

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 5, 2006

Marion C. Blakey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20591-0001

Dear Administrator Blakey:

We write regarding the January 20, 2006 letter sent by David L. Bennett, FAA Director of Airport Safety and Standards, to Robert Trimborn, Manager of Santa Monica Municipal Airport (SMO), concerning that airport's runway configuration. It is significant that the FAA has acknowledged the need for safety enhancements at SMO to correct the absence of Runway Safety Areas (RSAs). We strongly urge the FAA to build into its proposals the concept of safety enhancements of equal scope at both ends of the airport.

As you know, the Santa Monica Airport has a unique layout. Approximately 75% of the airport is surrounded by residences, with some homes located as close as 250 feet from the runway. There is growing concern in the community about safety conditions at SMO, particularly given the increased usage by jet aircraft whose size and landing speed exceed the facility's designation for operations. Larger aircraft or aircraft that land at faster speeds require longer stopping distances and the absence of an RSA leaves no margin for error.

The alternatives suggested in Mr. Bennett's letter, while non-standard, present promising possibilities for mitigating the risk of overshoots on the western end of the airport. We understand that discussions between the FAA and the Airport Administration to address the equally important need for additional safety measures at the eastern end of the airport are also underway. We urge you to continue working together to identify solutions to the following issues:


- (1) **RSA on Runway 3:** While airport operations data indicate that 95% of operations at SMO take place on Runway 21, the western facing runway, it is notable that the 5% of operations on Runway 3, the eastern facing runway, generally take place during poor weather conditions. It is vital that the FAA address the need for an RSA at the eastern end of the airport by implementing safety enhancements that are comparable to the changes envisioned for the western end.
- (2) **Undershoots on Runway 21:** We are troubled that Mr. Bennett's letter downplays the problem of runway undershoots. Although less common than runway overruns, undershoots are equally dangerous. With residents at the eastern end of Runway 21 residing especially close to the runway, an undershoot accident caused by poor visibility or pilot error could have deadly consequences.


April 5, 2006
Page 2

Airport users and airport neighbors deserve the same level of safety no matter which direction planes take off and land. We urge you to continue working with the Airport Administration to develop a comprehensive and equitable plan to address the pressing need for safety enhancements at both ends of the SMO runway.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress


JANE HARMAN
Member of Congress



U.S. Department
of Transportation

Federal Aviation
Administration

Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

JUN 12 2006

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Waxman:

Thank you for your letter of April 5, cosigned by Congresswoman Jane Harman, about Santa Monica Municipal Airport (SMO). We have heard the concerns of neighbors of the airport and agree that safety improvements should apply to both ends of the runway.

We do not intend to minimize the effects of runway undershoots. We do, however, consider the overall safety of all landings and takeoffs. A seeming improvement can actually decrease overall safety, and we believe displacing runway thresholds at SMO would have that effect.

We are pleased to continue working with SMO and airport users to determine the most suitable safety improvements for runway safety areas at the airport.

We are sending an identical response to Congresswoman Harman.

If I can be of further help, please contact me or Mr. David Balloff, Assistant Administrator for Government and Industry Affairs, at (202) 267-3277

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marion C. Blakey".

Marion C. Blakey
Administrator