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Airlines/Airport Examiner

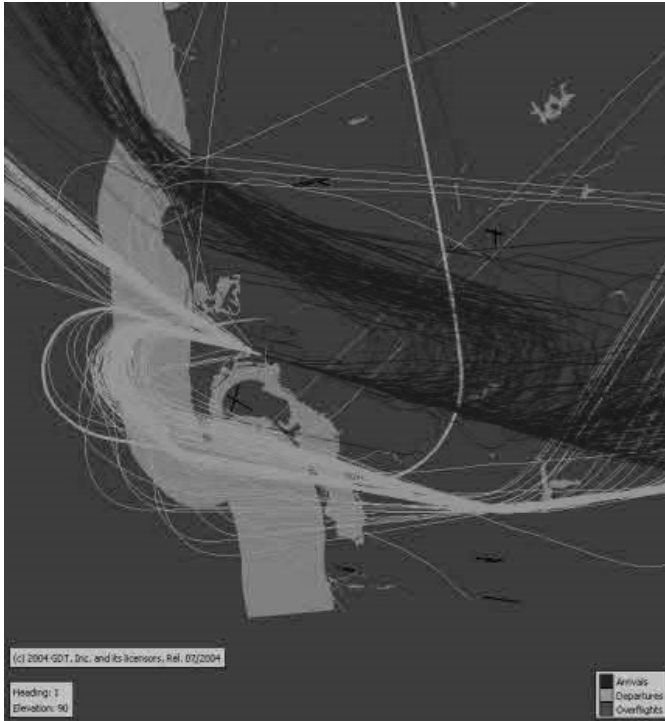
Noise flap raises flak at San Diego Airport

September 3rd, 2009 5:33 am ET

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Part 1 - Background - All About Vectors

[Continued in Part 2](#)

Airport taxiways and runways are like street and roads, according to George Condon, the [San Diego County Regional Airport Authority's](#) Director of Airside Operations. Currently, [San Diego International Airport \(SAN\)](#), which is the busiest single runway commercial service airport in the United States, and second in the world after London's Gatwick (LGW), uses runway 27 West 97% of the time. Its reciprocal, 9 East, is seldom used for takeoffs because of prevailing winds blowing in from the Pacific. The airport also has three active taxiway, Bravo, Charlie, and Delta. The new Terminal Development Program, or Green Build, scheduled for completion in 2012, will add 10 additional gates at the West end of Terminal 2, and may incorporate an additional taxiway, Alpha.

There is a video following this article showing a United 767 taking off from SAN.

Scheduled resurfacing of taxiways began on August 10 using Federal [Department of Transportation](#) funding. It is a 280 day project, and should complete by May 2010. This work impacts mostly taxiway Charlie, with some spillover onto Delta. Resurfacing in airport terms, means re-doing the old pavement, based on soil boring and moisture index numbers. It is routinely done as continuing maintenance on a planned and rotating basis, in much the same way that the [Coronado Bridge](#), or any other large public infrastructure is routinely painted or maintained.



States George Condon, **"When we do this work, it's a balancing act. We try to make it so that there is more potential for good, than for disruption."**

Here's where it gets a little complicated. The Airport fully utilizes all of its available ground space, especially at the Northeast end, which is reserved for general aviation. The area is critical because of three factors, allowing access to: (1) cargo operations, (2) general aviation, corporate aircraft and charters often used by professional sports teams, and (3) four of eight overnight aircraft parking spots. Even for jets, parking is at a premium.



The overriding concern is always safety. The [Federal Aviation Administration](#) (FAA) oversees flight operations. If ground delays due to the construction start to cause problems, it has contingency plans. It can allow bigger departure gaps resulting in flight delays and additional costs to the carriers for wasted fuel and crew time, or it can utilize existing approved departure vectors. What does that mean? Think of it in simple terms of driving down a narrow highway, which suddenly divides into four broad lanes. In terms of aviation, these "*lanes*" are highways in the sky, called "vectors".

When an aircraft takes off from runway 27, which is almost due West, departing traffic is directed over the Pacific Ocean. At a specific location a few miles west of the shoreline, known as "*Poggi*" in FAA control tower shorthand, the aircraft is directed to fly straight ahead on a vector of 275 degrees, or to the right on a heading of 290 degrees, further to the right on a heading of 305 degrees, or possibly to the left (more to the South), using a vector of 250 degrees. Departing flights then make controlled turns, usually back over land, unless they are continuing on to Hawaii or up the coast to northern destinations. All four vectors are currently available to FAA traffic controllers. They have all been federally approved, and all have been in actual use for many years.



However, vector 250 is seldom used. Of the approximately 300 average daily departures from San Diego International Airport, currently there are only 4 flights each day that use vector 250. The other 296 flights use vectors 275 or 290 98% of the time.

Only as a contingency, will the FAA make more use of vector 250 to insure better aircraft spacing, safety, and in cases of missed landing approaches. It is not only the last choice, but probably will not happen, if at all, until the resurfacing project is further along, possibly not until November or December of this year.

The Airport's Deputy Director for Public & Community Relations, Steve Shultz stresses the words, "*if at all*". So does Gordon Condon.

Just what is at stake? If the FAA decides to boost the vector 250 option, a total of 10 flights a day instead of the current 4 may fly this more southerly departure route. That's still a small number out of a total 300 departures, but it is of great concern to the [Peninsula Community Planning](#)

Board (PCPB), an elected advisory committee, which represents Point Loma.

Continued in Part 2

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Part 2 - Community Concerns [Continued from Part 1](#)

The [Peninsula Community Planning Board](#) (PCPB) Airport Committee Chairman, realtor Su... that advance notification on this potential added source of noise has not been given. He is raising the matter with State Sen. Christine Kehoe and Congresswoman Susan Davis.

Khailil is concerned with the three secondary schools which are all beneath the vector 250 flight path, [Dana middle](#), [Silvergate elementary](#) and [Warren Walker](#) middle schools.

According to Dan Frazee, Director of Airport Noise Mitigation, these buildings do not fall within the 65 dB noise contour that would make them eligible under federal guidelines for

noise insulation retrofitting. Such a service has been provided to five other schools under vectors 275 and 290 as early as 1997 by the Airport's [Quieter Home Program](#). The [San Diego School District](#) accepted these complementary upgrades and signed aviation agreements with the [Airport Authority](#).

There is a video following this article showing a Grumman Albatross taking off from SAN.

Frazee has been with the Airport Authority for 7 years, working closely with community advisory groups. He sent out a notice on July 7th indicating that there may be an increase in the current 2 to 4 departures along the 250 vector during peak morning hours of 6:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. *"We have always tried to be up front and help those communities both to the East and West of the airport maintain their quality of life. We didn't anticipate the strong reaction that this information has generated."*



Frazee agrees with the "frog in the boiling water" analogy, claiming that people mistakenly feel the Airport is ramping up their flights slowly, trying to get its foot in the door for future expansion of operations over the next 25 to 50 years. He denies that there is anything sinister behind these small number of possible increased flights along the 250 vector. Says Frazee, *"We don't know for certain that there will be an actual higher number of flights along the 250 vector. It's the FAA's job to keep aircraft moving safely and efficiently."*

The [FAA](#) requires that aircraft be safely spaced, trailing either by 1-1/2 mile intervals, or by 15 degrees of separation, which is exactly the separation of the four departure vectors. The outer two vectors, 250 degrees southwest, and 305 degrees northwest, are usually reserved for slower moving aircraft.

According to FAA front line manager David Borcalli, in an interview with [Peninsula Beacon](#) reporter Anthony Gentile, *"The 250 degree fanning of the departures is not going to be a continuous mitigation to our traffic programs on the*

ground. It doesn't help us that much. It's a very small remedy to the ground traffic problems that we're trying to eliminate."

FAA Acting Air Traffic Manager Jeff Tittle told the [San Diego Airport Examiner](#), *"We are trying to survive the congestion issues at the Airport with minimum impact to our neighbors in the community."* Tittle has worked for the FAA for over 32 years as a controller in Long Beach and L.A., then was in charge of radar operations from Burbank to the Mexican border using Miramar Marine Air Station facilities. He's been at SAN for the past 1-1/2 years.

According to the veteran FAA manager, the vector 250 option is used only at times where there are congestion issues caused by an aircraft having to go around on final approach, or by long roll outs of arriving planes. He has been successful in reducing the number of these "go arounds", and providing for better spacing on approaches. He admits that part of his success may be due to the economic slowdown, during which the airlines have operated fewer flights. *"Vector 250 gives us the ability to clear another aircraft that may be backed up on the ground, so as not to block runway exits."* Like freeway ramps and exits, taxiways are vital to keeping airport operations moving safely and on schedule.

"There just isn't enough concrete available to park all the aircraft when we get busy," Tittle added. *"Aircraft back up on the remaining parallel taxiways, causing congestion when there are problems exiting the single runway."*

About 98% of the time, departing westbound traffic use vector 275 or 290. Vector 250 and 305 are just other options in the FAA's toolbox.

No shortage of twaddle about Obama's bike helmet



The [San Diego County Regional Airport Authority](#) claims that it has always prided itself on openness and transparency. Shultz, the Airport's media front man, said that courtesy flyers were mailed to 7,787 households in the 250 degree vector path, along with a notice in the Peninsula Beacon, and a presentation to the Peninsula Community Planning Board. Added Shultz, *"We do not underplay or diminish citizen concerns in this matter. We know that it is a very important issue to the PCPB, and others as well."*



Since these announcements, Shultz added that there have been few calls or inquiries, less than twenty in fact. In all fairness, it must be pointed out that actual increased over-flights in vector 250 have not yet begun.

PCPB Airport Committee Chairman Khalil sees things differently. When asked if the Airport has been a good neighbor, he replied, *"There could have been much more transparency and openness. We're concerned that the Airport Authority is pushing the envelope, taking our temperature, so that these increased flights are considered normal use."* He chuckled at the unfortunate frog in the boiling water analogy, first raised nationally in the Al Gore film *"An Inconvenient Truth"*, about global warming, and thought it an accurate representation of the PCPB's concerns. He went on to add that 98% of noise complaints come from Point Loma residents.

"It's ridiculous for the Airport Authority to be surprised that this issue would upset folks," the Point Loma realtor said. He added, *"We felt we were blind sided because Tait Galloway, the City's planner for airport matters, myself, and Matt Aubrey, assistant to Councilman Kevin Faulconer, all missed the initial July 15 Airport Authority Noise Advisory Committee presentation. This could have been raised the next day at the regular meeting of the Peninsula Community Planning Board."*

Mr. Khalil would like to see direct conversations with the FAA, and extends an invitation to FAA Acting Air Traffic Manager Jeff Tittle, along with the Airport Authority's George Condon and Dan Frazee to attend the PCPB's next meeting on **September 17th at 6:30 p.m.** in the [Point Loma branch library](#) community room, located at 3701 Voltaire Street. He has several questions he would like answered:

- (1) Will the Quieter Home Program be expanded around the 250 degree vector?
- (2) Are ground monitoring sensors being placed underneath the 250 vector to insure noise compliance?
- (3) Why is the FAA allowing deviation from the 275 and 290 degree departure vectors?
- (4) What is the so-called "handshake agreement" between the FAA and the Airport Authority, and how does it protect residents of Point Loma?

As in any complex issue, communications and dialogue can often resolve suspicions and restore trust. These issues appear similar to those raised by condominium homeowners over participation in the Airport's [Quieter Home Program](#). We will continue to follow this matter and report on future developments.

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Takeoff from San Diego in the Nose of the Row 44 Grumman Albatross