

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 15, 2013

Vice President
Richard Root
Riviera (Torrance)
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Mr. David C. Suomi
Acting Regional Administrator
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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 Statements at June 10, 2013 Hearing

Jeffrey Prang
Mayor, West Hollywood

At Congressman Schiff's June 10th Field Hearing on helicopter noise, four LAAHNC members comprised the Neighborhood Stakeholder Panel and each made a short initial statement. This letter formally transmits our four statements and requests that they become part of the hearing record.

David Rankell
Van Nuys Airport
Citizens Advisory Council

Mike Savidan
City of Lomita Councilman

Bob Anderson Statement

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.

Gerald A. Silver
Homeowners of Encino

Rudy Whitcomb
Rolling Hills Estates

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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.

Richard Root Statement

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 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

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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.

Gerry Hans

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.

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.

Wayne Williams Statement

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?

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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 and 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.

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
Steve May, FAA