

New leases, relationships secure protections for communities in John Wayne Airport flight path



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When Orange County introduced plans in 2018 to update the general aviation facilities at John Wayne Airport, the city of Newport Beach and other communities under the flight path were alarmed by the project's potential to increase traffic from larger, louder general aviation aircraft and to squeeze out the smaller, quieter piston aircraft.

More than two years later, thanks to the combined advocacy of the city, local community groups, neighboring communities and the support of the O.C. Board of Supervisors, there are now plans and agreements in place that will provide critical protections for our residents.

The project is a far cry better for Newport Beach than what was originally proposed.

In response to our concerns, in 2019 the supervisors agreed to limit the number of service operators to two, not the three that airport staff had recommended. And, there

will be about 40% fewer aircraft parking spaces than there are today. Most importantly, the supervisors approved a land-use plan for the project that sets aside the majority of the general aviation space available at JWA for the smaller, quieter aircraft. This was unprecedented.

Then, on Tuesday, Sept. 15, the supervisors voted to approve 35-year leases with Clay Lacy Aviation and ACI Jet, the companies the county selected to build and operate the airport's new general aviation facilities. The deals are significant for several reasons, including:

- The supervisors prohibited any commercial airline from using the space reserved for general aviation. This will ensure that commercial airlines cannot expand into the general aviation facilities.
- The supervisors included lease terms that lock in the land-use plan that preserves significantly more space for smaller, quieter aircraft for more than three decades.

Based on the advice of their legal counsel, board members chose not to include lease terms that restrict the operating hours of Clay Lacy and ACI Jet. However, both companies voluntarily agreed to set hours that will encourage their customers to arrive and depart the airport at times that align with the airport's commercial curfew. They have publicly committed to that and have assured the city more than once that they intend to maintain good communication with us and our community.

The adopted project and new leases represent the first time that Newport Beach has had a voice in the county's general aviation operations. The county heard our residents' concerns and responded with a less intensive project and lease provisions that secured important protections for Newport Beach for decades to come.

Diane Dixon, Jeff Herdman, and Kevin Muldoon are Newport Beach City Council members.

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