



County of Santa Cruz

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October 2, 2019

Santa Clara/Santa Cruz Roundtable
P.O. Box 3144
Los Altos, CA 94024

Dear SC/SC Roundtable Members,

As former Vice Chair of the Select Committee on SFO Arrivals, I want to share with you a recent opinion piece that was published in our local newspaper. The piece celebrates the success that local government officials have had in engaging with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). I am forwarding this to you because I think there are important points to consider.

When the NextGen changes were made to our Metroplex, the impacts were serious and immediate on our communities. For some, these new changes added to the burden they already felt. For others, there were new and significant changes to communities. Over the 20 meetings held by the Select Committee, local government officials were able to engage in useful and meaningful exchanges and education about what was happening and what could be done. At the conclusion of the process, even long-time members of the SFO Roundtable recognized that the advocacy found in the Select Committee had helped revitalized their own work on the Roundtable.

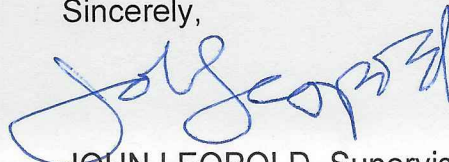
The final recommendations included many different elements. One of the most important was a call to form a group that could meet regularly with the FAA and share information. Your Roundtable is the product of that recommendation. The Select Committee recommendations represent a new chapter of the FAA listening to the public rather than simply the airlines. In order for you to build on the success of the Select Committee I caution trying to re-litigate the recommendations. By re-hashing the work of that very public, well-attended, and hard-earned process, the message you would send to this federal agency is one that undermines listening to the critical insights that you, the SC/SC Roundtable, provide on the effects of air traffic on your communities.

October 2, 2019

Page 2

Thank you for taking the time to read this piece. I wish you good luck on the important work that you are doing. I am grateful that we have a group of people who are willing to put their time into addressing issues of concern for our jurisdictions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Leopold", with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOHN LEOPOLD, Supervisor
First District

Guest Commentary

Making our voices heard over jet noise

By John Leopold

Santa Cruz County is on the verge of a victory for democracy in dealing with a federal agency that has no history of working with local government. We cannot let that opportunity slip by, especially when it can bring relief to so many members of our community.

In March 2015, without the benefit of even one community meeting, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) moved the SFO arrivals flight path over Santa Cruz county 3 miles. While that sounds innocuous, the impact has been devastating for thousands of residents who experience loud flights over their homes day and night. The move was the work of NextGen, an effort by the FAA to realign the airspace to better meet the needs of airlines. The FAA told us the noise resulted from a conflict in the route design and the ground topography under the new route.

Before this flight change, only one noise complaint was filed in the previous two years. Today they average more than 6,000 complaints each day. Since the jet path move, the San Francisco airport has received around two million complaints about noise. We are 50 miles from the airport and jet noise shouldn't be an issue in our community.

Fortunately, our federal legislators recognized the impact and in one of the first initiatives for the FAA, they got the agency to agree to sit down with local government representatives and the public to understand the impact and work on solutions. At the first meeting of the Select Committee, the FAA Western Region Administrator admitted that the FAA had not foreseen the impacts on Santa Cruz and committed to making it better.

The Select Committee agreed that no decision could be made unless a supermajority of the body and representatives from each of the three counties agreed with a recommendation, setting a high bar for any approval. The Committee met 19 times and heard testimony from the public. A meeting in Santa Cruz attracted more than 600 people from our community, and

Santa Cruz residents attended most of the Select Committee meetings in large numbers.

The Committee worked hard to understand the nature of the problem. The FAA patiently told us about how they measure sound, what was an Optimum Profile Descent and taught us about Class-B airspace. Detailed modeling was done and shared with everyone through online presentations, videos of each meeting and a public sharing of all documents.

At the end, most of us felt comfortable making suggestions about changes and worked studiously with the FAA staff to make recommendations that were feasible and practical. The final recommendation about the jet path was to return it to its historic path but with recommendations to make it less impactful than it had been for the previous 40 years.

Although the committee gave its supermajority approval in November 2016, it was only in June of this year that the FAA completed its technical review, saying the recommendations were achievable. Final safety testing is now underway, though they have told us that it still might take 18-24 months to implement.

Credit should go to Congressmembers Panetta, Eshoo and Speier who have unanimously endorsed the recommendations from the Select Committee. They got a hard-shelled, bureaucratic agency to listen to the public. The FAA now has new "engagement staff" and we have established the South Bay Roundtable which gives us a platform to work with the FAA on a regular basis so we are aware of any upcoming changes and can share with them the impact of their decisions.

When we are so close to relief for thousands of County residents, we should celebrate a new era of effective communication and real democracy within a federal agency. I look forward to the day when we don't have to talk about jet paths anymore, like we did when the jet path was on its historic path.

John Leopold is a Santa Cruz County Supervisor and was a member of the Congressionally appointed Select Committee.