

HEARING REPORTER:
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PACOIMA, CALIFORNIA
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2022
10:30 A.M.
RE-ENVISIONING WHITEMAN AIRPORT OPEN HOUSE

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(The following public comments were given during the Open House.)

SPEAKER 1: I would like for the airport to stay open because they keep it clean. I know it's noisy around. I am very close to here, but at least they do not have a mess like they do around. The air quality and also the noise reduction. I live right behind the airport, and maybe there is a program that can help to provide them with windows like in LA and Burbank airport. Because I live very close. It's really loud and noisy.

Also the air quality. Maybe there can be an agency to check what the standards are because there are so many children in the schools around. I think this could be a health problem later on. So maybe they can check out how they can provide some help to school areas that are very close.

SPEAKER 2: I want to keep the airport. I live right across the street from the airport, 45 years. The noise does not bother me. I love sitting in the backyard and watching the old planes come and go on the weekends. I do not want our area to look like south of here on San Fernando Road where all the RVs and trash are, and the signs there say, "No stopping."

The pandemic is over. Clean it up. There is lots of businesses that have closed in our area, use those to open new businesses. You got to clean up your mess before you start new stuff. And Monica Rodriguez is not cleaning up. She likes the new stuff. And the train makes more noise than the airport, but the train does not bother me, and it runs 24/7.

But the airport people keep it clean. There is no homeless. There is no trash. There is no mentally ill. That's all I have to say.

SPEAKER 3: Whiteman Airport is a true gem in the community and should be persevered. It provides education, jobs, and flight training activities for the entire community. The entire community has access to it. It provides capability for emergency response, and is extremely important to the community.

SPEAKER 4: Paul. I live on Gains Street, which is just here. I can see the tarmac from where I am. And I really feel that this whole shutting down of this airport -- and I do not own a

plane or anything, but I'm opposed to it mainly because I live here. I hear the planes, not much, the noise level. I don't believe in that at all. I am constantly in my backyard. It's quite big overlooking this part of the airport.

My problem is when they talk about noise pollution, I'm telling you straight up I think it's a whole lot of hooey. I think it's just wrong. There is no real noise pollution. Because if there were or any other sort of pollution from this airport, why do they not shutdown Burbank or Van Nuys? They have far more traffic at both of those airports and things are fine.

What really bothers me is I feel like this is an eminent domain take over of a large parcel of land for other people's benefit to make profit. It's like a big land grab. And this airport has been here for 75 years.

I have lived in Pacoima for 20 years, and I do not see any problem at all. I just think -- I smell a rat is what I am saying, and that is why I personally give my name to say I am on Gains Street. My house is right at the end, and I just -- I would like to know who are the people who are invested in this redevelopment, and what are their plans?

I was on one -- what do you call it? Hang on. I was on a Zoom call, and I was the last one on. And luckily I had my thoughts together quite well. What I find a major problem is that if there is a noise pollution or toxicity at all, it comes from the freeways. We are surrounded by freeways, and the San Fernando Road is heavy traffic. So you will get pollution from cars naturally. And this airport is surrounded by main roads. So there is not enough traffic that comes out of here, but the traffic that does come out of here is the local TV stations that have helicopters here that provide a service for traffic.

I been here when the airport was open to the public, and I found out their outreach program to be very good. I'm not tied to any of those people, and they don't know me, but just as a regular citizen and observing, I think this airport serves a purpose.

And the other thing I'm concerned about -- and I said that in the Zoom meeting, which they must have on record. There was a terrible catastrophe of a horrible flood in Germany on the border with -- anyway, there was a horrible tragedy where everyone went to safety. They went to the raceway because that was the only open space where they could do triage and house people, which this was being cleaned up. It was a real mess, and I feel if something goes wrong like a major earthquake like we had in '92 -- we are way overdue of one. Just look at the facts and figures. That is where it is at.

Where are these people going to go? Are they going to go to the other park over here? I forget the name of it. My mind is not working properly. But I think the truth is -- I know that may sound like a fantasy, but it's not. We need space to look after people and to calm people down.

I do believe that this is such a large parcel of land. It just hits me of someone wanting to go make a lot of money. There is millions of dollars involved here, and what I don't like when I first got the notice about this airport, when they passed out flyers, it just didn't ring true to me at all. And I saw something like that happen in Sydney, and they shut that down because it turned out to be a land grab.

I want to know, personally, who is involved, and who is going to profit from this? If they will say we will turn this airport into a homeless shelter, I go, okay, let's see it. I just feel that there is something dirty going on, and I'd like to know what it is. That is it really. I think this airport serves a good purpose. It's been here for 75 years. Why do this now?

SPEAKER 5: So we were talking, and I asked Margo if Whiteman Airport should remain an airport. And Margo, what would you like to say?

SPEAKER 6 (MARGO): I think the airport should stay open. It's important to the community.

SPEAKER 5: Do you think a lot of pilots will appreciate the airport staying open because they can keep their airplane here?

SPEAKER 6 (MARGO): That too.

SPEAKER 5: And if the airport closed, where do you think the airplanes will go?

SPEAKER 6 (MARGO): Somewhere else. And they do not want to.

SPEAKER 5: And we have fire services here and medical emergency services. Do you think those are important?

SPEAKER 6 (MARGO): It's important that they stay here. This is the statement of Margo.

SPEAKER 7: So my background is that I have been a pilot flying out of Whiteman Airport for 12 years. And I've been a tenant for almost eight years here, and I use to live in the area, but I don't anymore. But I'm active in the community, and the biggest concern that I have is what I perceive to be the divisiveness between the different groups. And it's almost a seen mentality.

So what I would like to see the County do is lean in more through the Department of Airport saying through other agencies within the County to try to bring everybody closer together. So I hope the decisions that they make will do that.

But this is an extreme asset for the County just like Fox is, and El Monte or I guess it's San Gabriel now as well as Compton. It's -- the County is taking over operations of it, but I do think if they leaned in and bring the community more in, that would be a great thing to do.

On the five boards that are out there for us to look at, I saw some great ideas that people have come up with to improve the grounds around the airport. I think that is a good thing. I think they should try to accelerate bringing in more business into the area and find a way with the different nonprofit groups that operate on the field, as well as the fix-based operator here, Vista.

Find a way to get the community more connected with the airport for opportunities for kids. I bet the majority of the population living in this area do not realize there are scholarships available to teach kids to fly, to teach kids how to work on airplanes, and that equates to, you know, great careers, if they want to do it. So it's a positive thing. With everything that is going on in the world and here in Southern California, I think we need more positive examples. So that is my thought.

I really appreciate the re-envisioning process to, you know, look at all the different opportunities to make things better here. Because I think we can make things better here, and I just hope that the County supervisors come up with a balanced approach. Because, like I said, this place is a real gem, and I would love to see more people from the community involved.

And my last closing comment is that if any of the folks in the Department of Airports or in the County, whether it's supervisors -- any of the supervisors or anybody else has ideas of how people who are already here can be more integrated in the community, can get out there and get more exposure out here, I am happy to participate in that.

I appreciate the opportunity to come in and talk, and thank you for having this program. That's about it.

I will say something else. It needs to be part of something bigger. Looking at the community here, the Pacoima -- it's more than Pacoima. It's Arleta. It's Sun Valley. There are a lot of people around this airport. What I think is important to know is that whether they decide to keep the airport open or close the airport, it's not going to really change that much around here. We have bigger issues around here.

And so what we do with the airport needs to be coordinated with a greater investment, for a lack of better words, a greater commitment into the area. So that is what I would ask the County to keep in mind, too, is that this decision on its own, I don't think will move the needle significantly for the area that much. Nor do I think it will make everybody -- bring peace to the issue or to the conflict.

What I would like to see is that in this area -- and I know a lot of it is LA City. Maybe it's working closer with the LA City folks. We need to do more to lift up this area, and I think the airport could be a great asset in lifting that up. We can have job programs here. We can do

more STEM outreach. We can have things here that the community, whether they are pilots or not, can actively participate in. So I would say take a bigger focus on things.

SPEAKER 8: I guess, first, I will start out with the proposition of relocating businesses if the airport would be closed, and I just wanted to say that it's impossible to really relocate Vista Aviation. It has dealerships that we maintain and are able to have here. If we were moved to another airport, they already have their dealerships at established places there. So they -- we would not be able to have the dealerships, so we could not move. So if the airport were to close, Vista Aviation would go out of business and all the employees would lose their jobs.

Talking about the air -- the noise study, I mean. I am all for doing the part 150 study and moving forward with that. If there are homes around here that have excessive noise caused by the airport, I am all for resolving that issue. Regarding pollution, unleaded fuel is definitely on it's way. It's coming. So hopefully within a couple of years that will be a nonissue anyway.

There is discussion of exploring a new flight path, and I definitely would want to make sure that it would be a safe situation and not create any safety hazards by trying to do that.

Talking about the additional education and safety issue, there is always meetings regularly that pilots and everyone attends, so that is already in existence. It doesn't need anything additional. Facilitating the public access to all the regulations, that is easily accessible on the FAA website. And they publish books for the mechanics as well, so that lists all the safety things that any mechanic or pilot need to know.

And community outreach, we have already taken a major step forward in reaching out to the community. Our Young Eagles Flights now consist of a lot of people from Pacoima, and we are really happy about that. We have done banners and different things around the airport. So the community outreach has definitely already changed.

Education for the community, we are trying to move forward with that as quickly as we can. We are looking into career days and continuing other events here that would help the young individuals and move forward for careers and realizing what really is available to them in the aviation industry.

As far as hiring local employees, we already do that. 17 percent of our employees are -- live in Pacoima, and 75 percent of them are from the surrounding San Fernando Valley. Reaching out for -- asking for increasing awareness about access to the airport and education, things that go on here, having tours and things like that, I have already reached out numerous times to leaders of the community. But unfortunately, they have not reached back.

And aesthetics, we are working on that. Hopefully that will get done very shortly. Sadly, it should have been done already, but we are getting there.

As far as keeping it -- just a general statement about keeping the airport open, I definitely, being a large stakeholder in the airport, prefer to keep the airport open. But I do think there is room for reaching out to the community and sharing the space. We can definitely create areas where the community can come for events. We can have combined things. Career days not just for aviation but for other aspects as well. Reach out for farmers markets, different events, community celebrations.

There is a tendency to think that the airport is not part of the community, but I do not agree. This airport is part of Pacoima's community, and we, you know, are here. I'm here ten hours a day. You know, we buy fuel here, we eat here, we do shopping here. All kinds of things we are participating in and adding to, you know, the community itself.

Vista has been here for over 40 years. In that time period, we have paid over two million dollars in property taxes for planes and different items, and all that money goes to schools, libraries and the community itself. So it really is sad for me to hear people say that this airport has done nothing for the community when we are supporting the schools and the libraries here on a regular basis, plus our sales tax, income tax for California. No it all does not come here but definitely portions of it do. Federal funding and things like that that this community gets, we are the tax payers that are helping support that. So definitely the airport needs to stay open and be there for the community as we work together.

SPEAKER 9: So in regards to the airport and it's impact to the community and to us as pilots, it's a very important hub. Because of it's location close to larger airports who are not exactly suited to accommodate smaller airplanes. Burbank is very busy with commercial traffic, so small airplanes would be a hindrance. Van Nuys is very busy with jet traffic. They do accommodate general aviation, but small airplanes are really not welcome there. So Whiteman Airport is a perfect airport for them.

Things that I would like to see change, this restaurant. A new restaurant would be perfect to have. Opening a training center for mechanics, opening more schools for pilots. That is something that would benefit not only the community because local kids and local people can go to them, but also, eventually, those turn into good jobs and would attract business from around. It would make the economic viability of the airport more important.

Other than that, I think the local pilots do understand the relationship between aviation and the local community, and I don't know a single one that would be negligent in the way they conduct themselves, in the way they prepare for flights, with the way they conduct themselves in training. So when they fly properly, the noise is being reduced, and pilots, in general, are aware of what the community would complain about. So those are the things I would like to put down. Let's keep the airport open.

SPEAKER 10: James. So things I want to talk on are 3.2.2, which talks about outreach to the community for jobs. And that is already started here at the airport. It's been going on for a long time, but we are just paying more attention to the fact that we are doing it. There is

two or three people that have been hired from the local community who have no background in aviation that are being brought into the aviation businesses to help out at the business to do jobs. But also to learn what it takes to be a mechanic and do the work under licensed mechanics. And that is what the community needs in order to provide high paying jobs is to get the training for these young people. So we are doing that.

And then the next one is 4.2.1, which is discussing education and the youth programs. And, you know, we have five different youth groups that are here working on the airport to try and help young people to prepare for high paying careers. We have Civil Air Patrol. We have two aviation explorer post, and we have the EAA that does their Young Eagles Flights.

This next Saturday they are hitting the 10,000 Young Eagle Flight at this airport. It's been a 30-year period, but these flights are all provided free to young people 8 to 17 to get them interested and excited about an aviation career.

And the same EAA group, Chapter 40, is also building an airplane and having young people build it. And that same age group is able to come every Saturday and spend two hours building the compartments of the airplane to put it together. It is under adult supervision with people who know about aviation and building an aircraft. So they will build an airplane, and when they get done, they will climb into it and fly with an instructor and learn to fly in it. Their parents will be able to go in it. It's a great opportunity. They are learning to use different tools, how to pay attention to detail, all kinds of things, and hopefully sparking them to look into being a pilot, a mechanic, getting into engineering and all those jobs that everybody looks at as really good paying jobs. And we are trying to help them get there.

I was sitting down and just to doing a count on volunteers at the airport that volunteer time and money and do not receive anything in return other than the personal satisfaction of doing something good. And we have close to 500 volunteers at this airport that are doing those things, which is a lot of people to have putting forth effort to do good things for the community. So it kind of goes to the arguments against the airport of we do not do anything for the community.

And then the final thing -- and I do not have an area for this. It's been mentioned at the meetings about the greater good. The greater good, when it was mentioned, was what is best for the small group around the airport. The true greater good of this airport extends to the whole country.

Today we are doing a search and rescue exercise with civilian patrol, which is a civilian auxiliary to the air force. And we have a large number of people that are here from other airports that have come to participate in honing their skills. But when the day comes, they will be called into action. And having had this training will make it so they can come and benefit this community when the big earthquake hits. Because people aren't going to be able to drive where they want to go when that 8.0 earthquake from the San Andreas hits. We will be cutoff from most of the world. And aviation is the way that we will get supplies in and out and get

people in and out and get the word out about what is going on, and this training helps prepare for that.

Also every year we responds to FEMA, Federal Emergency Management Agency, to their request when we have brush fires, flooding, earthquakes, anything that causes a lot of damage for us to go up and do aerial photography and provide them with that information so they know where to put their money and be most efficient and quickest in getting that out.

And the people that are doing this are not being paid to do it. They are doing it out of -- they pay to belong to the organization. They pay for all their uniforms. They pay to make sure they are proficient in their flying. And, again, just that personal satisfaction of doing good is what they are doing it for, and that all goes away if the airport goes away.

This is also a reliever for all of Southern California aviation. They are in the process of closing -- trying to close San Monica airport, and as part of that process they shortened the runway so jets could not fly in and out of it. All that jet traffic moved over to Van Nuys, and it's causing congestion. It's causing noise issues for people that live around that airport. It's disrupting our ability to have flying in Southern California.

If Whiteman closes, these aircraft have to go to someplace. There's no room at Van Nuys right now. There are no available tie downs or hangars for them to go to. So that means they go to Burbank, and when you integrate the air operations of Whiteman's into Burbank's operations, it will cause a slow down in their ability to deal with the commercial flights in and out of Burbank. And how does that help the local community, Southern California area in people being transported where they need to go and do what they need to do?

This is part of the greater good because people come from all over Southern California to use this airport, and if it goes away, not only the business it brings to the Pacoima community, which is over a hundred million dollars. It's the economic impact to the community. That money is going to go away, but also these people are going to have no reason to come to this area. And they will be moving to other places to either go fly or they have to give up flying.

And it's a very, very dangerous and adverse impact on the whole aviation operation. Because we are a reliever airport for Southern California so that the jets in and out of Van Nuys can do that and aircraft in and out of Burbank can be on time and on schedule. And it's part of de-conflicting all those operations. If you take it away, it brings conflict back that we have worked hard over the years to reduce. It poses a danger, too, because it increases where the traffic flows, the number of aircraft, and mixing small aircraft with jet aircraft is always dangerous because of the speed differences.

(End of public comments.)

REPORTER'S CERTIFICATION

I, the undersigned, do hereby certify:

That the foregoing proceedings were taken before me at the time and place herein set forth; that any witnesses in the foregoing proceedings, prior to testifying, were duly sworn; that a record of the proceedings was made by me using machine shorthand, which was thereafter transcribed under my direction; that the foregoing transcript is a true record of the testimony given.

I further certify I am neither financially interested in the action nor a relative or employee of any attorney or party to this action.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have this date subscribed my name. Dated: November 30, 2022