

## **PCPB Update on Airport Authority and related aviation items**

*by Lance Murphy*

### **Summary:**

With the loss of Proposition A in the November 2006 election there is no plan of relocation for Lindbergh Field to another part of the County. In fact, it appears that the newly appointed Board Members of the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority (SDCRAA or Airport Authority) will be focusing on how to ‘maximize’ the capabilities of Lindbergh Field to the detriment of the Peninsula and surrounding communities. It is imperative that the Peninsula Community Planning Board (PCPB) use its full resources to manage the changes and operations at Lindbergh Field to mitigate the negative aspects of this ‘maximization’ of the facility. Further, it is important for the PCPB take a consistent leadership position in the decision process that confronts the Airport Authority.

### **Detail:**

Principal PCPB involvement is required through various activities dictated by the State and Federal Governments when modifying/expanding Airport operations, particularly when those operations are in noise sensitive areas (Lindbergh Field is one of 10 California airports with this designation). The following eight topics provide an oversight introduction to the Airport and its interaction with the community:

1. Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan – a set of policies that are prepared by the Airport Authority and imposed on the City Planning Department as ‘recommendations’. The PCPB has a Primary and Alternate representative for a body labeled Airport Technical Advisory Group (ATAG). This group includes representatives for developers, land use agencies and affected aviation groups – its purpose is to develop the draft for approval by the Land Use Commission. Note: SDCRAA Board members are the Airport Land Use Commission for Lindbergh and the other 15 County airports.
2. Airport Master Plan – Mid and long-term plans for the development and reconstruction of the Airport facilities to improve throughput and operational efficiency are underway beginning in 2006. As required by the California Environmental Quality Act, it includes an Environmental Impact Report and also related approvals by the FAA, County, State and other bodies. Currently envisioned to be about \$650 million in cost, it will be announced shortly as a revision to a plan

released (but not approved) in 2006.

A set of seven (7) principles for the expansion of Lindbergh Field was adopted by the Airport Authority 9/6/07 titled "[Airport Facility Strategic Plan Guiding Principles](#)". It finishes with the goal Develop an Airport that Maximizes Airfield Capacity as its key strategy.

3. Transit Plan – As part of the Airport Master Plan, new proposals are being introduced to construct a Transit Center in the old General Dynamics property on Pacific Coast Highway at Washington. This may bring relief to potential overflow traffic into the Peninsula, but it is not likely to be funded entirely by the Airport Authority and will require significant funds from the City, State and SANDAG. Without alternatives similar to this proposal, it is relatively certain that a great number of additional cars will be transiting through the eastern end of Harbor Drive into the Peninsula to avoid the congestion on the eastern end of the Airport. This is further exacerbated by the Broadway development, Harborside project and Nickelodeon Resort adding traffic to an overloaded situation on Harbor Drive.

It is noteworthy that also on the latest Airport Authority Board meeting (9/6/07) that the concept of the Transit Center was in chaos because it lacks basic agreement with SANDAG and MTD regarding such a facility.

4. Airport Noise Advisory Committee (ANAC) – This group includes members from the surrounding community groups, City and County offices, aviation advisors and operators at the airport. PCPB has a primary and alternate representative. In the last couple of years we have been implemented significant increases in the fines for Curfew Departure Violations as well as the installation of a Precision Departure System that will help guide aircraft on departure to avoid 'early turns'. Other efforts address the 'Missed Approach' and other noise related operations that can be a noise and safety related impact on the Peninsula. A future effort will be to help direct the Curfew Fines to the affected communities as is done in several other airports (through the July 11 Curfew Review Panel, there have been \$38,000 in fines imposed in 2007).
5. FAR Part 150 Study - In the near future the Airport will undertake a Federal Air Regulations (FAR) Part 150 study to determine the Noise Impact on the surrounding community. This study will cost approximately \$1.5 million and will determine the impact on the Peninsula. The Peninsula civic organizations should have one or more representatives on this group activity.

6. CalTrans Title 21 Airport Operating Variance – The operation of Lindbergh Field violates State standards for operation of an urban airport regarding noise impact on the surrounding communities. In order to operate the Airport, a Title 21 Variance is applied for and typically approved for its continuing operation. The latest (8<sup>th</sup> Variance of 3-year duration) was granted in 2001 and expired in August 2004. The 9<sup>th</sup> Variance has not been granted and is being challenged by persons from the Golden Hill area. A full court hearing is scheduled for 17 September, 2007. In the meantime, the Airport continues to operate legally under its conditions of the 8<sup>th</sup> Variance.
7. Quieter Home Program – This ongoing process has the Airport Authority (20%) and FAA (80%) jointly fund the noise insulation of homes directly impacted by aircraft. To date approximately 700 homes to the east and west of Lindbergh have had windows replaced, air conditioning installed and some level of insulation. The latest installment includes \$10 million for this project. At best, prior efforts only addressed the increasing size of the area included in the 70 dB curve and would have taken 40 years or more to address all homes in the ‘incompatible 65 dB zone’. In the last 6 months this program has accelerated to 3-4 times the rate of prior efforts. Now it proposes that all homes in the 68 dB zone be targeted for renovations. This is a ‘double edge sword’ for the community – it protects the occupants that will live in a ‘closed box’, at the same time requires them to sign away all future claims in the form of an Avigation Easement. PCPB members should clearly understand the ramifications of this Program to adequately educate the residents and help protect property rights. It is crucial to note that the largest reduction of ‘incompatible use’ is occurring because these renovated homes are no longer counted in statistics about the noise impact of the Airport.
8. Possible Capacity Mitigation Measures – The Airport Authority clearly understands that Lindbergh Field has constraints that will eventually limit the number of passengers and flights. There is an open disagreement among experts and Board members as to when that may occur and the severity of the impact. In the meantime, there are efforts underway to investigate (\$385,000 study) a possible sharing of the International Tijuana Airport with a terminal on the U.S. side. It has also been mentioned that there are concerns that Corporate & Private (non-airline) aircraft utilize the airport but impact the capacity of the facility by using up to 10% of the landing slots. The only way to relocate these aircraft would be to designate another County airport as the preferred facility

and for that to happen, the Airport Authority would need to control more than just Lindbergh Field as it does today.

### **Take Aways:**

It should be understood by all parties including the PCPB members that the following facts are true:

- Lindbergh Field is the second busiest single runway airport in the world, second only to Gatwick Airport in Great Britain. Unlike Lindbergh, Gatwick has far fewer environmental concerns that affect its runway utilization.
- The runway at Lindbergh Field would not be permitted by the FAA to be constructed today in the valley between the hills to east and west of the airport. This is a terrible location.
- Lindbergh Field cannot effective in the long term and any ‘band aid’ solutions only delay the inevitable capacity ‘crunch’. If not corrected it is easy to predict that we will experience higher ticket prices and less flexibility in flying to/from San Diego.
- Nearby airports in Santa Ana (John Wayne), Long Beach and LAX will not absorb the capacity problems of San Diego and will likely have their own capacity crunch.
- Most aviation problems leading to accidents have something in common with the inherent problems at Lindbergh Field, including an obstructed approach and departure, a runway of limited length with inadequate safety areas, frequently foggy conditions, an overly crowded terminal area, and a capacity bottleneck that causes rapid interspersing of departures and arrivals on a single runway. This isn’t to say that Lindbergh IS dangerous, only that it is not optimal for safe operations and that safety is lessened with the greater utilization of the facility as planned.

As a personal observation, I have an unanswered question for this problem of the limited capacity at Lindbergh and the relocation to a more appropriate site:

*“The Airport Authority studied dozens of possible locations for a new airport in its selection process that determined Miramar was the single, best option. In that selection process there were several criteria that preemptively eliminated possible airport locations due to factors of construction cost, market acceptance, and environmental concerns. Given that the voters could not be convinced of the merit in locating a civilian airport at Miramar, shouldn’t the decision criteria be revised while some of the viable, less desirable sites are reconsidered?”*