

congestion pricing ... in the Washington Post:
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A Solution That Can't Get Off the Ground

By [Steven Pearlstein](#)
Wednesday, October 3, 2007; Page D01

Thirty years ago, Alfred Kahn, head of the Civil Aeronautics Board in the Carter administration, gave a speech to an industry conference in which he made this analogy:

Suppose everything that came out of a cow were sold at a uniform price per pound -- tenderloin, sirloin, ground chuck, soup bones. What would happen? In all likelihood, demand for choice steak cuts would soar, even as overpriced hamburger and bones rotted on store shelves. And to meet this new demand for steak, huge swaths of the country would have to be converted to cattle ranching and growing cattle feed, crowding out other uses for that land.

Kahn's message: If you misprice things, you prevent markets from matching supply and demand and wind up misallocating scarce resources. And what is true for hamburgers and land, he argued, also applies to the limited space at and near airports during peak hours. To solve that problem, Kahn recommended that the price paid by airlines for airport and air space in peak periods be high enough so that it not only brought demand in line with supply, but gave officials the money and incentive to add runways or air-traffic-control capacity whenever the price being paid for peak hours exceeded the cost of adding capacity.

This concept of "marginal cost pricing" ought to be familiar to anyone who has taken a basic college course in economics. But what is so astonishing is that 30 years after Kahn laid out the case for it, a decade after it was proposed by the Clinton administration, six months after it was officially embraced by the Bush administration, and in the midst of a veritable consumer revolt over flight delays and cancellations, "congestion pricing" is no closer to reality.

Who is responsible for killing this simple and sensible solution to a problem that costs the economy an estimated \$9 billion a year in wasted time and money? Is it the airlines, or private pilots, or operators of corporate jets, or airport authorities, or members of Congress? The answer is no different than in a

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classic Agatha Christie mystery: They all did it.

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Topping the list of culprits are the nation's airlines. In their zeal to expand service and take market share from competitors, they have deliberately overscheduled flights at peak times, knowing full well that, as then-FAA administrator Marion Blakey put it, their schedules "are not worth the electrons they are printed on." Scheduling at peak times allows airlines to sell more tickets and charge higher prices. And when the flights are delayed or forced to sit on the runway, the airlines can send out their beleaguered employees to blame it on the weather or anonymous folks at air traffic control.

In a letter last week to Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, James May, the president of the Air Transport Association, said the industry was opposed to any policy aiming to "artificially" constrain demand. Perhaps it doesn't occur to May that a system that charges the same price for steak and hamburger is the artificial one, by creating artificial demand. Or perhaps what he is really thinking, but dares not utter, is that now the airlines get to collect premium fees for peak-hour flights, while under a system of congestion pricing, that premium would go to the government and airport authorities who could use it to expand capacity.

Although the airlines overstate the impact of corporate jets, there is no getting around the fact that every plane takes up about the same amount of space in the air or in the landing and takeoff queues. And yet the smaller private planes not only don't pay a premium for using the airspace during peak time -- they don't pay anything near their fair share of the cost of running the air traffic control system at any time of day. Over the years, they have defeated any attempt to impose "user fees" on corporate jets by whipping up opposition from weekend pilots of propeller planes who never quite realize that they would be exempted from these fees. In the view of the general aviation lobby, congestion pricing is the worst kind of user fee -- one that might make even a corporate bigwig think twice before getting in line ahead of a 747 with 400 passengers.

Of all the opponents of congestion pricing, the ones with the best arguments are members of Congress from rural areas, who never miss a chance to force the rest of us to subsidize their inefficient lifestyles. They understand that any system that uses prices to ration peak-time slots at major airports will probably reduce service to places with fewer passengers using smaller planes. What they apparently don't understand is that congestion pricing can be tweaked to offset those tendencies.

Harder to understand is the knee-jerk opposition from Democratic leaders such as James Oberstar of Minnesota, chairman of the House Transportation Committee, who wants to "solve" the congestion problem by requiring all airlines at crowded airports to accept a proportionate reduction in the number of peak-hour flights. Apparently Oberstar would rather have politically pliant bureaucrats and airline executives decide where to cut than leave it consumers to make the trade-off between price and convenience.

And let's not forget the airport authorities, who privately acknowledge that congestion pricing makes sense but won't embrace it publicly because it takes attention away from the industry's favorite solution: adding capacity.

Congestion pricing works. When it has been used on highways, it spreads out demand so that more people wind up using the roads, not fewer. It has been so successful in relieving gridlock in central London that New York is about to try it. And it has allowed ports to increase tonnage without adding a dock or a crane.

The only reason it is not being used to solve the overcrowding problem in aviation is that it threatens a system that has been carefully designed to protect every interest but one -- the traveling public.

AIRPORT SAFETY UNDER SCRUTINY

FAA warns on risky runways

SFO, San Jose on FAA list of risky runways

20 airports singled out for near collisions and pilot confusion

By Marisa Lagos
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The San Francisco and San Jose airports are two of the nation's riskiest when it comes to near-collisions on runways or incidents in which pilots get confused while taxiing around the airfields, the Federal Aviation Administration said Monday.

Each airport had four reported runway incursions in the past year, defined as an incident that violates procedures and could lead to a collision between planes, the agency said. One of those incidents was a near-collision in May at San Francisco International between a jetliner and a turboprop plane that was caused by an air traffic controller's mistake.

SFO and San Jose were each on a list of 20 U.S. airports that the FAA studied because they had a high number of runway incursions or high number of incidents in which pilots were confused while taxiing around the airfield. The agency selected the airports based on the number and severity of incidents.

Nationwide, there were fewer reports of near-collisions and other dangerous incidents over the past year from a year earlier — the total dropped to 330 between October 2006 and September 2007, compared with 378 the previous year, the FAA said. But San Francisco and San Jose, which had no such incidents two years ago,

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had eight between them in the past year.

"When it comes to runway safety, we can't afford to overlook anything," Bobby Sturgell, acting administrator for the FAA, said during a news conference at which the agency released the numbers and general recommendations for changes at the airports. "Our runways are safe, and this call to action ratcheted that up a notch."

At the top of the list nationally was Nevada's North Las Vegas Airport, which reported 11 incursions during the year ending Sept. 30, or more than five for every 100,000 flights out of the airfield. The totals at San Francisco and San Jose each amounted to between 1 and 2 incursions for every 100,000 flights in 2007.

Oakland International Airport avoided the FAA's list, logging just one incursion in the past year.

The FAA study was released the same day the Associated Press reported that NASA had withheld results of a survey in which airline pilots reported at least twice as many runway incursions and other dangerous situations, such as near-mid-air collisions and bird strikes, as government monitoring systems show.

Runway incursions range from incidents in which a collision is imminent, or two planes actually collide, to technical violations such as when a pilot rolls a few feet past a designated holding point on a runway while waiting to take off.

Another factor that landed airports on the study list was whether pilots reported confusion over where they were on an airfield or which runway they were supposed to use — both situations that carry the potential for causing a collision, the FAA says.

"San Francisco was on that list because we have had a number of runway incursions there . . . including one especially nasty one in May," said FAA spokesman Ian Gregor, referring to the incident in which two passenger planes almost collided because of an air traffic controller's mistake.

In that instance, the pilot of a Republic Airlines jetliner took off earlier than planned when he noticed the

Airports examined

The 20 airports included in the Federal Aviation Administration study. They are listed alphabetically by city:

- Atlanta: Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International
- Atlanta: DeKalb Peachtree
- Boston: Logan International
- Chicago: O'Hare International
- Dallas: Dallas/Fort Worth International
- Denver: Denver International
- Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International
- Las Vegas: McCarran International
- Las Vegas: North Las Vegas
- Long Beach: Long Beach/ Daugherty Field
- Los Angeles: Los Angeles International
- Miami: Miami International
- Milwaukee: General Mitchell International
- New York: John F. Kennedy International
- Orlando: Orlando International
- Philadelphia: Philadelphia International
- Reno: Reno-Tahoe International
- San Francisco: San Francisco International
- San Jose: Mineta San Jose International
- Santa Ana: John Wayne Airport (Orange County)

smaller SkyWest Airlines turboprop converging on his path from an intersecting runway. The incursion occurred because an air traffic controller forgot he or she had cleared the SkyWest plan for landing.

The 19-year veteran controller was decertified, required to complete additional training and then recertified.

Mineta San Jose International Airport also reported four runway incursions during the past year, all of them considered technical violations, the FAA said. There were also two instances in the past two years in which pilots got confused about where they were on the runway.

FAA officials did not detail any systematic problems at either San Francisco or San Jose.

Before releasing its report Monday, the FAA spent two months talking with airlines, airports, commercial and private pilots, air traffic controllers, mechanics and others at each of the 20 airports. The idea was to solicit suggestions for improving safety, part of a push by the FAA to improve runway safety at all U.S. airports.

"We do have runway safety meetings at least annually at big airports, but these were more intensive brainstorming sessions," Gregor said. "People were really encouraged to think outside the box, and throw out any idea no matter how unusual it might seem."

The FAA said Monday that in general, the airports need to improve runway signage, come up with more explicit taxiing instructions for pilots, and provide more training for aviation workers, particularly those who drive any vehicles on runways.

Gregor and San Francisco International spokesman Mike McCarron said airport officials are updating a training video for people who drive on the SFO airfield. San Jose has agreed to put new lights at the end of one runway where pilots have been confused in the past, Gregor said.

McCarron said San Francisco airport officials realized even before the federal report was issued that they face safety challenges.

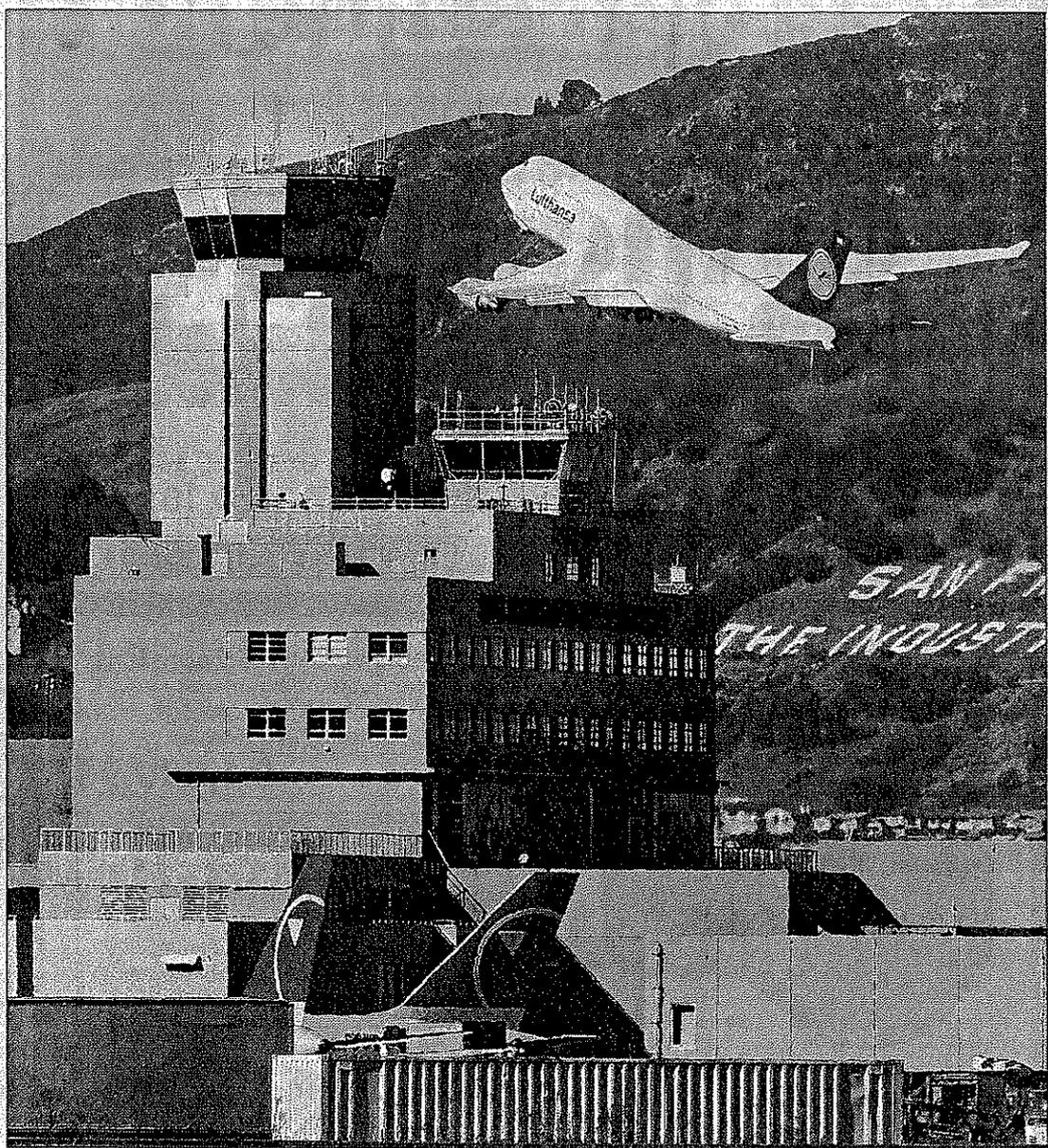
"It is what it is," he said. "We're not at all surprised."

Because SFO has intersecting runways, McCarron said, airport officials are always "very diligent" about addressing incursions and other potential dangers.

McCarron cited an incident a few years ago in which an airline mechanic was taxiing a plane to a gate and crossed a runway he did not have permission to enter.

The airport instituted a mandatory refresher training course for all airline mechanics, McCarron said. It also recently realigned one of the taxiways so it no longer crosses a runway.

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BRANT WARD / *The Chronicle*

San Francisco International Airport reported four runway incursions in the past year, as did San Jose.

NASA buried scary data on air safety

Agency worried travelers would be upset and airline profits hurt if results released

By Rita Beamish
ASSOCIATED PRESS

An unprecedented national survey of pilots by the U.S. government has found that safety problems like near collisions and runway interference occur far more frequently than previously recognized. But the government is withholding the information, fearful it would upset air travelers and hurt airline profits.

NASA gathered the information under an \$8.5 million federal safety project, through telephone interviews with roughly 24,000 commercial and general aviation pilots over nearly four years. Since shutting down the project more than one year ago, the space agency has refused to divulge its survey data publicly.

After the Associated Press disclosed details Monday about the survey and efforts to keep its results secret, NASA's chief said he will reconsider how much of the survey findings can be made public.



NASA chief Michael Griffin said he will reconsider how much of the findings can be made public.

"NASA should focus on how we can provide information to the public, not on how we can withhold it," NASA Administrator Michael Griffin said in a statement. He said the agency's research and data "should be widely available and subject to review and scrutiny."

Last week, NASA ordered the contractor that conducted the survey to purge all related data from its computers. Congress announced a formal investigation of the pilot survey on Monday and instructed NASA to halt any destruction of records. Griffin said he already was ordering that all survey data be preserved.

The AP learned about the NASA results from one person familiar with the survey who spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to discuss them.

A senior NASA official, associate administrator Thomas Luedtke, said earlier that revealing the findings could damage the public's confidence in airlines and affect airline profits. Luedtke acknowledged that the survey results "present a comprehensive picture of certain aspects of the U.S. commercial aviation industry."

The AP sought to obtain the survey data under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act.

"Release of the requested data, which are sensitive and safety-related, could materially affect the public confidence in, and the commercial welfare of, the air carriers and general aviation companies whose pilots participated in the survey," Luedtke wrote in a final denial letter to the AP.

Among other results, the pilots reported at least twice as many bird strikes, near midair collisions and runway incursions as other government monitoring systems show, according to a person familiar with the results who was not authorized to discuss them publicly.

The survey also revealed higher-than-expected numbers of pilots who experienced "in-close approach changes" — potentially dangerous, last-minute instructions to alter landing plans.

Officials at the NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View have said they want to publish their own report on the project by year's end.

Although most people associate NASA with spaceflight, the agency has a long and storied history of aviation safety research. Its experts study atmospheric science and airplane materials and design, among other areas.

Rep. Bart Gordon, D-Tenn., wrote to NASA on Monday announcing an investigation by the House Science and Technology committee, which he chairs, and directing the agency not to destroy documents. The letter instructed NASA to provide Congress results and background on the survey and any communications from airlines about how the data might harm them.

"I cannot imagine any good public purpose being served by destroying records," Gordon said in a statement. "The committee will get to the bottom of all of this."

The survey's purpose was to develop a new way of tracking safety trends and problems the airline industry could address. The project was shelved when NASA cut its budget as emphasis shifted to sending astronauts to the moon and Mars.

NASA said nothing it discovered in the survey warranted notifying the Federal Aviation Administration immediately and data showed improvements in some areas. Survey managers occasionally briefed the FAA. At a briefing in April 2003, FAA officials expressed concerns about the high numbers of incidents described by pilots because NASA's results were dramatically different from the FAA's.

An FAA spokeswoman, Laura Brown, said the agency questioned NASA's methodology. The FAA is confident it can identify safety problems before they lead to accidents, she said.

Aviation experts said NASA's pilot survey results could be a valuable resource in an industry where they believe many safety problems are underreported, even while deaths from commercial air crashes are rare and the number of deadly crashes has dropped in recent years.

"It gives us an awareness of not just the extent of the problems, but probably in some cases that the problems are there at all," said William Waldo, a safety science professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Ariz. "If their intent is to just let it sit there, that's just a waste."

NASA's survey, known officially as the National Aviation Operations Monitoring Service, started after a White House commission in 1997 proposed reducing fatal air crashes by 80 percent as of this year. Crashes have dropped 65 percent, with a rate of about 1 fatality in about 4.5 million departures.

NASA had directed its contractor, Battelle Memorial Institute, along with subcontractors, on Thursday to return any project information and then purge it from their computers before Oct. 30.

READERS' PLATFORM: SAFETY AND SECURITY

NASA was right to suspect that information about a survey of airline safety "would upset air travelers," in the words of Monday's AP story on the subject. Fury would be more like it, directed by SFGate readers mostly at NASA for keeping the survey under wraps and urging the contractor to destroy its records. Below, edited for space, is a cross-section of opinions. To see all the comments on SFGate, go to sfgate.com/ZBHR.

"Anxious to avoid upsetting air travelers, NASA is withholding results." Then what's the point of DOING the flipping survey??? I'm more upset at NOT knowing than if they'd published the results. In a nation that touts freedom as its core, this is blatantly un-American.

— Anthony Yee, 32, Alameda

"NASA directed its contractor Battelle Memorial Institute, along with subcontractors, on Thursday to return any project information and then purge it from their computers before Oct. 30." One week from tomorrow. After then it will be almost as if it never happened — like Katrina, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo (add your favorite here).

— Ralph Miesler, 68, San Francisco

I worked for NASA for a number of years and my guess is that they WANT to re-

The trouble is primarily due to the outdated [air traffic control] equipment. It should have been overhauled 25 years ago (when it was already 25 years old) ago but requests for such an overhaul was rejected by the Reagan administration as overspending.

— Larry D. Rafey, Fort Walton Beach, Fla.

I just re-read the article and I think this is way overblown. If you read it, they had the contractor destroy the data, it doesn't say the whole thing was destroyed as though it never happened. It actually says Congress instructed NASA to keep the data. From the article you would think that you could look at any airport and see planes nearly colliding at every turn.

— Rachel Mallette, 33, Martinez

One fatality per 4.5 million flights!!! I'll take those odds any day, compared to being in a U.S. hospital, driving the Bay Area highways, or living in Oakland or Richmond.

— Miriam Weinstein, 60, San Anselmo

Yes, flying is safe. Yes, it is even safer than when Clinton's administration started the funded survey. The point is that a publicly funded survey was done, the data indicate potential problems that should be addressed, and the conclusion was to DESTROY THE DATA INSTEAD OF ADDRESSING POTENTIAL PROBLEMS.

— Dan Melinger, 53, Santa Clara

NASA: Not Allowed to Sully the Airlines.

— Loren Davidson, 53, Castro Valley



Two Cents

What aspect of the NASA study disturbs you most?



Cris Hammond, Sausalito

I fly a lot, so I'm already aware that the system is in near collapse. What bothers me, though, is that this is another in a long list of examples of our government deciding that business profits are more important than citizen safety. Aren't they supposed be "keeping America safe"?



Sharna Kahn, Carmel

What concerns me about this story is that, potentially, NASA has been given incentive, or motivation, to not release the data. This story smells of behind-the-scene manipulation that subordinates the public's safety to airline industry revenue goals.



Dan Shiner, Mill Valley

While there may be occasional safety lapses, there have been virtually no fatal crashes among major American carriers in years. Personally, I am not very concerned, because no pilot would fly in a situation or an aircraft they did not consider to be absolutely safe. Inevitably, when airplanes crash, pilots get there first.



Bettie Laven, Oakland

The most troubling thing is that it doesn't surprise me. I have no confidence in this government or any of its agencies. That's just a terrible thing to say out loud, and I don't see any hope on the horizon.



Stephen Carter, Hayward

I mostly fear -- now that the statistics are released to an alarmist and litigious American public -- that air fares will rise in response. I would still rather be on a commercial plane flown by experienced pilots and overseen by professional teams than driving on a highway filled with inattentive SUV and large-truck drivers.

Ed Wagner, San Francisco

I'm not concerned about airline safety. The statistics are pretty good. I am very concerned that our government is lying to us in order to protect the airline business. Consumers have a right to informed decision-making.



Louisa Arndt, San Rafael

The most unsettling aspect is our government's focus on secrecy rather than safety, yet one more example of not-sec-ism in this administration.



November 24, 2007

SANTA MONICA JOURNAL

Enemy Aircraft Sighted and, Above All Else, Heard

By REBECCA CATHCART

SANTA MONICA, Calif., Nov. 23 — Virginia Ernst sat on her living room couch, her face turned toward the ceiling. The high-pitch grind of a jet engine split the air about 100 feet above her home.

“That’s a Challenger,” said Margaret Williamson. “No,” Ms. Ernst replied, “it’s a Citation. It reminds me of a dentist’s drill.”

The Challenger and the Citation are popular lines of corporate jets. The Citation is louder, explained Ms. Ernst, in her mid-60s, but the Challenger is bigger, and shakes her house’s windows and walls. Either way, the jets, and others like them, are a source of frustration to residents, who complain of not only their roaring engines but also their noxious fumes.

Since the 1960s, both Ms. Ernst and Ms. Williamson have resided beneath the flight path of planes arriving at Santa Monica Airport, one of the oldest general aviation airports in the country and among those closest to residential neighborhoods. Ms. Ernst’s house is 300 feet from the only runway, Ms. Williamson’s is 50 feet closer, and the noise in recent years has only worsened. Jet traffic there has almost doubled since 1999, to 19,000 takeoffs and landings so far this year, says the airport’s manager, Bob Trimborn, even as traffic of small piston-driven planes has declined.

The rise in private-jet travel is being driven in part by long check-in and security lines at major airports. Those waits make private flying attractive to wealthy travelers, while at the same time fractional-jet-ownership companies are making it possible for more corporations to send their executives off in style. The developments have stoked the anger of residents here, who say jet fumes endanger their health and jet noise threatens their sanity.

“You’ve got the celebrities, you’ve got the power players here,” said Bill Rosendahl, a city councilman in neighboring Los Angeles. “Frankly, I say to the super-rich, go to another airport,” because “this is an environmental issue that affects real people.”

The 227-acre airport was built in 1919, when the land for miles around was largely open fields. But with the 1921 opening of the Douglas Aircraft Company here and then the end of World War II and the Korean War, a residential building boom swept the area, spurred by demand from

Douglas employees and returning military pilots.

In 1984, after a series of lawsuits, the City of Santa Monica, which owns the airport, signed an agreement with the Federal Aviation Administration not to limit jet traffic there. The agreement (which also imposed some regulations on engine noise) does not expire until 2015, but a number of public officials, among them Mr. Rosendahl, Assemblyman Ted W. Lieu and Representative Jane Harman, are working for an early change to what they describe as a pact that has outlived its time. They are pushing for both state and federal legislation that would limit the size and number of jets at the airport.

Opponents of that effort say Santa Monica, one of 249 "reliever" airports across the country that help unclog congestion at major airports nearby, must remain open to all types of jets using Los Angeles International, five miles to the south. Indeed, any bill limiting jet operations would have to supersede both the 1984 accord and existing law.

"Under federal law, the airport cannot restrict the type of aircraft that can land," said Bill Dunn, vice president for airports at the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association. "The problem is that people live right next to the airport because of poor local planning decisions."

The flight paths extending from the runways of Santa Monica and Los Angeles International Airports converge over the Pacific. That means the airports have to coordinate inbound and outbound flights in an elaborately choreographed dance. "We shuffle our cards into their deck," Mr. Trimborn said.

That can lead to idling engines at Santa Monica that send exhaust out across Bundy Drive, the four-lane thoroughfare that separates the airport from the homes of Ms. Ernst and her neighbors, including the founder and director of Concerned Residents Against Airport Pollution, Martin Rubin. Mr. Rubin stood on the sidewalk the other day, pointing to nearby homes and speaking of cancer cases there that he says are tied to airport pollution.

But it is hard to link pollution to specific sources, said Philip M. Fine, manager of atmospheric measurements for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the air pollution control agency for all or parts of four Southern California counties. Dr. Fine ran a recent study of air quality around Santa Monica Airport that was financed by a federal grant to measure toxins in the air around general aviation airports. The study, he said, found levels of lead and other toxins in the community around the airport here "well below" federal and state limits.

That is little comfort to the Rubin family and others who fault the study for not noting levels of acrolein, a harmful byproduct of jet fuel known to cause respiratory irritation.

"We've always had a nice westerly breeze here," said Mr. Rubin's wife, Joan. "But now the breeze

brings the jet fumes in. They smell like kerosene and burn your throat.”

Marc Carrel, deputy chief of staff for Representative Harman, is also skeptical, saying too little time passed between the boom in private-jet traffic and the study.

“It’s sick to say, but you need a long-term impact to see long-term effects,” Mr. Carrel said.

Mr. Trimborn, the airport’s manager, says he is not the bad guy. Citing the binding nature of the 1984 agreement, he said: “I try to be as open and honest as possible all the time with residents. If I tell someone this plane’s not going to fly over your house and then it does, they’ll be angry with me. But I don’t tell them that. They know I can’t control it.”

He pointed to a photograph, dated 1924, on his office wall. It showed a row of five Douglas World Cruisers, biplanes with exposed seats. Back then, neither local land-use planners nor anyone else “saw a Gulfstream IV flying out of Santa Monica and going to the East Coast,” he said.

“We’re dealing with development over many years,” Mr. Trimborn added. “So the dynamic between the airport and the community, that’s inescapable.”

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Dan Walters: Air travel congestion will worsen

By Dan Walters - dwalters@sacbee.com

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Story appeared in MAIN NEWS section, Page A3

If you think commercial flying during this holiday season is a hassle, you haven't seen anything yet. As California's population and the demand for air travel continue to expand, the state's airports are feeling the pinch, but their expansion plans have run into increasingly stiff resistance.

Environmentalists, nearby residents, voters and risk-averse politicians have stymied plans to expand runways and terminals and/or build entirely new airports from San Diego to San Francisco.

The rising level of frustration is exemplified by a recent editorial in the Los Angeles Times, noting that Los Angeles International has the highest risk for collisions between aircraft on the ground and chiding local politicians for dragging their feet on reconfiguring LAX runways to make them safer.

"The cowardice of L.A. elected officials, who tend to call for more studies rather than making hard choices, is endangering lives," the editorial fumes.

The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and other business groups are increasing pressure to expand LAX, citing its unsuitability to handle the new generation of super-jumbo jets that are expected to dominate international travel.

Three hundred and fifty miles to the north, as a plane flies, the state's second busiest airport, San Francisco International, is facing similar problems, but its plans to lengthen and separate its runways have been blocked by environmentalists. The Federal Aviation Administration's associate administrator for airports staged a news conference in San Francisco in August to warn about congestion and urge local officials to act.

"We expect the number of air passengers to ramp up dramatically in the future," Kirk Shaffer warned, with SFO's traffic increasing by 60 percent by 2025, Oakland International's by 80 percent and San Jose International's by 100 percent.

Down in San Diego, meanwhile, voters have rejected much-ballyhooed plans to build a new airport at Miramar, site of a Marine Corps airfield. The local airport authority is now planning to expand terminals at San Diego's Lindbergh

Field, the state's third busiest airport. It was the latest setback in a 60-year-long quest for an alternative to Lindbergh, located on San Diego's scenic waterfront.

Traffic through California's commercial airports reached a peak of nearly 179 million passengers in 2000, then dipped to 167.5 million in 2001 as a recession hit the state and to 159 million in 2002 in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks. Since then, however, traffic has rebounded to near-record levels of just under 178 million in 2005 and 2006.

As major coastal airports approach capacity, more air traffic is shifting to inland facilities such as Ontario International in Southern California and Sacramento International. The city of Los Angeles, which owns Ontario, has been trying to reserve space at LAX for international travel by encouraging other, smaller airports to capture more of the regional air traffic - even to the extent of lavishly subsidizing flights out of Palmdale, which it also owns.

One factor in the looming airport crisis, certainly, is that the airports are owned by local governments and managed, directly or indirectly, by elected officials who tend, like all politicians, to view issues on short-range bases. Another is that as local entities, airports are under no compulsion to act in concert. Their owners and managers often view themselves as competitors rather than colleagues.

Although state governments are often involved in airport planning and construction in other states, there's been a hands-off attitude in Sacramento. At the very least, it would seem, the Legislature should hold some hearings to shine the light of publicity on what could become a real crisis in the decades ahead.

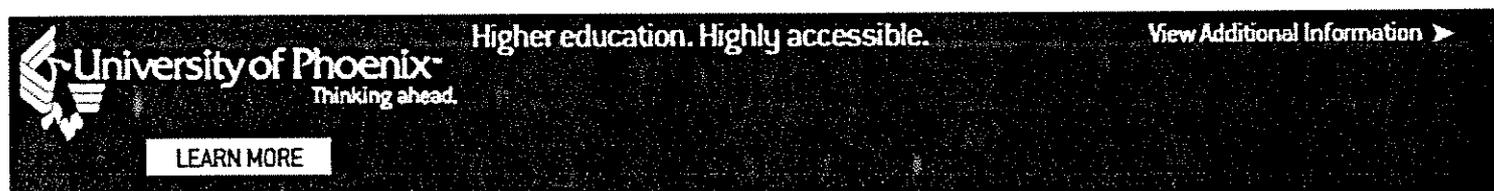
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Plan on Airline Emissions Hints at U.S.-Europe Rift

By JAMES KANTER

European Union governments have scaled back a proposed law that would regulate emissions from any airline with takeoffs or landings in Europe. But on Thursday, the ministers still agreed within five years to adopt measures likely to intensify a battle with the United States over global environmental regulation.

Environmental officials regard the airline bill as the centerpiece of a European effort to lead the world in reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, but the United States government and many airlines have insisted that there should be an international agreement first. Airlines also say the action could cost billions of dollars and drive up ticket prices.

European ministers deemed the measure a victory for the environment despite changes that include delaying its introduction and reducing the number of permits airlines would have to buy.

But environmentalists criticized the decision as hypocritical in the wake of pledges made this month at a United Nations conference in Bali, Indonesia, where governments promised to make deep cuts in emissions.

"It's a shameful end to a year filled with promise for action on climate change," said João Vieira of Transport and Environment, an advocacy group based in Brussels that focuses on sustainable transportation. "If environment ministers get their way, the scheme simply won't cut emissions and will end up being yet another subsidy to the aviation industry."

Mr. Vieira said that the aviation rules as revised would let the airlines pollute 90 percent more than in 1990, even as other European industries are making progress toward lowering their emissions from 1990 levels.

At a meeting in Brussels, European Union ministers agreed to start the system in 2012, rather than 2011 as recommended last month by the European Parliament. They also proposed that carriers buy 10 percent of the permits they need under an auction system, with the rest distributed free. The Parliament had recommended that airlines be required

to buy a quarter of all permits.

Final approval by governments is expected by the end of 2008.

The system would set limits on how much carbon dioxide emission airlines would be allowed, allowing them to sell surplus permits if they flew less or used more environmentally friendly technology and punishing them with extra costs if they wanted to use more fuel.

The proposal mirrors an existing carbon credit trading system used by the European Union to combat global warming and meet its emissions targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

Aage Dünhaupt, a spokesman for Lufthansa, complained that the rules were unfair to airlines like his because of the intense congestion over European skies, which requires circuitous flight paths and sometimes puts planes into holding patterns while awaiting clearance for landing.

Mr. Dünhaupt said that forced carriers into unnecessary emissions.

The airline industry has forcefully lobbied against the legislation, calling it an ineffective regional attempt to tackle a problem that requires a global solution. Airline lobbyists also warn that the Europeans risk a trade war with the United States if they insist on moving ahead without an international agreement.

American officials have said that the Europeans could violate international aviation rules if they forced non-European airlines into the system.

Daniel K. Elwell, assistant administrator for aviation policy, planning and environment at the Federal Aviation Administration, said the Europeans had softened their proposal "a little bit in timing and base-lining, but it is still on the face of it a unilateral imposition of standards worldwide."

Any limits on airline carbon releases should be negotiated through the International Civil Aviation Organization, he said.

Mr. Elwell would not say what position the United States would take on carbon quotas if the issue arose in the civil aviation organization. But he said that American carriers had become more efficient and were emitting less carbon dioxide now than they did in 2000; European airlines, he said, were producing more.

Matthew L. Wald contributed reporting from Washington.