

# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND  
CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Kimberly J. Becker

**SUBJECT:** CHANGE IN FAA-DESIGNATED  
ARRIVAL FLIGHT PATHS

**DATE:** July 22, 2015

Approved

D. D. S. Y. L.

Date

7/23/15

## INFORMATION

### BACKGROUND

#### New FAA Arrival Flight Paths

In 2013, the FAA announced the planned implementation of its Northern California Optimization of Airspace Procedures in the Metroplex (NorCal OAPM) project. NorCal OAPM consolidates several previous arrival and departure flight paths into San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and Mineta San José International (SJC) to create new, more concentrated flight paths using different approach procedures. The NorCal OAPM project is part of the Next Generation (Next Gen) project, a nationwide upgrade of the technology of the U.S. air traffic control system, to create greater efficiencies in flight arrival and departure procedures.

#### Why the Change?

The FAA is predicting that by 2024, the U.S. air transportation system will be transporting one billion people a year. (The U.S. air transportation system transported about 720 million people in 2011.) This significant increase in passengers transported will require more planes in the air and will result in increasing chokepoints and flight delays in already heavily congested areas. To handle this greater air traffic, the FAA is implementing a nationwide effort to create greater efficiencies in the air traffic control system by transforming the U.S. air traffic control system from the use of ground-based radar to satellite-based radar as well implementing different arrival and departure procedures for aircraft.

Next Gen will use GPS technology to shorten routes, save time and fuel, reduce traffic delays, increase capacity, and permit controllers to monitor and manage aircraft with greater safety margins. Planes will be able to fly closer together, take routes that are more direct and avoid delays caused by airport "stacking" as planes wait for an open runway. The Next Gen project is not unlike upgrading the traffic control technology of a congested street intersection from a stop sign to a traffic signal and adding turning lanes.

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### FAA Community Outreach

In March-April 2014, the FAA held an outreach meeting in San José, ostensibly to talk about the NorCal OAPM project. Airport staff and several Councilmembers attended the meeting. However, the FAA had little specific information to share about the potential changes in flight paths and their impacts on effected communities. At the time, Airport staff advised the FAA that more airport-specific information should be included in the agency's environmental assessment and that more information was needed to support the agency's environmental findings, including the conclusions that no area would experience an increase in noise levels and that air pollution emissions would increase only slightly (Attachment A).

### Impact on Residents

On March 5, 2015, a new flight path to SFO, known as SERFR ONE RNAV STAR, took effect, along with slight changes to the SJC flight paths. The SJC flight path is known as BRIXX.

While these arrival paths changes have not resulted in any increase in noise complaints from San José residents and residents of adjoining cities, residents in Santa Cruz County are experiencing a significant increase in aircraft noise. In June, they presented their concerns to the Airport Commission and staff. They asked for support in meeting with the FAA to discuss their noise issues and to request a modification in the new flight paths. The Santa Cruz residents have stated that the FAA did not conduct studies about the noise impacts on their community nor did the agency meet with them before implementing the change of flight paths in March. While some of the aircraft noise affecting the Santa Cruz residents is from SJC-bound flights from the northwest, the great majority of aircraft noise is being generated by SFO-bound flights. Although the number of arriving flights could vary on any given day, for purposes of getting an order of magnitude number, on July 5, 2015, staff analyzed the number of arrivals over the general area of the Santa Cruz Mountains using the new flight path. Out of the estimated 190 flights that occurred on that day, about 160 were bound for SFO.

In response to the concerns of Santa Cruz residents, the Airport Commission has requested staff to return with information on the new flight path. The Commission will discuss the Santa Cruz residents' concerns and make a recommendation to Airport staff at its August 10 meeting. The Santa Cruz residents have also met with SFO staff, who, in May 2015, offered to work with the FAA to suggest adjustments that would further "optimize" the new flight path to reduce the noise impact on the Santa Cruz residents (Attachment B). In addition, in early June 2015 the SFO Roundtable (the body that addresses noise issues at SFO) expressed its support for SFO's offer (Attachment C).

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Summary

The purpose of this memorandum is to advise the Council that:

- ✓ While there has been a change in the arrival/departure flight paths, San José and the adjoining surrounding communities have thus far not experienced a significant increase in aircraft noise.
- ✓ The establishment of arrival and departure flight paths is solely within the jurisdiction of the FAA. However, staff will be as supportive as resources and circumstances allow in working with the Santa Cruz residents and the FAA to reduce any noise impacts from SJC-bound flights using the new arrival flight paths – provided any modifications do not result in any adverse impacts on the residents of San José and the adjoining communities.
- ✓ Staff will continue to monitor and study the new path for potential noise impacts, particularly if the FAA makes any modifications to the flight path in the future.

/s/

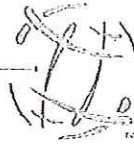
KIMBERLY J. BECKER  
Director of Aviation

Attachment A: April 22, 2014 letter from SJC staff

Attachment B: May 12, 2015 letter from San Francisco International Airport Director John Martin

Attachment C: June 1, 2015 letter from the San Francisco International Airport/Community Roundtable

NORMAN Y. MINETA  
**SAN JOSE**  
 INTERNATIONAL  
 AIRPORT



SILICON VALLEY'S AIRPORT

April 22, 2014

NorCal OAPM EA  
 Federal Aviation Administration  
 Western Service Center – Operations Support Group  
 1601 Lind Avenue SW  
 Renton, WA 98057

**Subject: Comments on Draft EA for NorCal OAPM Project**

The City of San Jose, which owns and operates the Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International Airport (SJC), has reviewed the March 2014 Draft Environmental Assessment for the FAA's Northern California Optimization of Airspace and Procedures in the Metroplex (NorCal OAPM) project and offers the following general comments.

SJC supports the objectives of the Proposed Action and the vigorous technical process that was conducted to design the component improvements to airspace utilization in the Metroplex. However, SJC suggests that the Draft EA, as a public information document, does not adequately provide "...a clear, accurate description of the potential environmental impacts.." (quoting the very first sentence on Page 1-1), and therefore should be substantially revised.

First, given the large geographic size of the Metroplex (all or part of 22 counties) and the number of proposed new airspace procedures (33 in addition to the existing 52), the EA should include sub-regional discussions to convey the analyses on a more airport-specific level. Exhibits displaying the Proposed Action and No Action flight paths separately for each of the four major airports, along with the associated environmental impact analysis for each of the four sets of airport-specific flight paths, would substantially enhance the document.

Second, the EA needs more information to support some of the environmental findings presented. In particular, as the Proposed Action would provide more precise, efficient flight routes in the Metroplex (with presumed fewer speed or altitude changes and resulting shorter flight times), there should be environmental benefits compared to the No Action. Instead, the analysis presents somewhat counter-intuitive conclusions, such as that no areas would experience a significant increase in noise levels, and that air pollutant emissions would increase slightly. Why wouldn't noise levels or air pollutant emissions be reduced? The document needs to address these perceived disconnects between the project description and the environmental impact findings.

Sincerely,

Cary Greene  
 Airport Planner



San Francisco International Airport

May 12, 2015

Mr. Glen A. Martin  
 Regional Administrator  
 Western-Pacific Region  
 Federal Aviation Administration  
 P.O. Box 92007  
 Los Angeles, CA 90009

Subject: Routing of SERFR ONE Area Navigation (RNAV) Standard Terminal Arrival Route (STAR)

Dear ~~Mr. Martin~~ (e)

The San Francisco International Airport (SFO or the Airport) has been tracking the implementation of new arrival and departure procedures that FAA developed through the Northern California Optimization of Airspace Procedures in the Metroplex (NorCal OAPM) project. Most recently, on March 5, 2015, the FAA implemented the SERFR ONE RNAV STAR.

Since March 5, when FAA implemented the new SERFR ONE RNAV STAR, the Airport's Aircraft Noise Abatement Office has noted a significant increase in complaints from the communities of Aptos, Capitola, Felton, Los Gatos, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Soquel. In the six weeks prior to March 5, the Airport received two complaints from two complainants from these areas. In the six weeks following March 5, the Airport received 497 complaints from 237 complainants. These complaints and an analysis of flight tracks and the procedures by the Airport indicate that the new SERFR ONE RNAV STAR may not be fully optimized north of the STOKD waypoint.

We have some ideas which may further optimize the SERFR ONE RNAV STAR on the BIG SUR Arrival between existing fix, ANJEE, and the MENLO waypoint. This could result in a reduction in noise complaints in the area beneath the SERFR ONE RNAV STAR. We will reach out to your staff to discuss further.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Very truly yours,

John L. Martin  
 Airport Director

Attachment

cc: Cliff Lentz, Chairman, San Francisco International Airport/Community Roundtable  
 John Bergener, Planning Director, SFO Bureau of Planning and Environmental Affairs  
 Bert Ganoung, Manager, SFO Aircraft Noise Abatement Office



June 1, 2015

Mr. Glen A. Martin  
Regional Administrator  
Western-Pacific Region  
Federal Aviation Administration  
P.O. Box 92007  
Los Angeles, CA 90009

Re: Northern California Metroplex SERFR ONE Area Navigation (RNAV) Standard Terminal Arrival Route (STAR) Implementation

Dear Mr. Martin:

The San Francisco International Airport/Community Roundtable has tracked progress of the Northern California Metroplex (Metroplex) satellite-based procedure implementation since November 2014, as well as the preceding Metroplex Environmental Assessment (EA) process. On March 5, 2015, the SERFR STAR was implemented, one of the numerous Metroplex procedures shown in draft form in the final Metroplex EA. The SERFR STAR waypoints published in March 2015 did not reflect information regarding this procedure in the Metroplex EA. Citizens from the Santa Cruz area have voiced their concerns about the SERFR STAR flight path shifting laterally, most recently at our April 1, 2015 regular meeting and the Roundtable's Arrivals Technical Working Group on April 29, 2015.

The Roundtable supports the San Francisco International Airport in its efforts to optimize the SERFR and BIG SUR routes in the greater Santa Cruz and Capitola areas. As a noise abatement stakeholder in the Bay Area, we look forward to working with the airport and FAA to find a solution for these routes.

Regards,

Cliff Lentz, Councilmember  
City of Brisbane  
Chair, San Francisco Airport Community Roundtable

Cc: Congresswoman Speier  
John Martin, San Francisco International Airport

