Federal Aviation Administration

Significant Progress Report on the Los Angeles Helicopter Noise Initiative

January 16, 2015

Background: The May 2013 Report

Helicopter noise in the greater Los Angeles region has been a concern for residents for many years. In response to those concerns, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) solicited input from local communities and other stakeholders on helicopter noise and safety issues. On May 31, 2013, the FAA published the "Report on the Los Angeles Helicopter Noise Initiative."[1]

In the report, the FAA expressed that the most satisfactory and widely accepted noise abatement measures are those developed by engaged stakeholders and the FAA at the local level and supported by local consensus. The FAA recommended engaging in a robust local process and is supporting such a process to pursue remedies aimed at reducing helicopter noise that are responsive to community quality-of-life and economic interests and are consistent with National Airspace System (NAS) safety and efficiency.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014

In January 2014, Congress included language in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-76 (Jan. 3, 2014), directing the FAA to undertake six actions, which were previously identified in the May 2013 Report:

1) Evaluate and adjust existing helicopter routes above Los Angeles to lessen noise impacts;
2) analyze whether helicopters could fly safely at higher altitudes;
3) develop and promote best practices for helicopter operators for limiting noise;
4) conduct outreach to helicopter operators on voluntary policies and increase awareness of noise sensitive areas and events;
5) work with stakeholders to develop a more comprehensive noise complaint system; and

[1] http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/policy_guidance/envir_policy/media/la_helicopter_noise%20report_final_053113.pdf

6) continue to participate in collaborative engagement between community representatives and helicopter operators.

The legislation also stated that within one year of enactment, the Secretary "shall begin a regulatory process related to the impact of helicopter use on the quality of life and safety of the people of Los Angeles County unless the Secretary can demonstrate significant progress in undertaking the actions."

FAA has worked diligently for more than a year with various stakeholders to implement these six actions and significant progress has been made on each one, as demonstrated in this report. FAA believes that these efforts are producing positive results and will continue to work through the collaborative process.

Significant Progress

FAA and the stakeholder working groups have made significant progress on each of the six actions over the past year.

Action 1: Evaluate existing helicopter routes to identify feasible modifications that could lessen impacts on residential areas and noise-sensitive landmarks.

The FAA has expended significant resources to analyze how helicopters integrate into the complex airspace of Los Angeles County, including developing new methodology and tools to identify helicopter flight tracks. Gaining a better understanding of existing helicopter operations was a necessary first step in evaluating existing helicopter routes, and the FAA shared its work-in-progress with stakeholders through detailed briefings and working group sessions. With this foundation, the FAA and stakeholders are making progress in identifying route adjustments that could lessen impacts on residential areas and noise-sensitive landmarks while avoiding shifting noise from one residential neighborhood to another.

Achievements:

- Conducted analysis throughout the entire Los Angeles County to determine where helicopters are currently operating.
    - Formulated a county-wide density map that depicts concentration of helicopter activities
    - Developed an algorithm to differentiate fixed-wing and helicopters operating under visual flight rules
- Developed voluntary beacon codes to enhance safety by distinguishing helicopters from fixed-wing aircraft and increasing situational awareness of pilots and air traffic controllers.
- Completed extensive in-depth analysis of adherence to existing helicopter routes and potential for route adjustments for the Hollywood, Torrance, and Palos Verdes areas; similar analysis is underway in the Long Beach area.
- Provided stakeholder briefings to review and explain the results of the in-depth analysis.
    - 5/8/2014: Residents/operators explaining the process used on the Torrance Safety Risk Management analysis
    - 8/27/2014: South Bay community workgroup on initial analysis
    - 8/29/2014: Cahuenga Pass workgroup on helicopter/fixed-wing operations
    - 9/16/2014: Long Beach Routes workgroup on finalized analysis
    - 9/17/2014: Best Practices workgroup on how the National Airspace System operates and the relationship to flight procedures
    - 9/24/2014: South Bay community workgroup on FAA Safety Process
    - 9/29/2014: Cahuenga Pass workgroup on fixed-wing aircraft through the Hollywood region of interest
    - 11/13/2014: South Bay community workgroup on finalized analysis
    - 12/3/2014: Cahuenga Pass workgroup on FAA subject matter expert recommendations
- Identified potential new voluntary off-shore routes based on analysis of coastal air traffic and stakeholder input; design of those routes is underway.

Action 2: Analyze whether helicopters could safely fly at higher altitudes in certain areas along helicopter routes and at specific identified areas of concern.

The FAA has combined work under Actions 1 & 2 to increase efficiency and leverage resources. In conjunction with its evaluation of routes, the FAA has begun to analyze options to safely raise altitudes and reduce impacts on communities. Adjusting the altitudes for helicopter traffic is an extremely difficult task given the busy airspace within Los Angeles County. The substantial analysis for Action 1 provides a foundation for identifying altitude adjustments along routes and over noise sensitive areas.

Achievements:

- Used the in-depth analysis of helicopter operations conducted to evaluate route modifications to support discussion of altitude adjustments in those areas.
- Provided data to the pilot community with recommendations to adjust altitudes where operations would safely allow.
- Conducted a Safety Risk Management (SRM) analysis of the city of Torrance proposed changes to Zamperini Field helicopter arrival/departure routes. FAA issued the SRM Decision Memorandums on the following routes:
    - West Pacific Coast Highway
        - Raised altitude from 600 feet (ft.) MSL to 900 ft. MSL
    - South Crenshaw
        - Raised altitude from 600 ft. MSL to 2,000 ft. MSL
        - Modified Route
    - Southeast
        - Raised altitude from 600 ft. MSL to 1,000 ft. MSL
- Conducted analysis of helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft at various altitudes in multiple areas, a necessary step before adjusting routes or altitudes.

Action 3: Develop and promote best practices for helicopter hovering and electronic news gathering.

The FAA has collaborated with community representatives and helicopter operators to identify and promote existing best practices to reduce noise. We will continue to issue Advisory Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) for large events and encourage helicopter operators and news organizations to employ practices that reduce noise. As we obtain more insight into the location and nature of helicopter noise problems throughout the Los Angeles area we will continue to work with stakeholders to identify additional best practices targeted to those areas and events.

Achievements:

- Worked with stakeholders to promote camera pooling for electronic news gathering helicopters to limit operations during major events.
    - Carmageddon II
    - Space Shuttle Endeavour
    - Jamzilla
- Issued advisory NOTAMs requesting pilots to avoid overflying or hovering.
    - 2012 Hollywood Bowl concerts
    - 2013 Hollywood Bowl concerts
    - 2014 Coachella Music Festival
- Enhanced efforts for the Hollywood Bowl 2014 Concert Season:
    - Issue a graphic notice for the 2014 Hollywood Bowl season.
    - Issued Letters to Airman regarding the noise sensitive location.
    - Instituted the issuing of information on the Automatic Terminal Information Service at major airports in Los Angeles County for pilot awareness.
- Engagement from local stakeholders to enhance and promote best practices:
    - Local law enforcement identified opportunities to fly neighborly when operations permit.
    - Helicopter operators developed a brochure of local "hot spots" for the pilot community.

Action 4: Conduct outreach to helicopter pilots to increase awareness of noise-sensitive areas and events.

The FAA and helicopter groups have taken advantage of opportunities over the past year to educate pilots and encourage best practices. We remain alert to the potential to use regularly scheduled meetings, conferences, and special events that attract helicopter pilots as well as various methods of communication, including printed material, Web sites, and targeted emails to increase awareness of noise issues and best practices to reduce noise over noise-sensitive areas.

Achievements:

- Prepared and disseminated handouts describing noise sensitive areas to over 500 participants of the annual helicopter industry conference and 7 major local helicopter operators.
- Posted information at FAASafety.gov regarding noise sensitive areas for Los Angeles County helicopter pilots and issued email "Notice" blasts for various local events.
- Participated and briefed industry groups and professional associations at the annual safety event hosted by the FAA.
- Conducted several pilot/controller forums at local airports to address helicopter operating best practices and noise sensitive areas.

Action 5: Explore a more comprehensive noise complaint system.

Implementation of a dedicated helicopter noise complaint system for Los Angeles County is well underway. The system will consist of a dedicated web portal, radar flight tracking, and a brokering system that can route complaints associated with a specific airport to that airport's noise office and forward helicopter noise complaints received by airports to the centralized helicopter noise portal. This system has the potential to form the basis of an on-going helicopter noise program, and the data it generates can help to inform decisions about modifications of helicopter routes and operations in the future.

Achievements:

- The FAA and stakeholders investigated and evaluated currently available technology and options for a helicopter noise complaint system.
- FAA allocated funding to acquire 12 months of correlated noise complaint/flight track data for helicopters.
- A contractor was selected to develop and administer a complaint system that will provide this data.
- The contractor met with FAA and stakeholders to obtain feedback on the design of the complaint system.
- The Automated Complaint System went live in March 2015. The system allows individuals to make complaints about helicopter operations anywhere in the county, both via a website and by telephone.

Action 6: Continue the collaborative engagement between community representatives and helicopter operators, with interaction with the FAA.

Collaboration with community representatives and helicopter operators has been an essential part of the Los Angeles Helicopter Noise Initiative. These stakeholders have contributed significant effort towards reaching agreement on a set of voluntary measures that could reduce helicopter noise and enhance quality of life. The success of the voluntary measures will depend in large part on this continuing collaboration. The FAA is committed to working with stakeholders as they further mature and oversee additional voluntary measures and encourages formation of an institutional structure to sustain this robust local engagement.

Achievements:

- Stakeholder working groups were established and used to formulate proposals for actions 1 through 5.
- FAA facilitated establishing a process to work issues and proposals through a stakeholder steering group and drafting a memorandum of understanding to

memorialize the organization of the stakeholders and document the roles and objectives for all participants in this process.

- The stakeholder steering group, with interaction from the FAA, has formulated a proposed set of over 20 voluntary measures for use by helicopter pilots and operators, ranging from voluntary helicopter routes to voluntary helicopter altitudes in specific areas that will reduce helicopter noise in noise-sensitive areas of Los Angeles County while maintaining adequate margins of safety.
- FAA has participated in over 50 meetings with stakeholders and has been the primary provider of technical support, flight data, and analysis to the stakeholders.

Next Steps

Noise abatement measures developed with input from engaged stakeholders and the FAA remain the most effective approach to reducing helicopter noise. The FAA is committed to continuing its collaboration with stakeholders in pursuit of voluntary agreements on routes and altitudes, best practices, outreach and training, implementation of the noise complaint system, and other means of addressing the helicopter noise situation in Los Angeles County.

Over the next year, FAA will expand its evaluation of helicopter traffic throughout the entire Los Angeles County. FAA will review the correlated noise complaint data and work with stakeholders to consider the implications for helicopter routes and operations. FAA anticipates that a memorandum of understanding among all stakeholders, including the FAA, will be signed, and the initial set of voluntary measures will be finalized and implemented this year.