

## Calls for Air Quality Study Gets Boost from L.A. Council Member

Niki Cervantes, Santa Monica Lookout | NOV 2, 2017

Calls from the Santa Monica Airport Commission and others for an air quality study of SMO as its runway is shortened have gotten a boost from L.A. Council Member Mike Bonin, whose 11th district includes nearby neighbors worried about the health impact of airport pollution.

In an October 30 letter to the Santa Monica City Council, Bonin urges the City to “support Suzanne Paulson to study the air quality in and around Santa Monica Airport, and to allow her critical academic project to proceed.”

Paulson, a UCLA scientist who specializes in analysis of pollutants in urban areas, was an Airport Commissioner until recently resigning after some argued having her lead the study was a conflict of interest.

“Dr. Suzanne Paulson’s work on this subject, as an academic product, would be unbiased and neutral,” Bonin said in his letter.

“I echo the sentiments of your own Airport Commissioner, Joseph Schmitz in his letter to you in which he responds to your questions thoughtfully, point-by-point, and also recommends that these air quality studies be done.

“I would further ask that the communities of Mar Vista and Venice be included,” he said.

The Santa Monica Airport Commission wants the City to approve a special study of how pollution levels change before, during and after SMO closes temporarily for work reducing the length of its sole runway.

Work on the reducing the runway from nearly 5,000 feet in length to 3,5000 feet, started October 23 and is to end in the new year (“Santa Monica Airport Cleared for Runway Reduction,” October 18, 2017).

Designed to ward off jets, the shortening is a precursor to the City’s ultimate goal of closing SMO<sup>1</sup> by the end of 2028 (“City, FAA Agree to Close Santa Monica Airport in 2028,” January 28, 2017).

Supporters of the special study say its findings could be critical in It in heading off the arguments of those still fighting in court to keep SMO operating for aviation.

Bonin said his constituents in Mar Vista, West L.A., and Venice “have long suffered the disproportionate impacts of SMO in large part due to your airport’s decision to configure its departure path to fly over the City of Los Angeles.

“I have walked local streets with neighbors abutting SMO many times, hearing and smelling the choking pollution and environmental degradation caused by the planes taking off, landing, and idling on SMO’s runway,” his letter said.

“I have seen families being forced to shut their windows on an otherwise beautiful summer day, and mothers ask their children to stay inside to avoid breathing the toxic fumes,” he said.

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<sup>1</sup> aiR footnote: it is not at all clear that this is the City’s goal; in fact, it appears more likely, the city agreed to the Consent Decree to provide time to slowly shift the leadership (at City, as well as at the aviation board), to tip the City back into taking grants (and 20-year obligations!) from FAA.

The construction shortening the runway provides a “unique opportunity to study this insidious problem,” Bonin said.

“Measurements taken during temporary closure of the airstrip, and immediately after, could help establish an important control that will allow for full and more accurate study of the true impacts of jet pollution at SMO over an extended period of time,” he said.

“With full closure of the airport still more than 10 years away, this information is vital to maintaining the safety and health of those that live near SMO,” he said.

Council Member Kevin McKeown said he was “an early voice for the current study proposed by Suzanne Paulson, and her unfortunate resignation from the Commission may have made moot any legal conflict concerns.

“My direction to City staff remains that the study be done, whether by Professor Paulson or someone else,” he said.

He said in 2010, when the runway was closed for repairs, he brought in the SCAQMD to complete “very telling air quality studies, which showed 12 to 17 times more particulates when the airport was open.”

McKeown did have a fiscal bone to pick with the City of LA.

"As for Mike Bonin’s letter, I have long been supportive of Councilmember Bonin’s courageous stands in the difficult environment of the Los Angeles City Council,” he said.

“However, the City of Los Angeles has yet to contribute a dime to the expensive legal struggles Santa Monica has endured with the FAA, and we continue to pursue relief for all those near the outmoded airport we are in the process of closing, with or without advisory letters.”

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