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## South route tests Mather jet noise

**Some complain it just shifts the problem from Folsom to others.**

**By Mary Lynne Vellinga -- Bee Staff Writer - (*Published August 1, 2003*)**

In response to persistent noise complaints from Folsom residents, freight pilots approaching Mather Airport at night have been asked -- at least temporarily -- to fly farther south to avoid the city.

But now another group of citizens is rising up in protest. Some people who live in Cameron Park and Shingle Springs complain that the new route will simply shift the rumbling jets from Folsom and northern El Dorado Hills to the sky above their homes.

The Federal Aviation Administration is conducting a 120-day test in which pilots on four incoming nighttime flights have been asked to fly the southerly route, already used by some pilots.

"It's a very small number of flights, but these are big planes," said FAA spokesman Donn Walker.

"We will evaluate the results and see if we want to make any changes in our procedures," Walker said.

Testing started in mid-July -- the agency won't say exactly when -- and the complaints from people living under the newly preferred flight path have started rolling in.

"This is nothing more than dumping trash from your back yard to the other guy's back yard," said John Kerhlikar, a 25-year resident of Shingle Springs.

"It's noise trash, but it's trash," Kerhlikar said.

His reaction illustrates the difficulties facing the former U.S. Air Force base as it seeks to expand its cargo business. Mather Airport is currently going through a master plan process that could result in the lengthening of one runway or the construction of another.

Sacramento County Airports spokeswoman Cheryl Marcell said the county projects that the number of flights at Mather could more than double in the next 20 years -- from 10 to 21 daily.

Any growth plan is sure to face opposition from communities under the flight path of the large jets that use Mather.

"I do not feel they should expand until they get the noise issue resolved," said Folsom resident Chuck Coalson. "If the noise issue can't be resolved -- don't expand."

In the hopes of finding a route that would generate fewer complaints, the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors submitted a letter in February asking the FAA to conduct the test.

Kerhlikar said he found out about the test in June. Since then, he and his neighbors have been organizing. They are going door-to-door in neighborhoods under the new flight path and talking to people outside grocery stores.

Kerhlikar said his group has collected several hundred signatures from people opposing any change in

the flight pattern.

Supporters of the test stress that it's only that -- a test. "We feel very confident that the only way to find out what the impacts are is to do the test," Marcell said.

She said a special test hotline had been set up at (916) 874-0200 to receive feedback. A public hearing is scheduled at the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors on Aug. 6.

Marcell would not release the number of complaints received by the department since the test began, for fear of influencing the results. But she said the airport system had "seen an increase in activity" on the test hotline in recent days.

Sacramento County asked the FAA to conduct the test under pressure from the Folsom City Council, which has long sought to do something about the low-flying, noisy jets over Folsom's burgeoning subdivisions.

Folsom resident Coalson said the jets are loud enough to wake him up at night in the Broadstone subdivision. He estimated that some fly over his back yard as low as 2,000 feet.

Coalson suspects that all nighttime pilots are not following the new procedures. The test is voluntary. Pilots can stick to the usual approach if they prefer.

"Just this morning, at 3:57 a.m., we were awakened by a plane," Coalson said Tuesday.

The Folsom approach to Mather is easiest for the pilots because it relies on a radio transmitter situated right at the end of the Mather runway.

"You put the autopilot on and it will land the plane for you," said FAA spokesman Walker.

The alternate approach being used in the test doesn't use this radio transmitter. Instead, pilots use radio signals from a different system that will tell them whether they are to the left or the right of the airfield, but not how high or low they are in the sky.

Such approaches "are approved for use by the FAA, so they're not unsafe," Walker said. "But they're a lot more work for the pilot."

The issue of where Mather's planes should fly has emerged as a hot potato for politicians in El Dorado County. Supervisor Rusty Dupray said he represents people under both flight paths.

"My gut feeling is that when this test is over, because of the complaints, the flights will be moved back to their original route," he said.

He said a group convened to examine noise issues at Mather has come up with some other ideas, including requiring quieter engines on planes or asking pilots to stay at higher altitudes until they get closer the airport.

But unless the planes can be routed entirely over rural areas, the issue probably won't go away, he said. "There's going to be a problem as long as airplanes are flying over houses."

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#### **About the Writer**

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