

Santa Monica Airport and public infrastructure
(An open letter to the Santa Monica City Council)

It is almost axiomatic that virtually any piece of public infrastructure is noisy, smelly or unsightly. While the Santa Monica airport may not meet all of the above criteria, it has obviously created many detractors. But let us look at it from the point of view of infrastructure, as a facility designed to serve the needs of the community, in this case by providing aviation services.

You know that the airport has been here for over 90 years and during that time it has hosted the Douglas Aircraft Co. factory, now long gone. That factory was one of the most important facilities in Santa Monica, putting the city on the map. It also provided much of the financial wherewithal to the city to grow and expand and provided employment and housing for thousands of people in Santa Monica and surrounding cities. In fact, it was so successful that the city has moved on and become home for other types of businesses. It is understandable that people moving into Santa Monica/West Los Angeles area since 1973 when Douglas plant closed, have little appreciation for its financial contribution or its contribution to aviation, aerospace and the war efforts during WWII, Korean War and Vietnam War.

Santa Monica Airport has been and is a vital part of the aviation infrastructure in the Los Angeles area. There are many other airports in the area so what is the big problem in closing down Santa Monica? With the closure of any airport, the airports in the surrounding area will see an increasing load of traffic and if we continue down this path, pretty soon nobody wants to have an airport in his neighborhood or city. What do we do then?

As I mentioned before, almost any piece of infrastructure is going to have its opponents because of noise, smell or unsightliness. In most communities the infrastructure facilities are usually spread around so that no single area has to carry more than its fair share. So how does the city of Santa Monica stand in its share of infrastructure? How many of the following does the city have: Power plants, sewage treatment plants, oil drilling rigs, oil refineries, prisons, landfills, or smoke stack industries? Edison power plant is in El Segundo, as is the sewage treatment plant, no oil rigs that I know of and the nearest oil refinery is in El Segundo where the local residents can enjoy its sights and smells. The nearest prison is in downtown Los Angeles and landfills are even further away. And there is no heavy industry in Santa Monica since the departure of Douglas Aircraft Co. So would you say that the city is carrying its fair share of the infrastructure load?

Isn't this elitism in the extreme that you are not willing to tolerate anything that offends your refined senses and dump it on others? You know, I have yet to meet a single person who did not willingly move into this area. And if they didn't know that the airport was there, shame on them!

You are probably well aware that America's infrastructure has been in decline for some time. The American Society of Civil Engineers has done some estimates and our infrastructure is in urgent need of upgrading. And yet, here you are ready to tear down a significant piece of this infrastructure, which not only is a local but a national asset! And all of this to please a few malcontents and developers who stand to make a real killing when the airport property is

developed. What we need is some serious political will from our politicians -- not weathervanes.

In addition, have you not considered what this will do to the local traffic? I used to live just on the Los Angeles side between Bundy Drive and Centinela Avenue and between I-10 and Ocean Park Blvd. I'd like to invite you to come and check out the traffic one day in the late afternoon when people get off work in Santa Monica. I remember what it was like 50 years ago. We had parking restrictions on our streets so that Douglas employees would not park here. But the traffic flowed well and there were very few serious accidents. I don't think that most residents here want a repeat of the Playa Vista development on the former Hughes Airport with its huge population density and attendant increase in traffic load.

Over 50 years ago, Sam Yorty got elected mayor of Los Angeles with the promise of doing away with separate collection of trash and metal cans. That collection had been perhaps the first serious attempt at recycling. Well, that decision was finally overturned many years later and now trash, recyclables and garden waste are all collected separately, saving huge volumes of material from going into landfills. That regrettable delay in conservation was and remains Sam Yorty's legacy.

30 years ago, then--Congressman Henry Waxman succeeded in stopping the Metro Red Line expansion to the West side because of objections from the residents of Beverly Hills. They did not want the great unwashed descending on their beautiful city. Well, that decision has now been reversed, even by Mr. Waxman. But I seriously doubt that I will see this line operating to the Veterans Administration, much less to the beach at Santa Monica, in my life time. How much time has been lost and how much easier would the traffic on the West side and Santa Monica be if that subway line were running today? So that remains Mr. Waxman's legacy.

Your decision to support the closure of Santa Monica Airport will go down in history in the similar manner. The only difference is that this time, that decision soon will be impossible to reverse, unlike those that I mentioned above. Is this the kind of political legacy that you want to leave?

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