

LAX: Airport's Master Plan Sparks Regional Battle

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es.”
But concerns about LAX's expansion, expected to cost anywhere from \$8 billion to \$12 billion, extend far beyond the South Bay. West San Fernando Valley communities are becoming concerned about the plans – specifically about more noise from an increase in north-south flights which travel over the Santa Monica Mountains, said Calabasas City Councilman Dennis Washburn.

“The increase in noise from LAX has been substantial,” said Washburn, who is looking to scale back the expansion plans and investigate ways to spread the air transportation burden more evenly throughout Southern California's regional airports.

LAX is Southern California's only international airport, the sole entry and exit point for thousands of travelers from as far north as Bakersfield and as far south as San Diego, with some 2,000 takeoffs and landings a day. On the domestic side, almost three-quarters of Southern California's air travel goes through LAX.

Rather than simply doubling capacity at the airport to keep up with growing demand, Hardison and others in Southern California believe that the region would be better served by developing new international airports at existing fields in Palmdale and Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

“All of us need to be involved in these decisions – it shouldn't just be the city (of L.A.) and the airport commission deciding how things should be,” said Washburn.

“We're putting all of our eggs in one basket and that's just wrongheaded,” added Doug Drummond, a Long Beach city councilman and chair of the Gateway Cities Council of Governments, a 26-city coalition stretching from Long Beach to Montebello.

Drummond said he was concerned about a huge increase in traffic on the already congested San Diego (405) Freeway and a corresponding jump in air pollution as a result of LAX's expansion.

Drummond's concerns also are driven by fears over how the expansion will affect the distribution of federal, state and local trans-



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Wilson: Says public safety is a big item left on his agenda.

portation funds available for roadway improvements.

In the draft of the new 20-year regional transportation plan by the Southern California Association of Governments, almost \$1 billion of the \$3.5 billion in state and federal funds identified for local street improvements would go to improve access to the airport. The SCAG plan will provide a guideline for allocation of transportation funds in the future.

Driscoll, for his part, denied any sort of power grab was under way, and insisted that the airport is considering regional approaches to the growing demand for air travel.

“This is not a competition,” he said. “We see ourselves as trying to work with the entire region.”

The Department of Airports, he said, will open two new terminals at the city-owned airport in Ontario in September, boosting capacity there from 6.5 million to 12 million passengers. The department also is acquiring up to 1,000 acres of land adjacent to the facility for further expansion to 20 million passengers by 2015.

Meanwhile, the department also has hired a consultant to study expanding the city-owned airfield in Palmdale.

But neither Palmdale nor Ontario play a role in the department's master plan. Instead, the three proposals under consideration consist of adding a new runway for small, commuter aircraft, reconfiguring existing runways and adding new cargo and terminal facilities to accommodate an expected explosion of passenger and air cargo traffic.

The first draft of the environmental impact report on those options should be complete by August, Driscoll said. After a public comment period, a final draft of the expansion plan will be sent to the Federal Aviation Administration and the L.A. City Council for approval.

The plan could face a tough fight there, according to City Councilwoman Ruth Galanter, whose Sixth District includes LAX and who is fast becoming the point person for opponents of LAX's expansion.

“This is not going to be a process that goes smoothly,” she said. “All of the people who represent the Westside and Southside of the city have expressed concerns. Communities are seeing and hearing more and more airplanes. And traffic is getting worse.”

Rather than expanding LAX, Galanter advocates creating a second international airport at the city-owned facility in Palmdale, which could be serviced by a high-speed rail line to Los Angeles.

She compared Los Angeles to Washington D.C., which is serviced by two airports – Dulles International and the newly christened Ronald Reagan Airport – despite being home to a much smaller population than L.A.

“We can be a global center without having to do it all at LAX,” she said.

But Driscoll says that advocates of a second international airport in Palmdale fail to understand how the airline industry works. The strength of LAX is its immediate proximity to a market of almost 10 million people.

“Airlines fly to markets, not to airports,” he said. “The airlines are not going to create dual operations. Palmdale is not an answer to growing demand in L.A.”

International traders tend to agree. “The LAX expansion is critical,” said W. Guy Fox, chairman of Global Transportation Services Inc., a customs broker and freight forwarder in Redondo Beach. “You cannot have the cargo operations go into Palmdale or Ontario; you still have to move the goods back here.”

Nonetheless, officials in the Antelope Valley, hungry for new economic development opportunities, plan to add their voices to the growing debate about the future of air travel in Southern California.

“If LAX is intent on expanding to 98 million passengers, we have a real opportunity,” said Palmdale Mayor James C. Ledford, Jr.

And advocates for a new airport in the Antelope Valley have a powerful ally in Galanter, who predicts that the debate over LAX will only grow more heated as the master plan process moves forward.

“The decisions we make about airport capacity are going to shape the 21st century the way decisions about water shaped the 20th and decisions about the railroads shaped the 19th,” she said. “If we make a mistake, it's going to be a whopper.”

LAX Turbulence

FUROR OVER AIRPORT EXPANSION PLAN GROWS

By LARRY KANTER
Senior Reporter

THE battle lines are hardening in the fight over LAX's ambitious “master plan” for expansion.

What once was a neighborhood scuffle between local business interests and Westside homeowners and environmentalists is fast becoming a full-scale, regional brawl.

Concerns over the effects of Los Angeles International Airport's mega-billion-dollar master plan are on the agendas of Torrance, Redondo Beach and Long Beach – and garnering scrutiny as far afield as Calabasas and Palmdale.

“We see most of the value of the expansion going to the city of L.A. and most of the headaches – the noise, the traffic, the pollution – coming to the other cities,” said Dee Hardison, mayor of Torrance and chair of the South Bay Cities Council of Governments, a consortium of 16 municipalities that recently passed a unanimous resolution

opposing the airport's growth plans.

Already, Hardison said, the skies above the South Bay are increasingly noisy with jet traffic and local surface streets are crowded with trucks and travelers headed to and from LAX. With the airport planning to increase its capacity annually from 60 million to nearly 100 million passengers over the next two decades, Hardison and her peers fear that congestion will only grow worse.

“Where are the benefits for us?” she asked.

Backers of LAX's expansion say such benefits are obvious – jobs and economic growth. Expansion of the airport, they argue, would add 367,000 jobs and \$37 billion a year in additional activity to the region's economy.

“The South Bay would be in deep trouble if it were not for the airport,” said John J. Driscoll, executive director of Los Angeles World Airports. “Half the buildings are filled with airport-related business-

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Congestion: Traffic concerns could slow LAX expansion.

