COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"

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May 18, 2026

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Mark Pestrella, PE
Director of Public Works

BOARD MOTION OF MAY 5, 2026, AGENDA ITEM 29
ENHANCING SAFETY AT WHITEMAN AIRPORT

On May 5, 2026, the Board approved a motion directing Public Works to identify immediate actions the County can take to further strengthen safety at Whiteman Airport by building on the recommendations developed by the Community Advisory Committee. These recommendations should include timelines, cost estimates, and revenue sources, and be submitted in a written report within 7 days. Attached is an outline of responsibilities across jurisdictions, including Public Works, the Federal Aviation Administration, the National Transportation Safety Board, the City of Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

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

JM:ma
P:PW Admin Whiteman Airport Final 5.18.26.docx

Attach.

cc: Chief Executive Office
County Counsel
Executive Office, Board of Supervisors

ENHANCING SAFETY AT WHITEMAN AIRPORT

PART I: Actions to Further Strengthen Safety at Whiteman Airport

The Board Motion of May 5, 2026, was introduced following an aircraft accident that occurred on April 20, 2026, near Whiteman Airport. The aircraft was landing at the airport when it hit powerlines and crashed into a parking lot in the Pacoima neighborhood near the intersection of Van Nuys Boulevard and Sutter Avenue. Initial observations indicate that there were no unusual or unsafe circumstances related to the flight leading up to the accident which is currently under investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The NTSB will ultimately provide a final report identifying the probable cause and provide any safety recommendations.

The following actions are responsive to the Board Motion, build on the recommendations of the Community Advisory Committee, and may be pursued immediately at no cost to the County's General Fund.

A. Enhance Pilot Safety – Sponsor and coordinate quarterly Pilot Safety seminars for pilots at the airport.

   Pilot safety meetings are already occurring at the airport on an ad-hoc basis through the FAA, individual flight instructors, and various aviation nonprofit organizations.

   To further promote safety of aircraft operations and pilot proficiency, Public Works will sponsor and facilitate quarterly Pilot Safety seminars at the airport which will be advertised via the airport's website, social media, e-mail blasts, newsletters, airport postings, and monthly rent statements

   The Pilot Safety seminars will be structured as an ongoing, free, and accessible program for local pilots that reinforce a culture of safety while addressing the specific operational realities of the airport and surrounding airspace. The series will combine quarterly in-person seminars covering topics, such as airspace compliance, runway incursion avoidance, noise abatement procedures, weather, decision-making, human factors, and emerging safety technologies, among others. Presentations will feature a mix of FAA representatives, experienced local flight instructors, air traffic controllers, and accident investigators to provide both regulatory context and real-world lessons learned. Emphasis will be placed on scenario-based training tailored to common local risks, such as traffic congestion, terrain, obstructions, local structures, such as buildings and utility poles, and noise-sensitive areas, to ensure pilots are aware of the voluntary nighttime curfew and other mitigation measures and directly apply best practices.

   To encourage participation, Public Works will collaborate with the FAA to potentially offer credits to participating pilots as part of the FAA's WINGS Pilot Proficiency Program.

The proposed Pilot Safety program would reinforce a culture of continuous learning and operational safety among airport users while serving as a proactive, community-oriented effort to reduce incidents and enhance overall aviation safety at Whiteman Airport.

The program could be implemented by July 2026 and conducted at the airport on a quarterly basis. The estimated annual cost of the program is approximately $2,000 and would be fully funded through the Aviation Enterprise Fund. No FAA Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grant obligations would be associated with the proposed program.

B. Enhance Airfield Safety – Complete a Capital Improvement Project to maintain the runway and taxiway pavements and markings at Whiteman Airport.

Runways and taxiways are the primary aircraft movement areas at airports, used for takeoffs, landings, and maneuvering of aircraft. At the last FAA Runway Safety Advisory Team (RSAT) meeting for Whiteman Airport held in March 2025, there were no airport safety issues identified that require action. The FAA RSAT has, however, recommended that Public Works consider including Aim-Point markings on the runway for any future runway maintenance project. There are two non-precision instrument approaches at the airport, and Aim-Point markings would further help guide a stabilized approach to the runway, ensure adequate obstacle clearance, and maximize the available rollout distance.

While the runway and taxiways at Whiteman Airport remain safe, functional, and satisfy FAA maintenance and design standards, it would be prudent at this time to perform maintenance on these primary aircraft movement areas and incorporate the related FAA RSAT recommendation regarding Aim-Point markings.

The proposed project would rehabilitate approximately 554,500 square feet of existing runway and taxiway pavements at Whiteman Airport through preventative maintenance measures to include crack sealing, application of a polymer modified slurry seal, and new pavement markings.

Ultimately, these improvements would enhance the airport's primary aircraft movement areas and help ensure that runway and taxiway pavements and markings remain in a state of good repair consistent with FAA maintenance and design standards. The project would also reduce the potential for foreign object debris and other hazards to aircraft associated with aging and deteriorating asphalt surfaces, while improving the visibility of runway and taxiway markings for pilots and Airport Traffic Control Tower personnel.

The design activities for the project are anticipated to begin in 2026 with construction beginning in late 2027 and completed in 2028. The estimated cost of the project is $5 million. The potential funding sources include FAA AIP Design and Construction

Grants, which are typically eligible to fund approximately 90 to 95 percent of project costs, with the remaining local share funded through the Aviation Enterprise Fund.

Although acceptance of FAA AIP funding for a typical major airport capital improvement project may obligate an airport to remain open for at least 20 years, the proposed project would only obligate Whiteman Airport to remain open for approximately 3 years following the completion of construction, which is currently estimated through the years 2030 or 2031.

The most recent FAA AIP grant accepted for a major airport capital improvement project at Whiteman Airport was awarded in 2013 for airport perimeter fencing improvements. That grant currently obligates the airport to remain open through 2033. Accordingly, acceptance of FAA AIP funding for the proposed project would not extend the airport's existing grant assurance obligations beyond that date.

C. Enhance Community Outreach Regarding Airport Safety – Utilize media to enhance community outreach, education, and collaboration.

Public Works will implement an enhanced community outreach program to provide regular updates or public safety announcements to the community through the airport's website, e-mail newsletters, and social media platforms. This program will provide timely information regarding airport activities, projects, public meetings, safety initiatives, and opportunities for community education and engagement and will also include the development and distribution of a social media airport informational toolkit for use by community-based organizations.

Outcomes of the outreach program will include improved collaboration, transparency, public awareness, and understanding of airport operations, safety, noise management, and airport events, activities, and programs.

The outreach program could be implemented by July 2026 at an estimated annual cost of approximately $5,000, which would be fully funded through the Aviation Enterprise Fund.

D. Enhance Aircraft Operations Compatibility and Safety – Conduct a Noise Compatibility Study for Whiteman Airport.

An FAA Part 150 Study is a formal but voluntary process with stakeholder input that identifies non-compatible land uses and airport activities and formulates a Noise Compatibility Plan comprised of recommended measures that could be implemented to reduce noise impacts to noise sensitive and incompatible land uses and potentially qualify for federal funding. Following completion of the study, the recommended Noise Compatibility Plan is submitted to the FAA for review and approval before any measures are implemented.

A Part 150 Study characteristically involves open house and public hearing events as well as the formation of advisory committees (typically a Technical Advisory Committee comprised of airport users and land use planning officials, among others, as well as a Citizen's Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from local communities) that meet regularly throughout the study process.

The typical timeline to complete a Part 150 Study is approximately 3 years, which includes the time needed to gather data, conduct extensive public outreach, and allow for review and approvals by the FAA. Similar studies have been conducted at other local airports. A study conducted at Van Nuys Airport was initiated in 1989 and due to delays for various reasons was submitted to the FAA in 2007. The most recent study conducted at Hollywood Burbank Airport started in 2024 and is expected to be completed by 2027 and the most recent study conducted at Camarillo Airport was initiated in 2023 with their final report completed in 2025.

A Part 150 Study is a responsible step toward addressing various recommendations of the Community Advisory Committee and improving safety of operations and the compatibility between the airport and the surrounding communities.

Some potential outcomes of a Part 150 Study include the development of a formal Noise Compatibility Plan that may evaluate measures, such as a mandatory nighttime curfew; modifications to flight paths through preferential runway use or revised flight procedures intended to reduce noise and improve operational safety; and land use strategies involving the acquisition of incompatible properties, easements, or development rights to remove obstacles from runway protection zones and enhance safety.

The study may also confirm impacted land uses surrounding the airport, thereby strengthening opportunities to secure Federal funding for residential sound insulation programs benefiting affected residents. Additional outcomes may include the identification of long-term, federally supported strategies to improve compatibility between airport operations and surrounding communities, as well as enhanced transparency, communication, and collaboration among airport stakeholders.

Estimated costs range from approximately $1.5 million to $2.5 million.

Potential funding sources include FAA AIP Planning Grants, which are typically eligible to fund approximately 90 to 95 percent of project costs with the remaining local share funded through the Aviation Enterprise Fund.

Acceptance of FAA AIP funding solely for the completion of a standalone Part 150 Study would not obligate the airport to remain open for any specific period beyond completion of the study. However, acceptance of future FAA AIP funding for certain related noise mitigation measures, such as residential sound insulation programs, may carry associated grant assurance obligations requiring continued airport operation for a specified duration.

As the Whiteman Airport Land Use Study and Economic Impact Analysis, which contemplates various scenarios including keeping the airport open or closing the airport, is currently underway and expected to be completed later this year, it may be prudent for the Board to wait for the completion of the study before determining whether it may be appropriate to pursue a Part 150 Study for Whiteman Airport.

PART II: Jurisdictional Roles and Responsibilities

Federal Aviation Administration

The FAA is the federal agency responsible for regulating all aspects of civil aviation in the United States. The FAA has exclusive authority over airspace management, aircraft operations, pilot certification, air traffic control, and aviation safety regulations. The FAA establishes and enforces standards governing aircraft design, maintenance, and operation, as well as airport design and safety requirements through federal regulations and advisory circulars.

The FAA, through its Contract Tower Program, operates the Airport Traffic Control Tower at Whiteman Airport. The facility is operational daily between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. with Airport Traffic Control Tower personnel managing aircraft on the ground and in the immediate airport airspace consistent with federal standards established by the FAA.

FAA also administers the AIP, which provides federal funding for airport planning and development projects subject to associated grant assurance requirements.

In addition, the FAA facilitates periodic Runway Safety Action Team meetings that bring together FAA representatives, airport operators, air traffic control personnel, and other aviation stakeholders to identify airport-specific safety risks and develop collaborative mitigation measures intended to reduce runway incursions, excursions, and other operational hazards.

Following an aviation accident, the FAA is also responsible for investigating the accident scene to help determine potential causes and ensure compliance with applicable FAA regulations.

National Transportation Safety Board

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged with investigating all civil aviation accidents and significant aviation incidents in the country, determining probable causes and issuing safety recommendations to prevent future accidents. In some cases, the agency also assists accident victims' families and investigates accidents involving U.S. registered aircraft abroad.

California Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division

The California Department of Transportation Division of Aeronautics oversees public-use airports throughout California. Its responsibilities include issuing and maintaining State

airport permits; conducting annual permit compliance and safety inspections; and providing recommendations regarding safety and noise considerations for proposed K-12 schools, community colleges, and State building sites located within two miles of an airport runway.

The Division is also responsible for authorizing helicopter landing sites at or near schools, administering State airport noise regulations and land use planning laws intended to promote compatible land use around airports, and integrating California's aviation system into broader regional, statewide, and national transportation planning efforts. In addition, the Division administers grant and loan programs supporting airport safety, maintenance, and capital improvement projects.

Public Works

Public Works is responsible for operating, developing, and maintaining the County's five airports, including Whiteman Airport, in a safe, secure, financially self-sustaining, and operationally compatible manner while ensuring compliance with applicable Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, policies, procedures, and grant assurances. This includes performing airfield and facility maintenance, administering lease and license agreements for use of land or improvements at the airports, and maintaining a secure facility through airfield patrols, fencing, and restricted gate access.

As part of its emergency and incident response responsibilities, Public Works coordinates notifications and updates to Board offices and the media; reports aviation accidents and incidents to emergency responders, the FAA, the NTSB, the Public Works Department Operations Center, and the Public Information Office; and supports life safety operations, which remain the highest priority during any emergency response.

Public Works also assists with preserving accident scenes and evidence, securing affected areas, identifying witnesses, and gathering and documenting incident information to support investigative efforts. In addition, Public Works coordinates recovery operations with the FAA and NTSB, including site cleanup and aircraft removal activities, and may provide affected residents and businesses with information regarding available County resources, including mental health services.

City of Los Angeles

The City of Los Angeles, through the Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) department, operates Los Angeles International Airport, a major international commercial service airport, and Van Nuys Airport, a general aviation airport. LAWA is governed by a seven-member Board of Airport Commissioners appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. LAWA maintains its own protocols for responding to local emergencies/accidents related to its airports, which typically involve coordination among its operations personnel, airport police, and local police and fire departments.

Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power is responsible for securing, assessing, and repairing electrical and water infrastructure, such as de-energizing downed power lines and restoring services, following an aircraft accident in Los Angeles. The Department may also assist with immediate scene safety and long-term recovery, participate in investigations to determine whether utility infrastructure, such as power issues, was a factor in the incident, and investigate and implement safety measures, such as underground utility lines in the vicinity of high-risk areas.

FAA Regulations Related to Aircraft and Pilots

In the United States, the FAA regulates the full lifecycle of aircraft and pilots through its Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR), codified as Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations.

Aircraft Regulations

The FARs require that aircraft be designed and approved under a type certification process that verifies compliance with detailed safety and performance standards, which is then, upon approval, individually issued an airworthiness certificate confirming that it meets approved design standards and is in a condition for safe operation.

Each aircraft must also be registered with the FAA and display appropriate nationality and registration markings. To keep an aircraft in service, owners and operators of aircraft are responsible for maintaining continuous aircraft airworthiness by complying with required aircraft inspections (annual inspections are mandatory for all certified aircraft ever 12 calendar months and 100-hour inspections are required for aircraft carrying passengers for hire or used for flight instruction), adhering to mandatory Airworthiness Directives (mandatory regulations issued by the FAA to correct unsafe conditions in aircraft, engines, propellers, or appliances), and ensuring all maintenance and alterations are properly documented and performed by personnel authorized by the FAA and in accordance with prescribed FAA standards.

Finally, aircraft must be operated in accordance with applicable FARs which govern everything from flight conditions and equipment requirements to pilot qualifications and safe operating practices, ensuring a comprehensive regulatory framework for aviation safety.

Pilot Regulations

Under the FARs, pilots are required to hold an appropriate certificate for the type of operation they are conducting (e.g., private pilot, commercial pilot, or airline transport pilot) which is obtained through prescribed training, knowledge testing, practical evaluation, and to maintain a valid medical certificate appropriate to their flight privileges. The requirements for pilot medical certificate renewal depend on the class of medical certificate and the pilot's age. For example, a Third-Class medical certificate for private

pilots is valid for 60 months for individuals under the age of 40 and 24 months for those age 40 or older. Once the certificate expires, pilots must obtain a new medical certificate to continue exercising the associated privileges.

The pilots must also meet ongoing currency and proficiency requirements, including flight reviews every 24 months and recent experience standards for carrying passengers or operating under instrument flight rules.

In addition, pilots are required to comply with all applicable operating rules, such as those governing weather minimums, airspace, right-of-way, and aircraft limitations, while exercising final authority and responsibility for the safe operation of the flight, ensuring both compliance and sound aeronautical decision-making.

The pilot violations of the FARs are primarily enforced by the FAA. Through its Flight Standard District Office, the FAA investigates alleged violations, often based on reports from air traffic control, FAA inspectors, or the public. The FAA can take administrative or legal enforcement action, including warning notices, remedial training, certificate suspension or revocation, and civil penalties which can include fines.