

Palomar Airport Expansion: FAA Noise Evasions, Part V, 158

Charades

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As noted in the FAA articles #156-157, the FAA avoids answering questions. Worse, some FAA answers mislead.

A case in point: FAA claims its future NEPA assessment of McClellan-Palomar (Palomar) Airport expansion will tell us (1) how much more noise larger, more fuel-laden heavier aircraft make and (2) how that noise compares to recreational aircraft noise. (See #157.)

But FAA NEPA noise analysis sidesteps *aircraft* noise questions. Today, just two examples.

FAA Noise Fiction #1: Flights Over Your Neighborhood Should be Ignored

FAA NEPA analyses do not say how many aircraft will fly over your neighborhood or how much noise will rain down on you. Instead, FAA NEPA analyses only show how far from the center of the airport noise will exceed 65 decibels (dbs). In fact, as Vista residents well know, the FAA even denies that flights have increased over Vista neighborhoods since 2014 or cause more noise.

And the FAA describes noise deceptively. FAA NEPA analyses average noise over a 24-hour period. So if aircraft create 100 dbs of noise all day long but none at night, the FAA NEPA analyses tell you the noise level is 50 dbs – well below the 65 db level it considers offensive.

FAA Noise Fiction #2: New Aircraft are Quieter So Airport Expansions Reduce Noise

County tells you that Palomar expansion will cut noise. County says newer, larger aircraft enjoy quieter Stage 3 ratings. FAA NEPA analyses parrot this claim.

And, the claim would be true if two things were true. If all existing aircraft flights at Palomar were large aircraft and if expansion did not increase aircraft flights.

But small aircraft flights now comprise about 80% of Palomar flights. As Supervisor Bill Horn said at last month's Board of Supervisor meeting, county wants Palomar to become a commercial airport scattering smaller, recreational aircraft to the hinterlands. So Palomar expansion replaces quieter, smaller aircraft with larger noisier aircraft.

Moreover, Palomar now has about 150,000 annual operations per year. In the early 2000s, it had about 286,000 per year – even before today's county's rush to push the Palomar runway from 4900 to 5800 feet.

Why Should Communities Around Palomar Care?

The FAA has said: *Don't apply for FAA grants if surrounding communities do not want more noise.*

The FAA refusal to answer how much more noise heavy, larger aircraft create and how much noisier such aircraft are than small aircraft was not accidental or innocent. For the reasons above, the promised FAA NEPA analyses will simply continue its game of charades.

In short, the only way to avoid more frequent, noisier flights over your neighborhood is to oppose a county Palomar runway expansion and to oppose an FAA grant to expand the runway.