

Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition

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

President
Bob Anderson
Sherman Oaks
Homeowners Association

June 10, 2013

Vice President
Richard Root
Riviera (Torrance)
Homeowners Association

Mr. David C. Suomi
Acting Regional Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Western-Pacific Region
Post Office Box 92007
Los Angeles, CA 90009-2007

Treasurer
Dave Garfinkle
Tarzana Property Owners
Association

George Abrahams
Beachwood Canyon
Neighborhood Association

John Bailey
Southeast Torrance
Homeowners Association

Dear Administrator Suomi,

Gerry Hans
Friends of Griffith Park

Subject: LAAHNC Questions to FAA at June 10, 2013 Hearing

Jeffrey Prang
Mayor, West Hollywood

David Rankell
Van Nuys Airport
Citizens Advisory Council

Mike Savidan
City of Lomita Councilman

Gerald A. Silver
Homeowners of Encino

Rudy Whitcomb
Rolling Hills Estates

Wayne Williams
Van Nuys Airport
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At Congressman Schiff's June 10th Field Hearing on helicopter noise, four members of the Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition (LAAHNC) comprised the Neighborhood Stakeholder Panel and asked questions of the FAA representatives at the hearing. Because of time constraints at the hearing and to ensure that the FAA has the opportunity to respond in detail to all of our questions, we are herein formally submitting all of our panel's questions to the FAA, and requesting that all of our question become part of the hearing record.

1. With regard to community economic interests, the report is highly biased toward economics favoring helicopter operators and manufacturers, and repeatedly ignores economics favoring residents, homeowners, communities, and schools. For example, on page 38, concerning no-fly zones, the report states "These kinds of restrictions would have a direct adverse economic impact on businesses that depend on helicopter operations", but at the same time totally ignores the negative economic impacts that helicopter noise has on communities. If the FAA's current mandate is that it can take no action that results in any negative economic impacts on helicopter business opportunities, the public will understand why the proposed legislation is necessary to change that mandate. There needs to be a balance. Can the FAA please explain why offsetting negative environmental and economic impacts to residents, homeowners, communities, and schools do not currently fit into the FAA's equation? Why does economic loss to the helicopter-related businesses currently take precedent over loss of property value as noisy residential areas become shunned? Where, if at all, does "quality of life" work into the FAA's economic equation?
2. The National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) was passed in 1970 and requires Federal agencies to consider environmental impacts in their decision making process, obtain public input, and make environmental findings. On page 25 of the report, the FAA states that it published the first VFR Helicopter Route Charts in the late 1970s. Therefore, NEPA was in effect when these first charts were published, showing primary, secondary, and transition routes. Would the FAA please explain why it has conducted no environmental impact analysis in connection with its decision to establish and publish these route charts?

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Footnote 7 on page 14 of the report indicates that there has been no analysis to determine whether noise levels exceed thresholds of significance under NEPA. Please explain the thresholds of significance under NEPA, and why no analysis has been done?

3. Page 24 of the FAA Report, Section 4.1, Ensure Safety of Helicopter Operations, states “The technology to manage a greater number and mix of aircraft with vastly different performance capabilities within the same airspace does not exist now and will not in the foreseeable future. Given the slower speed of helicopters and the fact that they typically operate under VFR, safety requires helicopters to be kept at altitudes where they will not interact with jet aircraft.” We certainly understand the potential conflict with jets that are landing or taking off, and it should be avoided. However, the report also states “Although there is potential for enhancing helicopter safety through the Next Generation Air Transportation System (“NextGen”), the tools being developed under NextGen will not enable helicopters to operate safely at higher altitudes in congested airspace.” Many helicopters are already flying in the same airspace as fixed-wing (above 1,000 feet AGL). Also, fixed-wing aircraft already operate at different speeds from other fixed-wing aircraft in the same airspace. Please explain NextGen’s potential for enhancing helicopter safety and why is it not being pursued. And, if it were pursued, would it allow helicopters to fly higher than they do now?

The FAA has issued regulations that will require aircraft operating in high-density, complex airspace such as that in Southern California to have ADS-B Out capability by 2020. This will allow aircraft to transmit their position to other aircraft, so they can maintain separation. However, there are no plans to require ADS-B In, which allows pilots to receive positional information from other aircraft. Please explain why ADS-B In is not being required and, if required, how it would enhance safety even further and allow helicopters to fly higher?

4. On page 43 of the Report, the FAA states it’s willing to evaluate routes to lessen noise impacts on residential areas; however, any new routes should avoid moving noise from one residential area to another. We agree. We think the one change that has the most potential to accomplish that goal is the establishment of a new offshore route. However, on page 25 of the report, the FAA states that offshore routes are not feasible and it’s apparently not willing to consider it further. We think Figure 2-4 on page 12 clearly shows a lot of flights concentrated right on the shoreline. The County and most of its coastal cities, from Malibu to Palos Verdes, have identified helicopter noise as a problem and they support legislation to reduce to reduce it. Also, a lot of the flights on our shoreline, such as test flights, are not constrained by FAA regulations from flying offshore. Could the FAA please clarify why they are opposed to creating an offshore route, even a voluntary one?

Page 25 of the FAA Report states “Unlike fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters are unable to glide any significant distance in the event of total loss of power. Requiring helicopters that are unequipped for overwater operations to fly at a distance offshore would present a safety hazard.” Apparently, the FAA’s position is that when a helicopter flying on the

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shoreline loses power, it's better for it to come down on land, even though it may be in a populated location (such as a beach), than it is to come down on the ocean. We think it would be best if the helicopter were equipped with flotation systems so it could come down safely on water? Can the FAA please better explain the safety rationale behind their position?

5. Page 24 of the FAA Report, Section 4.2, Establish Noise Abatement Helicopter Routes states "Los Angeles is one of nine major metropolitan areas in the United States with published VFR Helicopter Route Charts ... These areas have some of the nation's busiest airports, where there is a high-volume mix of both airplane and helicopter traffic and which are surrounded by highly congested, densely populated urban environments." One of the route charts is for New York airspace with several airports in close proximity (JFK, LaGuardia, Newark, and Teterboro). The New York helicopter route chart has a notation to pilots that asks them to fly all its routes at 2,000 feet, when practical and possible. If the FAA doesn't want to regulate helicopter altitudes, why can't it at least add a notation to the Los Angeles Helicopter Route Chart like the one for NY asking pilots (voluntarily) to make every effort to fly at or above 2,000 feet?

If the problem is the mountains, why couldn't the FAA at least ask pilots to fly at 2000 feet where they can in the LA Basin?

6. Page 41 of the FAA Report, Section 4.9, Improve Information on Helicopter Operations and Noise Abatement Practices states "While each of these systems serves an important role in addressing individual noise complaints, the FAA recognizes the potential advantages of a centralized [noise complaint] system that could collect information about the types, times and locations of operations creating noise issues, identify trends and hotspots and facilitate development of measures to reduce their occurrence." The LAAHNC strongly supports a centralized, countywide noise complaint system. It would identify noise hot spots, provide noise trend data, and facilitate identification of specific helicopters that cause excessive noise. We appreciate what pilots are already doing to reduce noise, and the data from a noise complaint system can help them reduce it further. We have been talking to the PHPA about such a system, studying the features of a potential system, determining how much promotion will be necessary to promote effective use of a system, and investigating sources of funding for a system. However, the FAA Report only states that the FAA will "support the assessment of the prospects for developing such a system." Will the FAA further commit to review identified hot spots and investigate the possibility of modifying the airspace at these hot spots to reduce noise?
7. The FAA has standards for an acceptable level of aviation noise in close proximity to airports, but it has no standard for an acceptable level of noise on the ground caused by helicopter flyovers or hovering. The helicopter industry, in its 1993 edition of the Fly Neighborly Guide, prepared by Helicopter Association International (HAI), states that the generally accepted standard for a helicopter flyover is a maximum of 65 dB(A). Their 2005 Noise Abatement Training CD indicates that the acceptable level would actually be lower than 65 for low ambient noise areas. Many residential areas have low ambient noise

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levels. Can the FAA please explain why they have never developed a standard for an acceptable level of helicopter noise for flyovers of residential areas?

8. Page 29 of the FAA Report states “The FAA’s experience is that voluntary noise abatement procedures have a high degree of compliance when operators can use them safely and efficiently. Voluntary noise abatement measures are successfully in wide use across the U.S., while mandatory measures are rare.” We know that mandatory measures are rare and voluntary measures are in wide use, but there seems to be a lot of anecdotal evidence that voluntary measures are not very successful. Since the FAA does not systematically collect noise complaints, what data or criteria do the FAA use to arrive at the conclusion voluntary measures are successful?
9. The FAA Report includes no discussion of helicopter noise testing. Helicopter noise is complex problem, and is significantly influenced by the type of helicopter, altitude, geography, atmospheric conditions, and other factors. Characterizing helicopter noise requires significant testing in relevant environments. In May 2013, the FAA responded to an LAAHNC question concerning helicopter noise testing results applicable to Los Angeles. In their response, the FAA noted that the FAA and Helicopter Association International (HAI) conducted extensive helicopter noise testing in 1995, as documented in FAA Report FAA-EE-85-7, Flight Operations, Noise tests of Eight Helicopters, dated August 1985. We do not understand how 1995 test data can be part of a 1985 report; however, our principal concerns are that the report is almost 30 years old and very out of date, and that the eight helicopters tested did not include the Robinson R44 – one of the most common helicopters currently flying in Los Angeles. Does the FAA have any more recent helicopter noise testing data available, can this data be made available to the public, and will helicopter noise testing relevant to the Los Angeles area be conducted as part of the FAA research roadmap noted in the Report on the Los Angeles Noise Initiative?
10. Page 24 of the FAA Report, Section 4.1 states “Given the slower speed of helicopters and the fact that they typically operate under VFR, safety requires helicopters to be kept at altitudes where they will not interact with jet aircraft.” However, Section 5.1, Air Traffic Control Discussion, of the FAA’s December 2004 Report To Congress on their Nonmilitary Urban Noise Study, states “FAA believes that current helicopter high altitude boundaries are flexible enough to facilitate noise abatement if desired and requested by pilots. ... The opportunity to request higher altitudes for operations, in the interest of noise abatement, is unconstrained by regulation.” This statement seems somewhat inconsistent with what the FAA is saying now. Can the FAA please explain?
11. Page 29 of the FAA Report states “Federal rulemaking requirements, including limitations on the FAA’s engagement with stakeholders during the process, could make it more difficult to work collaboratively with stakeholders to identify effective noise abatement routes that are supported by local consensus.” If this is the case, we wonder how the FAA expects to support the voluntary actions in the report. Can the FAA please explain what this statement really means, how they are constrained from effectively working with stakeholders versus pilots, and how they will be able to support the multiple voluntary actions recommended in the report?

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12. Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) restrict flights over certain outdoor venues during performances, such as Music Festivals, The Hollywood Bowl, and Dodger Stadium. They produce relief from noise, and are used for that purpose, even though the FAA Report states that TFRs are intended only for the “protection of persons or property on the ground,” and not for noise abatement. In declaring certain TFRs, helicopter-related commerce may, in deed, be affected. Why is the FAA able to give temporary relief from noise in the case of event venues, and not for the day-to-day relief from noise that is equally offensive and more frequent?
13. Page 31 of the FAA Report, Section 4.3, Keep Helicopters at Higher Altitudes, states “Given the aviation activity and airspace complexity in the Los Angeles Basin, it would create an unsafe flying environment to raise helicopter altitudes across the entire region. However, the FAA can analyze altitudes on existing helicopter routes to see if there are areas in which the altitude could be safely raised. In addition, the FAA is prepared to further review identified areas of concern (e.g., the Hollywood Bowl, Hollywood Hills, Hollywood Sign, Getty Center, and Griffith Park) to explore options for recommending higher altitudes that would not negatively impact safety or the efficient flow of air traffic.” We appreciate the FAA’s offer to further review areas of concern. One additional area of concern is the entire Los Angeles County coastline, and this should be added to the list. We are sure that there are other additional areas of concern, and more will be identified when a centralized, countywide noise complaint system is operational. Will the FAA commit to work with community stakeholders and pilots to ensure that a comprehensive list of areas of concern is developed, prior to initiating their review and exploring higher altitude options?
14. Page 36 of the FAA Report, Section 4.5, Reduce Helicopter Source Noise, states “The FAA is currently creating a research roadmap to identify potential new areas of research for aircraft noise, including helicopters, and will be preparing to conduct additional studies if funding and resources are available.” Can the FAA please provide further insight into this roadmap concerning helicopters, including expected outcomes, planned timelines, whether any local noise testing relevant to the geography and climate of Los Angeles County would be conducted, and whether community stakeholders would be able participate in reviews of the roadmap.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact me at 213-364-7470 or by email at BobHillsideOrdinance@roadrunner.com.

Sincerely,



Bob Anderson
President, Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition

cc: Congressman Adam Schiff
Congressman Tony Cardenas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Other concerned elected officials and other interested parties