

Council Meeting of  
October 26, 2010

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

**Members of the Council:**

**SUBJECT:** General Services - Approve formation of sub-committee to examine current helicopter letter of agreement between helicopter operators at Torrance Airport and FAA Control Tower.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Recommendation of the General Services Director and the Airport Commission that the City Council approve the formation of a sub-committee to re-open and examine the current helicopter letter of agreement between helicopter operators at Torrance Airport and FAA Control Tower.

**BACKGROUND**

At its meeting of October 14, 2010, the Airport Commission recommended that staff form a sub-committee to study the current helicopter letter of agreement (LOA) between the helicopter operators at Torrance Airport and the FAA Control Tower. The purpose will be to examine the current LOA and determine if any revisions are needed, primarily in the areas of altitudes and routes. This recommendation was brought before the Commission as a result of several helicopter roundtable discussions.

At its meeting of June 10, 2010, the Airport Commission recommended that staff conduct a series of helicopter roundtable discussions to address the issue of helicopter operations. These meetings would provide community members and helicopter operators an opportunity to share their concerns regarding helicopter operations in and around Torrance Municipal Airport – Zamperini Field.

The first meeting was held on July 22, 2010, which began the process of identifying concerns by both the residential community and helicopter operators. Stemming from that meeting, three causal issues were identified as main concerns by the community. They were helicopter altitudes, routes and noise.

Subsequent meetings were then held on August 26 and September 30, respectively, to further discuss the core issues and reach a resolve if possible. During these two meetings, the three main issues of altitude, noise and routes were primarily discussed. As the process progressed, better understanding was achieved by all parties involved, with a strategy for compromise beginning to develop.

## **ANALYSIS**

At the conclusion of the roundtable discussion on September 30<sup>th</sup>, a strategy had been agreed upon by members of the roundtable working group, as well as those in attendance. The results of which are listed:

- Achieved concurrence between FAA tower and helicopter operators in attendance that helicopters will fly above 600 ft Mean Sea Level (MSL) when safety allows. Both the operators in attendance and tower personnel agreed to this commitment.
- FAA tower will recommend routes listed in the helicopter LOA to all helicopter operations when safety allows. This will now include both based and transient aircraft, regardless of signatory status on the LOA.
- Helicopter routes will be more widely publicized utilizing City and FAA websites, pilot charts, periodicals etc.
- Helicopter LOA will be re-opened for examination. Focus areas will be altitude and potential re-routing.
- Airport staff will be coordinating with FAA tower chief and meeting with helicopter operators not in attendance to update them on the meeting results.

With a unanimous vote of 4-0 (Commissioners Dingman, Donnellan and Jacobsen absent), the Airport Commission recommends that staff form a sub-committee to re-open and examine the current helicopter LOA between the Torrance Airport and the FAA Control Tower. Members will include representatives from the Airport Commission, helicopter operators, community members, FAA and City staff. It is anticipated that the sub-committee will present its findings to the Airport Commission and City Council by December 2010.

Any changes to the LOA will then be presented to the Southern California  
Airspace Users Group in January/February 2011. This will allow any revisions to  
be published in aviation helicopter charts by July 2011. If no revision is  
recommended, the current helicopter routes may be submitted to the Airspace  
Users Group for publication.

Respectfully submitted,

AIRPORT COMMISSION



Paul Jacobsen  
Chair

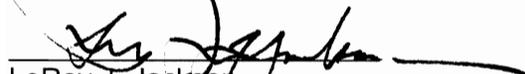
SHERYL BALLEW  
General Services Director

By   
Shant Megardichian  
Facilities Operations Manager

Concur:

  
Sheryl Ballaw  
General Services Director

Noted.

  
LeRoy J. Jackson  
City Manager

Attachments:

A – Airport Commission Item 7A, October 14, 2010

B – Excerpt of Minutes from Airport Commission Meeting of October 14, 2010.



Airport Commission Meeting of  
October 14, 2010

Honorable Chair and Members  
of the Airport Commission  
City Hall  
Torrance, California

**Members of the Commission:**

**SUBJECT: Expenditure: None**

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Facilities Operations Manager recommends that the Airport Commission review and recommend the strategy set forth by the helicopter roundtable working group.

**BACKGROUND**

At its meeting of June 10, 2010, the Airport Commission recommended that staff conduct a series of helicopter roundtable discussions to address the issue of helicopter operations. These meetings would provide community members and helicopter operators an opportunity to share their concerns regarding helicopter operations in and around Torrance Municipal Airport – Zamperini Field.

The first meeting was held on July 22, 2010, which began the process of identifying concerns by both the residential community and helicopter operators. Stemming from that meeting, three causal issues were identified as main concerns by the community. They were helicopter altitudes, routes and noise.

Subsequent meetings were then held on August 26 and September 30, respectively, to further discuss the core issues and reach a resolve if possible. During these two meetings, the three main issues of altitude, noise and routes were primarily discussed. As the process progressed, better understanding was achieved by all parties involved, with a strategy for compromise beginning to develop.

**ITEM 7A**

## ANALYSIS

At the conclusion of the roundtable discussion on September 30<sup>th</sup>, a strategy had been agreed upon by members of the roundtable working group, as well as those in attendance. The results of which are listed:

- Achieved concurrence between FAA tower and helicopter operators in attendance that helicopters will fly above 600 ft MSL when safety allows. Both the operators in attendance and tower personnel agreed to this commitment.
- FAA tower will recommend routes listed in the helicopter letter of agreement (LOA) to all helicopter operations when safety allows. This will now include both based and transient aircraft, regardless of signatory status on the LOA.
- Helicopter routes will be more widely publicized utilizing City and FAA websites, pilot charts, periodicals etc.
- Helicopter LOA will be re-opened for examination. Focus areas will be altitude and potential re-routing.
- Airport staff will be coordinating with FAA tower chief and meeting with helicopter operators not in attendance to update them on the meeting results.

Staff recommends that a small committee be formed to examine the current helicopter LOA and present any changes to the Airport Commission for review. The members of this Committee will include representatives from the Airport Commission, helicopter operators, community members, FAA and City staff. It is anticipated that this committee will present its findings to the Airport Commission by December 2010.

The committee will then present any changes to the Southern California Airspace Users Group in January/February 2011. This will allow any revisions to be published in the helicopter charts by July 2011. If no revision is recommended, the current helicopter routes will be submitted to the Airspace Users Group for publication.

Respectfully Submitted,



Shant Megerdichian  
Facilities Operations Manager

**Attachment B**

Excerpts of Airport Commission Agenda Item  
7A – Review of Recommendations from  
Helicopter Roundtable Discussions, to follow.



**EXCERPT OF MINUTES**

Minutes Approved  
 Minutes Subject to Approval

October 14, 2010

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING  
 OF THE AIRPORT COMMISSION**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The Torrance Airport Commission convened in a regular session on Thursday, October 14, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. in the West Annex meeting room at Torrance City Hall.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Present: Commissioners Fitch, Hsiao, Orpe, and Tymczyszyn.

Absent: Commissioners Dingman, Donnellan, and Chairperson Jacobsen.

Also Present: Facility Operations Manager Megerdichian and Business Manager Williams.

Due to the absences of Chairperson Jacobsen and Vice-Chairperson Donnellan, Commissioner Orpe led the meeting.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Hsiao moved to grant Commissioners Dingman, Donnellan, and Chairperson Jacobsen excused absences for the October 14, 2010 Commission meeting. Commissioner Fitch seconded the motion; a voice vote reflected unanimous approval.

**7. ACTION ITEMS**

**7A. REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM HELICOPTER ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS**

Facility Operations Manager Megerdichian provided background on the helicopter roundtable meetings of July 22, August 26, and September 30, 2010 regarding helicopter operations in and around the Airport. He reported that discussions centered on community concerns regarding helicopter altitudes, routes, and noise. He stated that, as discussions progressed, a better understanding was achieved by all parties involved and a strategy was agreed upon by participants. He presented and briefly reviewed the recommendations set forth by the roundtable working group in the material of record and recommended that the Commission review, provide input, and recommend approval of the strategy to City Council. He stated that all of the short-term goals in the strategy are a start in the right direction to make an immediate positive change.

He noted that staff also recommends, as a long-term goal, that a small subcommittee of seven to nine people be formed, consisting of representatives from the Airport Commission, helicopter operators, community members, FAA staff, and City

staff, to examine the current helicopter Letter of Agreement and to present any changes to the Commission by December 2010 for its review. He noted the January/February 2011 deadline for submitting any revisions, or routes at all, to the Southern California Airspace Users Group to be published in the helicopter charts for potential publication in July 2011. He stated that if no revision is recommended, the current helicopter routes would be submitted to the Airspace Users Group for publication. He mentioned that the FAA is fully on board with the strategy.

Commissioner Tymczyszyn stated that he attended the three roundtable meetings and that Facility Operations Manager Megerdichian has provided a very good synopsis.

In response to Commissioner Fitch's inquiry, Facility Operations Manager Megerdichian stated that he would take whatever strategy the Commission recommends to City Council in two weeks and request approval to move forward with formation of a subcommittee. He provided clarification that nothing would be publicized until the subcommittee has a recommendation.

Richard Root, Via Buena Ventura, stated that the roundtable process was a good one and thanked Commissioners Tymczyszyn and Donnellan for their participation. He stated that he was disappointed that two of the four helicopter operators based at the Airport did not attend any of the meetings. Referring to the first bullet point in the strategy, he stated that the current Letter of Agreement already states that helicopters will fly above 600 feet mean sea level when safety allows. He noted that most helicopters fly above 600 feet and that citizens are asking for a much higher minimum. He voiced support for the formation of a subcommittee.

He discussed the WebTrak system and the proposal for the City to implement a module that would provide on-line access for the public to view aircraft tracking. He stated that past minutes indicate that the Commission thought that a tracking system would be included in the contract awarded to Lochard in 2005 but that it never materialized.

Facility Operations Manager Megerdichian suggested that Mr. Root bring up the WebTrak system under Oral Communications.

Hope Witkowsky, Mesa Street, stated that she attended the roundtable meetings and that a representative from the helicopter's association showed a track map that they publish. She indicated that revisions to this map should be made as soon as possible and not to wait for the subcommittee's recommendations. She stated that illegal turns of fixed wing aircraft should also be addressed.

Barry Jay, Brian Avenue, stated that 600 feet mean sea level is equivalent to 500 feet above ground level. He noted that the helicopter chart has not been revised for five years and does not have a regular revision cycle. He stated if revisions are not submitted by the deadline, it may not be five years until the next revision and could be as soon as six months. He emphasized the importance of taking the time to come up with approach and departure paths that are safe and reasonable, adding that current helicopter routes should at least be submitted for publication. He noted that whatever is agreed upon is just an agreement and falls to the FAA to control traffic, not to the City.

In response to Acting Chairperson Orpe's inquiry, Mr. Jay explained responsibilities of air traffic controllers and pilots in command.

Commissioner Tymczyszyn pointed out that the City's Municipal Code regulations are old and outdated. He stated that alternate flight routes were proposed at the roundtable meetings and that the subcommittee should consider these.

John Bailey, Walnut Avenue, stated that it was important to involve the other helicopter operators in discussions. He suggested adding under "Background" that at the July 22, 2010 roundtable meeting, the Commander from the Coast Guard committed to a reduction in training flights over the City.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Tymczyszyn moved to recommend the strategy set forth by the helicopter roundtable working group including formation of a committee to open and reexamine the current helicopter Letter of Agreement. Commissioner Hsiao seconded the motion; a roll call vote reflected unanimous approval (absent Commissioners Dingman, Donnellan, and Chairperson Jacobsen).

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