

Council Meeting of
September 14, 2010

Honorable Mayor and Members
of the City Council
City Hall
Torrance, California

Members of the Council:

SUBJECT: General Services- Approve letter of opposition to Long Beach Airport proposed airspace change to Class C designation.

Expenditure: None

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation of the General Services Director that the City Council approve the submission of a letter to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) opposing the Long Beach Airport proposed airspace change to Class C designation.

FUNDING

Not Applicable

BACKGROUND

The FAA is considering establishing a significantly more restrictive airspace surrounding Long Beach Airport (LGB) based upon safety concerns and the number of operations in and out of Long Beach, which serves more than one million passengers per year. This would change the airspace around LGB from Class D to Class C. The proposed Class C airspace would be approximately 3 times larger than the existing Class D airspace.

Class C airspace is essentially a 10 nautical mile wide space, in which aircraft need additional FAA permission to pass through. Currently, Long Beach is designated Class D, therefore all aircraft passing through that airspace is identical in nature to aircraft flying over Torrance, which is also Class D. Class D airspace requires pilots to be in contact with local control towers at given airports which occupy Class D airspace. Class C airspace requires pilots entering that airspace to contact an FAA Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON), located in San Diego, to gain the additional permission needed to proceed.

The majority of general aviation pilots avoid Class C airspace because it is more cumbersome and intimidating to enter that airspace due to the high volume of commercial air traffic and the permissions needed to fly in it. Therefore, an increased

number of aircraft flights are anticipated to avoid the proposed Class C airspace, taking their routes over the Palos Verdes peninsula and other cities such as Torrance.

General Aviation pilots who train out of Long Beach may choose other airports in the South Bay to do so if the Class C proposal is accepted. These pilots, who often perform "touch and go" maneuvers as part of the training process, will most likely choose an airport which does not need the permissions of Class C airspace. Torrance could become an option for increased pilot training. This may bring more business to our current Fixed Based Operators (FBO's) but would also bring increased air traffic.

Straight out departures from Torrance Airport may also increase, as pilots may have to take off westerly toward the ocean, then bank over the PV peninsula. This may cause more noise concerns among Torrance residents living west and south of the Airport. Currently, most aircraft departing bank on Hawthorne Boulevard and proceed north, or turn over the tank farm along Lomita Boulevard, then head east to their destination. While this will continue to be the normal flight pattern for most aircraft, others heading south may not be able to fly this route due to the Class C boundaries. The PV coastal route will continue to be preferred as general aviation aircraft will not want to travel north into LAX traffic.

ANALYSIS

If the Class C designation is implemented, the City of Rancho Palos Verdes (RPV) may incur the largest impact, and has entered into a consulting agreement with Williams Aviation Consultants (WAC) to study the potential effects of this airspace class change. At the September 7, 2010 RPV City Council Meeting, staff presented the Council with the first potential impact statement from WAC. In summary, they are concerned about the unintended consequences that could be experienced by RPV and neighboring south bay cities, including Torrance, Rolling Hills, Rolling Hills Estates, Palos Verdes, Palos Verdes Estates and Redondo Beach. These consequences include:

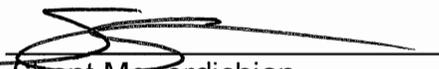
- 1) Increased safety risks resulting from a greater number of general aviation (GA) aircraft flights compressed in flight areas;
- 2) Environmental impacts, especially increased aircraft noise and air pollution from piston-powered and turboprop aircraft;
- 3) Increase of GA aircraft flights across the entire PV Peninsula, as well as neighborhoods in Redondo Beach, Hermosa Beach, Torrance and San Pedro; and
- 4) Increased workload of FAA traffic controllers, possibly impairing passenger flight safety.

Staff has been working closely with the City of RPV, who has agreed to include Torrance and the afore mentioned south bay cities in the scope of the final technical analysis report to be provided by WAC. The final report will be submitted to RPV for City Attorney review prior to distribution. It is anticipated that this report will be submitted by September 15, 2010 to RPV.

Attached is a draft public letter addressed to the FAA that would be signed by the Mayor for consideration by the City Council. The letter addresses the concerns set forth by WAC which may have an impact in and around Torrance. This letter would be sent to the FAA prior to the September 21, 2010 comment deadline.

Respectfully submitted,

SHERYL BALLEW
General Services Director

By 
Shant Megerdichian
Facility Operations Manager

CONCUR:


Sheryl Ballew
General Services Director


LeRoy J. Jackson
City Manager

Attachments:

A – Draft letter to FAA from Mayor

ATTACHMENT A

September 15, 2010

Clark Desing, Operations Support Group, AJV-W2
Western Service Area, Air Traffic Organization
Federal Aviation Administration
1601 Lind Avenue, SW
Renton, WA 98057

Subject: Proposed LGB Airspace Change to Class C Designation

Dear Mr. Desing:

On behalf of the City Council of the City of Torrance, California, I am writing to express the City's concern regarding the FAA's Proposed LGB Airspace Change to Class C designation. While passenger safety is of the utmost importance, I request that the FAA consider all of the potential impacts that may result from the proposed change. If the FAA proceeds to establish the proposed rulemaking change, it will likely result in unintended consequences that include:

- 1) An increase in air flight safety risks for pilots, passengers and innocent residents on the ground. Example: It is our understanding that flight instructional aircraft from schools based at Hawthorne Airport, Compton Airport and Torrance Municipal Airport – Zamperini Field would move from the LA/Long Beach harbor “practice and instructional area” (a major portion of which would become restrictive Class C airspace) to the entire coastline. This would likely result in a compression of instructional flights along the Torrance and Palos Verdes coastline, potentially impacting the safety of pilots and passengers.
- 2) It is our understanding that the FAA has no intention of increasing the staffing of air traffic controllers in conjunction with the proposed airspace change. A greater number of general aviation aircraft will be tracked in the proposed Class C airspace by the same number of air traffic controllers who manage passenger flights throughout the entire southern California region. I am concerned about the potential impact resulting from the increased workload of FAA traffic controllers, possibly impairing passenger flight safety.
- 3) Possible environmental impacts, including an increase of aircraft noise and air pollution, especially along the South Bay coastline. It is our understanding that the FAA has not conducted an environmental review to determine the impacts

Clark Desing, Operations Support Group, AJV-W2
Western Service Area, Air Traffic Organization
Federal Aviation Administration
September 8, 2010
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that would result from the airspace change. The City of Torrance requests that the FAA conduct an environmental review prior to further consideration of the proposed airspace change.

At its meeting on September 14, 2010, on a 7-0 vote, the City Council authorized me to sign this comment letter. The residents of Torrance have always strived to reach a balance of air safety and quality of life, and by instituting this airspace class change, this balance may no longer be an achievable reality. As Mayor who has been a resident of the City of Torrance for over 50 years, I strongly urge the FAA to work with our City staff to find the right air safety solution. I respectfully request that you consider the City's comments prior to making any decision of rulemaking regarding the proposed airspace change.

Sincerely,

Frank Scotto,
Mayor

Cc: City Manager, LeRoy J. Jackson

City of Rancho Palos Verdes
City of Palos Verdes Estates
City of Rolling Hills
City of Rolling Hills Estates
City of Redondo Beach
City of Los Angeles, Councilwoman Janice Hahn
William C. Withycombe, Western-Pacific Region Regional Administrator