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Altered Mather flight path assailed

El Dorado residents and officials press Sacramento County to end the FAA noise test immediately.

By Maija-Liisa Young -- Bee Staff Writer - (*Published August 11, 2003*)

El Dorado County officials have called on Sacramento County to immediately halt a 120-day flight path test for approaches to Mather Airport, saying residents in foothill communities are complaining of late-night noise.

In a meeting last week, residents of El Dorado County communities affected by the altered flight path blamed Folsom officials for pushing for the tests because their residents were complaining.

"We didn't know we had a noise problem" until the test, said John Kerhlikar of Shingle Springs. "The fact that you can affect our lives without our consent is objectionable."

The heated comments came as Sacramento County supervisors received a written report from a committee appointed to study noise reduction at the former Air Force base.

The report's suggestions quickly took second place as the meeting degenerated into name-calling and finger-pointing by residents of various communities upset by the flight test.

"I'm asking the test be terminated immediately," said El Dorado County Supervisor Rusty Dupray.

Charlie Paine, another member of the El Dorado County board, echoed Dupray's request to halt the test that the Federal Aviation Administration began in mid-July in response to earlier complaints of noise from planes landing at Mather.

The test path decreases air traffic over Folsom and shifts it farther south, over communities such as El Dorado Hills and Cameron Park. The test approach remains north of Highway 50 to the Sacramento-El Dorado county line.

For the test, pilots have been asked to fly a few miles south of the airport's main eastern approach between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. -- a flight path already used by some pilots.

"The flight path goes through the center of El Dorado County," Paine said. "If you wanted to find a more populated area, you can't. I've received more complaints about this in one week than the casino issue."

Paine referred to a controversial casino planned by the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians.

Sacramento County supervisors listened but took no action on requests for an early end to the testing.

Meanwhile, Folsom Mayor Steve Miklos defended his city, accused by some El Dorado County residents of complaining until the test was conducted.

"Nobody is interested in shifting one person's problem to another," he said. "We think there's a solution that can be shared. The bottom line is the region as a whole, with proper time and effort, can find a

solution."

Paul Stanfel of Cameron Park took issue with Miklos' comment and objected to the flight test.

"I'm not pleased with what I've seen," he said. "The concerns of the mayor of Folsom about not being adversarial, that's ludicrous -- they are."

So much effort has been made to shift the noise that people have lost track of controlling it, said Jim Roach of El Dorado Hills. He suggested closing the airport at night to reduce the flight noise for residents.

Federal law prohibits local jurisdictions from placing restrictions such as curfews on airports, said G. Hardy Acree, Sacramento County's director of airports.

The fireworks at the supervisors' meeting followed a report from the 16-member Mather Aircraft Overflight Noise Group. After nearly a year of studying 50 noise-reduction proposals, the group presented 33 suggestions for further study. None received unanimous support, however.

The group's suggestions ranged from modifying cockpit flight procedures to restricting the type of aircraft landing at Mather.

Sacramento County supervisors agreed to have the county's airport system staff study the suggestions and report back on their feasibility.

Supervisor Don Nottoli praised the effort of group members, saying, "We'll benefit from their work to improve the situation we have today."

County airport system staff members will report to the supervisors in four to six weeks on ideas that could be quickly implemented, said Frances Sherertz, an assistant director of airports.

The staff also will look at how the region should handle airport noise issues in the future and report back by December, she said.

About the Writer

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