



COUNCILWOMAN MONICA RODRIGUEZ
SEVENTH DISTRICT

April 24, 2024

LA County Aviation Commission

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Sent electronically: Van Tran, vtran@dpw.lacounty.gov

Re: Item II-F, Re-envisioning Whiteman Airport

Dear Commissioners:

I am encouraged that you are meeting at Whiteman Airport to see firsthand its location in the Pacoima community directly abutting residential homes and other sensitive uses like schools, parks, and daycares. **I recognize the item on your agenda is re-envisioning Whiteman Airport and related economic analysis and study for potential land uses which I support as necessary items to move toward closure of the airport, but I also wanted to take this opportunity while you are in Council District 7, to share the important history and context of community advocacy regarding the airport.** This commission needs to recognize the negative impacts of the airport on the neighboring residential homes and other sensitive uses, the unmitigated accidents that have occurred at the airport, the role of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and the mitigations that must be implemented immediately.

Proximity to Homes & Sensitive Uses

Whiteman Airport is too close to homes and impacts resident's ability to live peacefully with constant noise from airplanes taking off and landing. Specifically, the aircraft runup area for Runway 12 on the north end of Whiteman Airport is approximately 240 feet from the closest residential areas north of Pierce Street. The aircraft runup area for Runway 30 on the south end of the airport is approximately 960 feet from the closest residential areas located south of Osborne Street. Whiteman Airport operates 7 days/week with an unenforced curfew from 10 pm to 6 am and averages 269 takeoffs/landings per day and 80,000 takeoffs/landings per year. This high volume of planes is unmitigated and residents have not been provided with sound insulation or any other common-sense protections, this must be addressed now by providing sound insulation to homes in the catchment area, enforcing the County curfew and rescoping the runways.

In addition to homes there are 37 schools and daycares and 5 parks within a mile and half of the airport full of children being exposed to harmful neurotoxins from the small piston-engine planes using leaded aviation fuel at the airport. We must move away from leaded fuel completely and expect Whiteman Airport to require this as soon as possible. There are unleaded fuels available and the airport must require its use. I was pleased to partner with Senator Menjivar on Senate Bill 1193 to require unleaded fuel at Whiteman Airport by January 1, 2026 and believe we can accelerate that timeline to reduce the harmful impacts.

Unmitigated Accidents

Whiteman Airport operates with a lack of regulations and that has been borne out by the high-level of accidents. According to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)'s database, 16 aviation accidents have taken place related to Whiteman Airport since 2009.

- In 2018, a 12-year-old was among two killed when a Cessna 150L that had taken off from Whiteman crashed into a building. The pilot also died (NTSB).
- In 2020, a single-engine Cessna 182 approaching Whiteman knocked over power lines before falling onto parked cars on a residential street. That pilot died in the crash.
- On January 9, 2022, a pilot missed the runway, landed on the Metrolink tracks, and was extricated by LAPD just seconds before the train collided with the plane.
- On April 20, 2022 one person was killed when a small plane from Whiteman crashed on an embankment next to the 210 freeway.

The unmitigated accidents are the result of the lack of oversight by LA County in owning and operating this airport. LA County took over operations in 2021 and it is past time to see real improvements.

Role of CAC

In response to the November 2020 accident the LA County Board of Supervisors created the Whiteman Airport Community Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC met for over 2 years and ultimately voted to close the airport. Now in 2024, we continue to wait on LA County to take action on the airport. The community organized and followed the process established by the County and are still being told to wait. This is unacceptable and does not happen in other communities that have more

resources. There are several actions the County can take now to mitigate the impact of the airport and I have submitted several letters regarding these actions and will also outline them in this letter. LA County may still need to consider what the future of Whiteman Airport will be but, the Pacoima community cannot wait any longer for relief.

Immediate Mitigations

1. The County should require all airplanes utilizing Whiteman Airport to apply for a supplemental certificate from the FAA certifying that the aircraft and engine type can safely operate using unleaded fuel. This will be an important step towards the use of unleaded fuel and to ultimately require all aircraft using Whiteman Airport to operate with unleaded fuel. With the County taking the necessary steps to make unleaded fuel for sale at all County airports by June 1, 2024 there should be an accompanying regulation that allows only aircraft operating with unleaded fuel to utilize Whiteman Airport.
2. The County is working with the FAA to move the north and south aircraft runup areas further away from residential areas and I understand these discussions are underway with the FAA to see if the current proposal meets design standards. As these discussions are still developing, I would like to urge the County to be bold and consider if the runup areas could be consolidated therefore, leaving just one runup on the property as far away from residential homes as possible.
3. The County needs a clear understanding of what the requirements for all the parcels within the Whiteman Airport are and what design limitations exist in order to operate the airport. This information is critical to understanding how the airport can change to better serve the community. Gaining this information from the FAA can inform the future of Whiteman Airport. This information would complement the County's potential land use and economic feasibility study.
4. Thanks to the hard work of the CAC and my constant advocacy the County recently enacted a night time curfew at Whiteman Airport from 10 p.m.- 6 a.m. daily. This is a good first step and should be assessed with data. For example, based on the flights since November 2023 when it was enacted what is the compliance rate with it. I ask that this data be collected and shared to determine effectiveness. Additionally, I request the County act on more aggressive communication and enforcement tactics to ensure airport users adhere to the curfew. For example, there should be enhanced curfew signage at the airport and the curfew should be more prominent on the Whiteman Airport and AirNav.com websites. In addition, I ask that as lease agreements are executed and renewed that the County include additional charges for airplanes that violate curfew.
5. The voluntary curfew is an important step to support the residential community adjacent to the airport but does not go far enough. The curfew should be 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. and the County should fund and begin a Part 150 study to develop a noise exposure map report and noise compatibility plan. The Part 150 study must be paid for with County funds so additional FAA regulations are not encumbered on the property and at the estimated cost of \$2M it is a responsible investment. The Part 150 study may support the establishment of a mandatory curfew and it would confirm all impacted land uses surrounding the airport. The information from the Part 150 study will inform the future of Whiteman Airport and help us make better decisions about sound insulation, curfew and future use. The County must fund and begin the Part 150 study immediately.

6. There are many public health concerns related to living by a large-scale use like an airport especially for children and vulnerable populations like seniors and those with chronic illness. I acknowledge the difficulties associated with assessing the impacts of a singular use like Whiteman Airport in a city as active as Los Angeles, however, that does not mean we should not try. There is substantial research that shows a link between green space and increased tree canopy and better health outcomes and at the very least there needs to be immediate action to make a Whiteman Airport a benefit to public health versus a detriment. I encourage the County to increase the tree canopy and green space at Whiteman Airport now.

Whiteman Airport occupies 184 acres and only produces 246 direct jobs which is very low jobs per acre use and I strongly believe this amount of county owned land can and should be used more effectively to serve our region's greatest needs such as increasing green space and providing affordable and workforce housing. I appreciate your service on the Aviation Commission and hope you will become active partners in making the Whiteman Airport property a community asset. Please reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,



Monica Rodriguez
Los Angeles City Councilwoman, 7th District

CC: US Congressman Tony Cardenas, 29th District
CA Senator Caroline Menjivar, 20th District
Supervisor Lindsay Horvath, LA County Board of Supervisors, District 3