

# Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition

*Citizens seeking relief from helicopter noise – A problem for more than 40 years*

LAHelicopterNoise.org

January 8, 2014

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**Bob Anderson**  
Sherman Oaks  
Homeowners Association

Vice President

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Friends of Griffith Park

**David Rankell**  
Van Nuys Airport  
Citizens Advisory Council

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Neighborhood Association

**Gerald A. Silver**  
Homeowners of Encino

**Rudy Whitcomb**  
Rolling Hills Estates

**Wayne Williams**  
Van Nuys Airport  
Citizens Advisory Council

The Honorable Tom Latham  
2217 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ed Pastor  
2465 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**Subject: LAAHNC Support for Los Angeles Helicopter Noise Provisions in 2014 Spending Bill**

**Reference:** Congressman Adam Schiff, et. al., letter to Congressmen Tom Latham and Ed Pastor, December 20, 2013

Dear Chairman Latham and Ranking Member Pastor:

The Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition strongly supports the referenced request for a provision of the FY14 Transportation Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill directing the Federal Aviation Administration to take steps to reduce the disruption caused by helicopters in Los Angeles. Los Angeles County is plagued with helicopter noise – from the San Fernando Valley, to the Santa Monica Mountains, to the Hollywood Sign, throughout the South Bay, and along the entire coastline from Malibu to Long Beach. Much of the noise comes from non-essential helicopter flights, such as news media, sightseeing tours, commercial flights to oil islands, test and training flights, and other business enterprises, plus from routine operations of emergency, law enforcement, and military helicopters.

LAAHNC has been the driving community force behind voluntary actions to reduce helicopter noise. As detailed in the attachment, LAAHNC has participated in all major events relating to helicopter noise, and organized key voluntary actions with the FAA and pilots.

However, LAAHNC is concerned that voluntary actions are proceeding too slowly and have resulted in little or no substantive reductions in helicopter noise, thereby indicating that strong legislation is needed to solve the problem and provide an impetus to pilots/operators and the FAA to accelerate their efforts. At a minimum, the FAA must establish timelines and milestones for noise reduction actions, and we feel that this can be done without compromising helicopter safety in any way.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [BobHillsideOrdinance@roadrunner.com](mailto:BobHillsideOrdinance@roadrunner.com) or at 213-364-7470. Please visit our website at LAHelicopterNoise.org. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Bob Anderson  
President, Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition

Attachment:

LAAHNC's Credentials Supporting Voluntary Actions To Reduce Helicopter Noise

cc: Senator Dianne Feinstein, Senator Barbara Boxer, Congressman Adam Schiff, Congressman Henry Waxman, Congressman Tony Cardenas, Congressman Alan Lowenthal, Congressman Brad Sherman, Congresswoman Karen Bass

***Attachment to LAAHNC Letter dated January 8, 2014***  
***LAAHNC's Credentials Supporting Voluntary Actions To Reduce Helicopter Noise***

Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition (LAAHNC) membership spans Los Angeles County, with board members representing Griffith Park, the Cahuenga Pass, Sherman Oaks, Encino, Tarzana, the Van Nuys Airport Citizens Advisory Council, Palos Verdes, Rolling Hills Estates, Torrance, Lomita, and Long Beach. Our bipartisan mission is to work with local, state, and federal agencies, elected leaders, and helicopter pilots and operators on multiple ways to safely reduce helicopter noise. LAAHNC has been the driving community force behind voluntary actions to reduce helicopter noise, and has participated in all major events relating to helicopter noise, and organized key voluntary actions with the FAA and pilots.

Adverse community reaction to helicopter noise in Los Angeles peaked in July 2011 during Carmageddon I when the Mulholland Bridge was demolished and media helicopters hovered over homes after midnight to watch pieces of concrete fall. This outrage sparked significant community action, encouraged Senator Dianne Feinstein and former Congressman Howard Berman to sponsor the Los Angeles Helicopter Noise Relief Act of 2011, and inspired Congressman Berman to hold a public hearing on helicopter noise in Sherman Oaks in August 2012. Federal Aviation Administration officials at that meeting said they were shocked by the huge turnout (450+ persons) and broad complaints from across Los Angeles County. This August 2012 hearing brought together concerned individuals from across the county who decided to work together as an ad hoc coalition to fight helicopter noise – the LAAHNC.

LAAHNC held its first meeting with the FAA in December 2012. At that meeting, we submitted many recommendations to reduce helicopter noise, including flying at higher altitudes and not hovering for long times at a single location. The FAA provided several reasons why reducing helicopter noise in Los Angeles was so challenging. LAAHNC also submitted a series of detailed questions to the FAA concerning helicopter noise, and requested detailed written responses.

In 2013, Senator Dianne Feinstein and Congressman Adam Schiff sponsored updated and more detailed legislation entitled the Los Angeles Helicopter Noise Relief Act of 2013. Both the Senator and the Congressman have taken a very active role against helicopter noise, and have been supported by Senator Boxer and Representatives Bass, Cardenas, Hahn, Lowenthal, Sherman, and Waxman. So far, supporters include the California Senate, California Assembly, LA County Board of Supervisors, fourteen cities (Beverly Hills, Hermosa Beach, Hidden Hills, Lomita, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Malibu, Manhattan Beach, Palos Verdes Estates, Rancho Palos Verdes, Redondo Beach, Rolling Hills Estates, Santa Monica, and West Hollywood), Santa Monica Airport Commission, Van Nuys Airport Citizens Advisory Council, and the LAX Community Noise Roundtable.

In February 2013, LAAHNC organized and conducted the first meeting with helicopter pilots/operators and the FAA. Our goal was to begin opening lines of communication and better understanding helicopter noise from both sides. LAAHNC discussed the noise challenges facing various communities, while pilots presented challenges to flying higher safely.

In May 2013, the FAA released their Report on the Los Angeles Helicopter Noise Initiative. This report responded to the concerns raised at the August 2012 helicopter noise hearing, and much of its content is devoted to explaining why this is such a difficult problem and why the FAA really wants it solved voluntarily between communities and helicopter pilots. However, the report did provide six areas where the FAA could support some actions to reduce noise, and LAAHNC has been focusing on voluntary means to successfully address these areas.

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Also in May 2013, Congressman Schiff sponsored a public safety meeting between LAAHNC and emergency service helicopter operators to garner better understanding of the these challenges across Los Angeles.

In June 2013, Congressman Schiff conducted a field hearing at the Gene Autry Museum in Los Angeles where Congressmen Schiff and Cardenas, and County Supervisor Yaroslavsky questioned the FAA concerning their report, and then heard comments from a community stakeholder panel, a pilot panel, and the public. LAAHNC board members comprised all four speakers on the community stakeholder panel, and explained our concerns with the FAA report and its lack of definitive solutions. LAAHNC's speaker statements are provided at the end of this attachment.

In September 2013, LAAHNC organized and conducted the second meeting with helicopter pilots/operators and the FAA. Participants included 10 LAAHNC members, 9 helicopter pilots/operators, 7 FAA representatives, 2 Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) members, and 5 congressional office staff. The meeting focused on the six action areas from the FAA May 2013 report, and our objective was to begin developing solutions to such challenges as helicopter routes and a noise complaint system. A key result of the meeting was establishing four working groups (WGs) that will have LAAHNC, pilot, and FAA representatives: WG1 – Implementing a countywide noise complaint system; WG2 – Developing potential noise-reducing modifications for three initial routes; WG3 – Developing best practices for reducing helicopter noise; and WG4 – Conducting outreach to the helicopter pilots community.

In December 2013, LAAHNC organized the third meeting with helicopter pilots/operators and the FAA. The meeting was conducted by teleconference and participants included 10 LAAHNC members, 5 helicopter pilots/operators, 11 FAA representatives, 2 Los Angeles World Airports members, and 2 congressional office staff. The meeting focused on status reports and planned actions for the four working groups.

***Example Illustrating LAAHNC's Concerns About Substantive Voluntary Noise Reduction Results***

As an example of why LAAHNC is concerned that voluntary actions are proceeding too slowly and accomplishing little, it is only necessary to look at the experience in the cities of Torrance and Lomita, California (south of Los Angeles International Airport). Every week residents of Torrance, Lomita, and surrounding cities experience hundreds of helicopter flights, most of them conducted by Robinson Helicopter Company, which is based at Torrance Airport and has grown to become the largest manufacturer of civil helicopters in the world. Torrance-based helicopters fly routes that were determined by helicopter pilots/operators and the FAA without any notice to the public or any study of negative environmental impacts to local communities. It has been more than four years since a group of local residents petitioned for relief. Residents, helicopter pilots, and the FAA have held dozens of meetings. Despite spending an enormous amount of time and energy, these efforts have resulted in zero changes and no reductions in helicopter noise.

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***LAAHNC Board Member Community Stakeholder Statements at Congressman Schiff's Helicopter Noise Field Hearing held on June 10, 2013 at the Gene Autry Museum in Los Angeles***

**Statement 1 – Mr. Bob Anderson, President LAAHNC**

I'm Bob Anderson, board member of the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association, and president of the Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition. LAAHNC is an ad hoc, voluntary group of residents across Los Angeles County. The other three panel members, seven others, and I started the coalition last year. We are committed to partnering with local neighborhoods and working with appropriate government agencies, helicopter pilots and operators, and others to reduce helicopter noise in our neighborhoods. We are each going to make a short statement, and then have some questions for the FAA.

We were looking forward to the report, because LAAHNC met with the FAA last December, explained the noise problems we saw, and made recommendations for solutions. Sadly, the report does not provide many solutions – it mostly identifies roadblocks – roadblocks to solutions that allow pilots to fly higher, safer and quieter. It includes statements like "... it is the FAA's considered judgment that a comprehensive regulation governing Los Angeles County helicopter noise would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to develop." But, we didn't ask for one comprehensive regulation; we asked for the FAA's help in developing localized regulations and actions to support, encourage, and complement voluntary actions. Instead we're told that voluntary actions are the do-all, end-all. Well, we are all for voluntary actions – and have already started working with pilots. But, voluntary actions are simply not enough, and regulations and FAA actions are a must, such as:

- Creation of an FAA noise standard,
- Creation of new offshore coastline routes,
- Environmental studies of helicopter routes, and
- The FAA's commitment to modify airspace for noise hot spots.

The report states "By law, citizens of the United States have a public right of transit through the nation's navigable airspace, subject to regulations necessary to ensure the safety of aircraft and the efficient use of airspace." Of course – but that does not mean such transit is not subject to regulation to also prevent environmental impacts to our quality of life.

The report also states "In addition to being effective for noise abatement, such measures must be safe, operationally manageable in the complex Los Angeles airspace, and responsive to community economic interests and public safety needs." But, the report focuses solely on negative economic impacts on helicopter pilots and operators, and does not even consider negative economic impacts on residents, property values, communities, and schools. Why not?

Thank you, Congressman Schiff, for this hearing, and thank you, FAA and pilots, for participating.

**Statement 2 – Mr. Richard Root, Vice President, LAAHNC**

I'm Richard Root and I'd like to start out by talking about how I got involved in this problem.

A few years ago I began to notice a growing number of helicopters flying over our home in Torrance. One day, in 2008, I counted 50 flyovers. That's when I decided to find out what was going on. I discovered they were test flights by Robinson Helicopter Company coming from miles away at

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Torrance Airport. Having a business like that Torrance is a good thing. But what I found out later made me angry. When the City approved Robinson's lease and several expansions in recent years, they ignored the California Environmental Quality Act. In a short number of years, Robinson had grown to become the largest helicopter maker in the world and no attempt had ever been made to identify their impacts – including noise – let alone to study or mitigate them. On top of that, I discovered that a few years earlier Robinson and the FAA privately agreed on the routes helicopters would use and one of them was over our neighborhood. This was also done without any environmental review or notice to homeowners. In short, the quiet enjoyment of our home was taken from us without due process. I've spent the last few years trying to mitigate some of the noise.

With respect to the FAA report, I have to take issue with the way it characterizes the voluntary process used in Torrance, on Page 27. First, it states that Torrance formed a "Community and Stakeholder Helicopter Noise Committee." That's a label I never heard until I read this report – and I was a member of the Committee. Its official title was simply "Helicopter Committee." I was the only member whose home was actually under a route, and there were no members from other cities near Torrance where homes are also affected. Second, the report says "The Committee carefully reviewed the North and Northeast routes, but made no changes." That's not right either. The City gave the Committee a deadline – It ran out of time and never studied those routes at all. Lastly, the routes that did come out of the Committee were the ones Robinson was already using – not the ones the community wanted and not much reduction in noise.

That brings me to why we're here tonight. It's not just a recent problem in Torrance – it's been a problem throughout the LA area for a long time. I think the fundamental reason it hasn't been fixed is that the FAA is focused almost entirely on safety and efficiency – and noise is at the bottom of the priority list. Everyone agrees safety is first – but noise should be moved up the priority list – and if needed – Congress should direct it. That's why hearings like this one are important.

I appreciate the discussion and I thank Congressman Schiff for bringing us together.

**Statement 3 – Mr. Gerry Hans, Board Member LAAHNC**

I'm Gerry Hans, president of Friends of Griffith Park and board member of The Oaks Homeowners Association.

There's been an insidious increase in low-flying helicopter traffic and noise over Griffith Park and the park's adjacent residential communities, where sound resonates through the canyons. We're at the breaking point, and short of legislative action to give new mandates to the FAA, I fear no improvement.

After the 9-11 incidents in 2001, as most may recall, there was a two-month ban on non-essential flights. It was heaven. The ban produced a "night and day" difference in the quality of family backyard environments, and the peaceful pleasures for passive recreation in Griffith Park. After the ban, it was back to the status quo, and noise has now jumped to intolerable levels.

Voluntary measures are not working well. Helicopter routes are published, but pilots take short-cuts putting them directly over our homes – and a significant reason for publishing these flight routes in the first place is, indeed, to avoid residential areas. Recommended altitudes on those route charts are also not followed.

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Tourist helicopters viewing the Hollywood Sign and Observatory are sandwiched together in a very narrow, low-altitude range, roughly 1,600 to 1,800 feet above mean sea level, with the park's peaks at that very same range, 1,600 up to 1,820 feet. Low-flying activities can be condoned by the FAA, saying that they "should fly higher, when possible." Yet, no actions have been taken to reshape this complicated airspace or to put these helicopter pilots under Burbank's Air Traffic Control, so they can fly higher. We have a sandwich of uncontrolled space that in less than one year has yielded one emergency landing in a cloud of smoke, and one crash.

The Griffith Park area only serves as a sample of the problems that the FAA needs to diligently tackle in the near-term, not a decade from now. Mandates that produce solutions – even if those solutions are complicated, like the complicated airspace we have – are what we need. I trust that change will be coming to protect our environment on the ground, and I thank Congressman Schiff for his leadership.

**Statement 4 – Mr. Wayne Williams, Board Member LAAHNC**

I'm Wayne Williams, a Member of the Van Nuys Airport Citizens Advisory Council. I've been working for decades to remove loud aircraft noise from the skies over LA. Did you know that by 2015, all noisy Stage 2 Jets will no longer be allowed to depart Van Nuys Airport? This was a 20-year effort by concerned residents and politicians over the significant resistance of the jet industry and the FAA.

This same effort must now happen with helicopters. Right now, there are NO noise standards for helicopters, and they can fly as low as 40 feet above an obstruction! Crazy huh?

We are bombarded every day by low flying helicopters with little, if any avenues to mitigate the problem, short of pleading for quieter skies and working voluntarily with concerned pilots. But pilots and ownership of aircraft often change, so mandates and regulations are the only sure way to limit noise over the long term.

Regulation is working to phase out Stage 2 jets and thus improving the quality of life of those on the ground. The Bills by Congressman Schiff and Senator Feinstein to resolve helicopter noise issues in the Los Angeles area are an excellent point of pressure on the FAA and the helicopter industry to do the same.

I'm not willing to wait another 20 years to have peace and quiet over our homes from helicopters. Are you? A significant mandate to ultimately remove older, noisy Stage 2 helicopters and increase all helicopter flight altitudes wherever possible must be a part of any solution.

To accomplish these goals, an excellent mixture of options must be enacted. From a toll-free call in system used by residents that help define helicopter "Hot Spots" – to FAA actions that clear airspace of other aircraft so helicopters can fly higher in those areas where possible – to a NextGen air traffic control system that includes all helicopters flying with transponders providing safety to all aircraft – as well as a strong push for new noise reduction helicopter technology. These and other options must be enacted to improve safety, balance the economic interests of the helicopter industry and residents home values, as well as our quality of life.

I expect good government to empower all concerned to work in good faith to make these changes happen as quickly as possible.