.
- d. Next steps in the process.

This report presents the relevant data, information, and costs required to prepare the initial steps of the FAA's application process to close an airport.

### **Background**

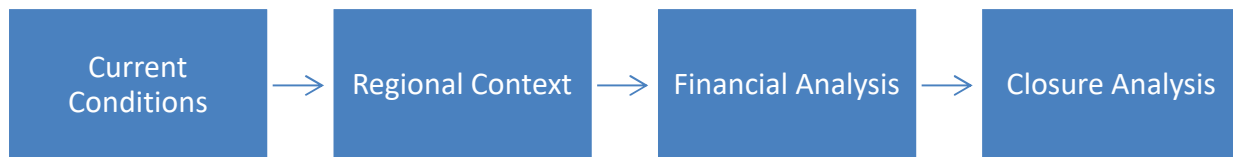
Los Angeles County, as a recipient of FAA grant funding for the airport and referred to by the FAA as the airport sponsor, is subject to obligations (grant assurances) to the FAA to keep the airport in compliance with Federal regulations. Airport sponsor obligations pertaining to the operation, use, and maintenance of the airport are statutorily defined in 49 U.S.C. § 47107(a).

The obligations include keeping the airport open and available for public aeronautical use. The process to close an airport includes the formal release of an airport and its sponsor from the obligations. The FAA makes the final decision on whether to allow closure of a grant obligated airport. As the airport sponsor, the County can request the closure of an airport and prepare the required information to assist the FAA in the decision.

Upon acceptance of the funds in a grant offer, grant assurances bind the grant recipient contractually<sup>1</sup>. The duration of sponsor obligations depends on the type of recipient, the useful life of the facility being developed, and other conditions stipulated in the assurances when an airport sponsor accepts a grant offer from the Federal government for funding airport development projects. Given the nature of grants the County has accepted for the airport, the sponsor obligations at the airport have a duration of 20 years from the date of each grant. The most recent FAA grant for the airport improvements was accepted by the County in 2015. As noted above, closure of the airport during the 20-year term would require following the FAA's formal release and closure process. Paying back or returning the funds associated with a past grant will not release the sponsor from the obligations.

### **First Step of the Airport Closure Process**

The first step to facilitate airport closure can be summarized by four tasks. Public Works would lead the extensive efforts to gather the information and prepare the report for the FAA's consideration.



**Current Conditions:** The history of the airport, how the land was acquired, previous Federal grants, and Federal obligations – As described below, existing data about the airport would be gathered, reviewed, and compiled into a report for the FAA's review.

- Compile the history of property acquisition for the airport, including any FAA grants for the acquisition of real property and analysis of any deed restrictions or conditions – In the case of this airport, only a very small portion of the airport land was acquired using Federal funds. Property acquisition records would be reviewed to determine any restrictions or conditions placed on the land.
- Summary of FAA grants for the airport currently in effect and assessment of the remaining useful life and remaining value of facilities built with the FAA grants – The County has accepted 11 grants since 2001 for the airport. The FAA grant

---

<sup>1</sup> [Airport Improvement Program Assurances for Airport Sponsors, February 2020 \(updated editorially June 2020\) \(faa.gov\)](https://www.faa.gov)

agreements typically last for 20 years and the remaining useful life and value of each improvement would be calculated using FAA guidelines.

- Summary of operational data and forecasts of aviation activity for the next 5 to 10 years – The report would include a summary of the annual flight operations, type of operations, and FAA classification data as made publicly available by the FAA.
- Summary of the airport tenants, businesses, hangar, and tie-down vacancy rates – The number and types of businesses and airport tenants on the airport will be documented. Currently there are over 24 businesses leasing space at the airport in addition to individuals leasing hangar and tie-down spaces. Public Works maintains this information and the current data would be included in the report.
- Information on the use of the airport by law enforcement, medical, firefighters, and other first responders – The airport is currently used for aerial firefighting support (utilized by Los Angeles County Fire, United States Forest Service, and other support agencies), law enforcement/national security, disaster relief, and search and rescue (Civil Air Patrol Air Force Auxiliary Squadron 35 is based at the airport). Based on information supplied by these agencies, the report would include a summary of these services, the types, and numbers of their operations.
- Current airport layout plan and Exhibit A property map – Public Works maintains these documents per FAA requirements and the current versions would be included in the report.
- Contracts and agreements for the use of the airport and analysis of how closure would affect existing property/lease/contract rights – Public Works maintains these documents and the current versions would be summarized and included in the report. Each lease and/or contract would be reviewed to determine how closure would affect the contract terms. For example, an early termination clause in a lease or if a lease is reaching the end-of-term before the potential closure.
- Summary of use of the airport by community groups and noncommercial entities – The airport is currently used for aeromedical and air ambulance flights, news, weather, traffic reporting, aviation-oriented youth organizations and educational programs, aircraft viewing area, and meeting facilities. The report would include information on each of these programs, the number of aircraft operations, and the role the airport plays.

**Regional Context:** The airport's role(s) in the community and regional airport system – In addition to the County's other general aviation airports, this review would consider the surrounding airports and the effect that the closure may have on them.

- Summary of the region's other airports which support general aviation – The information will include a summary of the other airports' current and planned facilities, hangar and tie-down vacancy rates, delay statistics, and any known capacity issues or constraints. This effort will require outreach and coordination with the non-County airports.

**Financial Analysis:** Appraisal of the fair market value of the airport land and improvements paid for with FAA grant funds – This task will also assess the financial impacts of the airport and the role in the overall County 5-airport system.

- Financial analysis to assess whether the airport is self-sustaining, and of the Los Angeles County Airports system to assess the airport's impact – It is anticipated that the analysis will include a significant level of effort as current budgeting is done on the airport system level and not by an individual airport.
- Summary of expected costs of closure to the County – The analysis will use all the financial data gathered under the previous tasks to determine the anticipated cost of closure.
- Transfer of the undepreciated value of FAA Airport Improvement Program to other airports – The analysis will use the data gathered about the airport's previous grants to determine existing or remaining value.

**Closure Analysis:** The final task will use the previously described data to study the impacts and effects of the potential closure.

- Plan for accommodating current airport tenants and users at other airports, including costs – The task will use the data collected in the regional context to develop a plan determining where current airport tenants and operations would relocate. The plan would also include costs associated with new facilities and/or early lease termination.
- Analysis of regional airspace to assess impact of closing the airport – Following FAA procedures and guidance, the regional airspace will be reviewed to determine the potential impacts of closing the airport.

- Cost-benefit analysis of closure – This analysis will use all the financial data gathered under the previous tasks to determine the cost-benefit of the airport closure.

### **Next Steps in the Process**

The closure of an airport is ultimately the decision of the FAA. The first step in the process for the closure of the airport would be for the County to initiate the work described in this report. The effort would be led by Public Works with supplemental support from technical experts and consultants. It is anticipated that the effort would require 12 to 18 months to complete. Proceeding with the gathering of information for a potential application for the closure of the airport would be an eligible expenditure of the Aviation Enterprise Fund. Only airport-oriented expenditures would be allowable. Any related studies that entail aspects not related to airport closure or operations would not be an eligible expenditure of airport funds.

<b>Task</b>	<b>Cost Estimate</b>
Current Conditions	\$14,000
Regional Context	\$39,000
Financial Analysis	\$57,000
Closure Analysis	\$64,000
TOTAL	\$174,000

The Whiteman Airport Community Advisory Committee continues to meet to provide the community an opportunity to re-envision the airport. The process included two community open houses held in early March, in addition to the regularly scheduled Community Advisory Committee meetings.

If you have any questions, please contact me or your staff may contact Steve Burger, Assistant Deputy Director, at (626) 458-4018 or [sburger@pw.lacounty.gov](mailto:sburger@pw.lacounty.gov).

PM:ma  
P:\AVPUB\ADMIN\BOS\BRT MEMO.DOCX

cc: Chief Executive Office  
Executive Office

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR SHEILA KUEHL

January 25, 2022

**Whiteman Airport FAA 1st Step**

In recent years, many communities adjacent to small airports have raised a number of concerns about the impacts their local airports are having on health and safety. The residents of Pacoima who live near the Whiteman Airport have raised these issues and it is incumbent on the County to explore all the options for this airport. With this in mind, on December 8, 2020, I brought a Motion [here](#) before the Board of Supervisors, following a Civil Air Patrol airplane crash on November 12th in the San Fernando Valley residential community of Pacoima, just a few hundred feet short of the Whiteman Airport’s Runway 12, that, tragically, ended the life of the pilot. Currently, the National Transportation Safety Board is investigating that accident.

My motion, which was adopted by the Board, established a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) that has spent the last several months reviewing numerous concerns pertaining to Whiteman Airport. The CAC is continuing to meet and is expected to submit recommendations to the Board of Supervisors later this summer. The goal of the CAC is to conduct an extensive analysis of the airport and participate in the

MOTION

SOLIS \_\_\_\_\_

KUEHL \_\_\_\_\_

HAHN \_\_\_\_\_

BARGER \_\_\_\_\_

MITCHELL \_\_\_\_\_

development of a plan, including a sustainability management plan, informed by independent environmental studies, to assess noise pollution, exhaust, air quality and health risk. The plan will also consider other ways in which the Airport impacts the community and how those impacts can be mitigated or enhanced, and may also make recommendations concerning hours of operation, how existing facilities could be used differently such as a potential role in disaster operations, community emergency notification systems, creation of recreational amenities, landscape improvements, additional community benefits and Whiteman's economic impact on the community. The CAC will also consider whether to recommend that the County begin the extensive process of asking the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to close the Airport, a process which, in other venues, has taken a decade or more, which may make it prudent to explore the sort of information that will need to be gathered to enter into this lengthy process.

On January 9th of this year, there was another plane crash, this one involving a small single engine airplane, which landed on the Metrolink Antelope Valley Line train tracks near Whiteman Airport. Thankfully, the pilot was pulled to safety by quick-thinking Los Angeles Police Department officers and is now recovering at home. Given this recent incident, I am recommending that, in addition to the important wide-spread deliberations and expected report from our CAC, our Department of Public Works begin to identify the data and documents that might be required in order to meet the first step in the FAA's process for airport closure. It is important to point out that there has been no determination to close the airport. However, it may be prudent to at least identify what may be involved should the County decide to embark on putting together an

application because the process is so onerous and time consuming. The initial report by Public Works is designed to complement the work of the CAC and further inform the County's thinking about how to move forward.

**I, THEREFORE, MOVE** the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Works to collaborate with the Chief Executive Office to take the following actions related to Whiteman Airport:

1. Direct the Director of Public Works to report to the Board in sixty days on information that may need to be gathered and assembled in order to prepare an initial step for the FAA's application process, how that data and documentation may be gathered, and by whom, and the overall cost of gathering such information, including, but not limited to:
  - a. The history of Whiteman Airport, how the land was acquired, previous federal grants, and federal obligations.
  - b. The airport's multiple roles in the community and regional airport system.
  - c. Appraisal of the fair market value of the land and existing improvements.
  - d. Next steps in the process.