

FBOs Evicted At Santa Monica Airport

Elaine Kauh, AvWeb.com | September 16, 2016

The city of Santa Monica issued eviction notices to two FBOs on the field, just days after one of them, Atlantic Aviation, filed a federal complaint in its fight to remain at the airport. Atlantic, which operates FBOs across the country, charges that the city's efforts to limit fuel sales and other aviation-related activities at KSMO runs against the airport's long-term obligation to the FAA to keep the airport operating. American Flyers, which operates flight schools in multiple states, also received a 30-day notice from the city, which is trying to [close](#) the airport for development. Atlantic's lawyers have asked the FAA in the complaint to take "corrective action" against the city for obstructing its operations, according to a [report](#) in the Santa Monica Lookout. "The City's objectives are now crystal clear: fight the FAA for 'local control' of SMO in the courts and, in the interim, undertake any measure at its disposal to severely curtail or discourage air traffic at SMO," the complaint says.



The FAA has said in the ongoing legal disputes that federal funding obligations require KMSO to stay open until at least 2023. In a recent letter to the city reacting to the City Council's decision to shut down the airport by 2018, the agency said it would take legal action to prevent the restriction of airport operations. But the city has pressed on with plans to close the field in the next couple of years and redevelop the land as a park and business district, vacating airport business spaces and aircraft tiedowns while raising landing fees. As far as the city is concerned, Atlantic no longer fits the needs there. "Atlantic Aviation caters to people who can afford to travel by luxurious private jet," Nelson Hernandez, a senior advisor to the city, told the Lookout. Anti-airport activists have long argued that aircraft cause noise, pollution and safety problems for city residents. The Los Angeles Daily News [noted](#) in a pro-airport editorial this week that those complaints have been ongoing since the post-war era, when Douglas Aircraft was unable to expand there and moved to Long Beach after building military aircraft at KSMO during World War II. Meanwhile, business jets increased their activity there over the decades, fueling calls to close the airport.

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(Highlights, footnotes and minor edits may have been added, but only to add clarification)

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The only way I see the FAA saving SMO is with a court order backed up with Federal Marshals. Considering the local politics and the lack of support the White House has for general aviation, I would not be surprised if the White House tells the FAA to back off and let the airport close, especially considering the California environmental lobby's opposition to general aviation. Or the local officials could pull a Meigs, intentionally destroying the runway. I sincerely hope I am wrong! Good luck to those continuing the fight.

Posted by: matthew wagner | September 16, 2016 6:35 PM [Report this comment](#)

Matthew,
I completely agree with you. We could see another Meigs Field. The City of Santa Monica and it's anti-airport activist cronies are so far off base and illogical in their stance against the airport. It is amazing how far they are willing to go to achieve their near-sided goal of closing such a valuable resource.

Posted by: RYAN LITTEN | September 16, 2016 11:16 PM [Report this comment](#)

Let's see some needed muscle from the FAA on this one...Get in there and protect aviation...it's your job.

Posted by: GBig Angle | September 17, 2016 12:15 PM [Report this comment](#)

There is nothing left to stop the Marxist/Socialist Governments of California. The FAA does not care about the airport, or GA, it cares about power and money. It is no different than the US Congress.

Posted by: bruce postlethwait | September 17, 2016 8:26 PM [Report this comment](#)

Just follow the money. Acres and acres of prime real estate. Developers donate money to elected officials who close the airport then sell the property to the same developers. The promise of a park helps generate additional public support. When voting in November think about which candidate might be the greater supporter of GA.

Posted by: MARLIN GRAHAM | September 18, 2016 11:05 PM [Report this comment](#)

Unless there's a Federal action to take back the airport, either under the terms of the original transfer or through eminent domain, it seems to me that SMO will be effectively closed within months, now, if not sooner.

Posted by: Thomas Boyle | September 19, 2016 7:11 AM [Report this comment](#)

Well, I know now that I will never set foot or spend a penny in the city of Santa Monica, with the exception of at the airport (if I ever find myself in the area, which is unlikely). Unfortunately, when the FAA let Daly off the hook with just a little wrist slap, they set a precedent that cities like Santa Monica are taking advantage of now.

Posted by: Gary Baluha | September 19, 2016 10:57 AM [Report this comment](#)

This is where the lack of coordination among federal agencies comes into play. I'm certain SM would see the issue differently were they to be told that other federal development funds would evaporate as a consequence of violating a federal contract.

Posted by: ROBERT TUCKER | September 19, 2016 11:48 AM [Report this comment](#)

There is a big difference between Meigs and Santa Monica. Meigs had no grant obligations, so the city of Chicago could legally close it. What Daley didn't do was provide the required advance notice that the airport would be closed.

Santa Monica, on the other hand, has taken grants and has an obligation to live up to the terms of them, whether it is to operate the airport until 2023 or "in perpetuity." The courts will decide that.

It is also unfair to say that the "FAA does not care about the airport." It is taking action and it appears likely that it will foil Santa Monica's efforts to close the airport. The current push by the city is to satisfy a vocal minority of citizens who want the city council to take action before the upcoming election.

Posted by: Art Friedman | September 19, 2016 4:58 PM [Report this comment](#)

It is also interesting how much taxpayer money is being spent to close this airport. I wonder if the residents know how much money is spent towards closing the airport and what the financial impact to the area will be without the airport? If you look at Justice Aviation as an example, which was the largest flight school in the Los Angeles area and was closed earlier this year, the City of Santa Monica paid a tidy sum to lawyers and eventually paid Joe Justice quite a lot of money to go away. I am happy for Joe Justice though he had to go through hell before they paid him off, but appalled by the amount of taxpayer money they city has spent. If the residents actually added up the money spent versus the impact of closing the airport, they might think some more. All this and the obligation the city has to the federal government for taking its grant money for an operating airport, Santa Monica's actions seem egregious at best...

Posted by: Victor Go | September 19, 2016 7:50 PM [Report this comment](#)

At the heart of every airport closure campaign is land speculation, not noise, and not concern over the environment. So its Capitalism, not Marxism that closes airports.

Posted by: Patrick Wright | September 19, 2016 9:26 PM [Report this comment](#)