

December 18, 1996

Mid-Coast Community Council
P. O. Box 64
Moss Beach, CA

Attn; Member Joseph Gore

Members;

I am David C. Foster. I reside in Pacifica, although I am an airplane owner and pilot and for the last 5 years have been employed at the Half Moon Bay Airport for a private contractor. While conducting this employment which consists of fueling aircraft, operating the Unicom radio, operating the emergency fire equipment as necessary, and dealing with the public on behalf of the County of San Mateo. In this I also receive many of the telephonic complaints from various citizens. I have also attended 4 of the last 5 meetings held in the area (4 before the MCCC & 1 at Supervisor Lempert's office) concerning complaints against the airport.

These sessions seem to dwell on a few areas of concern;

Touch & Go Traffic

Low Flying

Aircraft Noise

Totality of Aircraft Movement

Special Circumstances

I would like to address these points.

Touch & Go Traffic

Touch & Go traffic has been used as a training tool since the Wright Brothers. Show me a pilot and I will show you someone who has made many a touch & go, either while training or during recurrent training. A major complaint that I receive is that the aircraft and pilots doing touch & go's are from airports 'across the hill'. This is probably correct as the initial pilot training of aircraft from Half Moon Bay is minimal. Airport Manager Gary Petersen made it clear at the last MCCC meeting at the hospital that he has little, if any control over who may use the airport for flying purposes. The runway at Half Moon Bay is pretty much like St Rt 1, it is open to unlimited usage by any aircraft with proper registration and pilots with the proper certificate.

This also includes operations at night. Half Moon Bay Airport is fully lighted to allow night operations. While the Airport Administration "discourages" touch & go's at night, they are unable to forbid such. Federal Air Regulation 61.57(d) states that a pilot may not fly at night unless in the preceding 90 days he has made at least 3 takeoffs and 3 landings to a full stop at night. While we have no-one stationed at the airport after 5pm, various Sheriffs Officers tell me that there is very little night activity.

The airport "discourages" touch & go activity on weekend and holiday mornings. We have been instructed that this means until 10am. I have no objection to this and have no qualms about talking on the radio to any pilot who wants to violate this. When advised of our policy, I have never had a pilot refuse to cease doing touch & go's.

Low Flying

Most of the complaints concerning low flying are in my experience unwarranted. I am told by people that 'the airplane almost hit my chimney', or the aircraft was only 100 feet over my house. If any plane on takeoff from Runway 30 (Northwest) were only 100 feet high, they would be in the trees on the west end of the field. I am an experienced aircraft watcher and I monitor the aircraft for compliance with the pattern altitude.

The pattern altitude here is 1000 feet. However, this is above the runway (67' MSL), not 1000' above the closest home. Most of the complaints I receive concerning this are from people living on the various hills on the east side of the airport and this is mainly due to their living 3-4 hundred feet above the runway altitude. In addition, a number of the aircraft using the runway are light training planes and do not have the horsepower or load-carrying ability to climb at a steep rate.

"Low Flying" in the immediate vicinity of the airport is controlled by Federal Air Regulation 91.119 - Minimum Safe Altitudes; General. This section commences;

Except when necessary for takeoff or landing, no person may operate an aircraft below the following altitudes;
(Copy attached)

Aircraft Noise

Most aircraft noise is generated to a great degree by the propeller, the tips of which may even exceed the speed of sound. While all aircraft engines produce noise, they are muffled. Those aircraft with larger engines (200 HP or larger, also frequently have adjustable pitch props. We do request that these aircraft reduce power and prop RPM as soon as it can be done safely.

Totality of Aircraft Movement

There are several frequent complainants concerning situations in which there are a large number of aircraft arriving and departing from Half Moon Bay Airport or more usually when there are 4-5 aircraft in closed traffic (Touch & go's). The constant 'buzzing' of the engines seem to create annoyance. Again, there is little, if any control over this by the airport.

Special Circumstances

Jet Traffic - Jet traffic is controlled in the main by a 12,500 lb. weight restriction. This eliminates 99% of jets from this airport. The airport cannot restrict aircraft from using the airport solely on the basis of the planes propulsion. Other than during the Dream Machine and the yearly air show, we don't have 6 jet aircraft coming to the airport a year. There are a small number of biz-jets who meet the weight criteria and can land here. Whenever this happens I always receive a complaint from someone who tells me 'that jet aircraft are forbidden to land at Half Moon Bay'. When I try to explain the situation, I am usually told that "We were told that jets can't land there" When asked who told them this, they can't really say. This does not seem to be a real serious problem.

Low Flying Aircraft & Noise - 90% of the persons who complain of low flying aircraft and excessive noise live directly under the traffic pattern of the airport. Many of these persons also live high on the hills to the east of the airport. This exacerbates their view of how high the aircraft are and many expect the 1000' traffic pattern altitude to mean that high over their house. Again, the traffic pattern and its altitude are absolutely legitimate, and the airport has little, if any control over this aspect.

The Rich Pilot and 'I work at home' syndrome - A new aspect of complaints that I have commenced to receive are that aircraft operating at Half Moon Bay are mainly from other local airports, are flown by 'rich' pilots and come to Half Moon Bay because they don't want to upset people living adjacent to other airports where they are hangared. I am convinced from personal observation that the majority of the airplanes that are both hangarared at Half Moon Bay, or fly here from other airports are owned and operated by pilots who can just barely afford them.

Another area that I am hearing is from persons living in the immediate vicinity of the airport who work at home (By computer I gather) and the aircraft noise is 'annoying'. It must be understood that the airport is a business also, and these persons cannot expect the airport to cater to their expectations.

Complaints - Between April to September, 1996, the airport received a total of 20 complaints, 3 from El Granada, 13 from Moss Beach and 4 from 'other'. I suggest that considering the population on the Coast, this is a very minute number. When one also learns that of the complaints received from El Granada and Moss Beach, the overwhelming majority were from 2-3 persons, I wonder if there is indeed any problem. I see no overwhelming outpouring of support for these 2-3 persons. One of these complainants has personally told me that his goal is to shut the airport down and he has given himself one year to complete this. This indicates to me that there are ulterior motives for these complaints and those motives are suspect.

Airport encroachment - I have a high altitude photograph of the Half Moon Bay Airport taken in 1949 and one in 1988. Looking at both shows how housing has gradually encroached around the immediate vicinity of the airport. Why this was allowed is probably a matter of poor or non-existent planning. The time is long past to use the "we were here first" defence. Regardless it remains true that developers/real estate salesmen/and purchasers were all well aware that the airport was here, and they must bear some of the responsibility for their actions.

The Airport - Half Moon Bay Airport is a fully operations airport, no less than San Carlos, San Jose or San Francisco International. It is a publically owned and operated facility. It is operated as an 'Enterprise' operations, existing on airport generated income, with NO public tax funds going to the airports (Half Moon Bay & San Carlos). The airport has received substantial Federal funding from a fund gotten from airline ticket taxes and available for all airports. These funds have been used for capital improvements at the airport. The airport is an 'uncontrolled' airport, meaning that like the majority of airports in the U.S., there is no control tower. Permission to land or depart are not required, pilots follow a standard, FAA approved pattern. We do maintain a 'Unicom' radio for air to ground communications in which we provide advisories as to the current weather, landing pattern or any other pertinent information. This is voluntary and although most pilots utilize this service, there is no legal requirement to do so. While we do have non-aviation oriented activities at the airport, the major business of an airport is to facilitate the movement of aircraft.

Safety - I receive calls from time to time from persons questioning the safety factor of aircraft flying over the vicinity of their home. I suggest that the safety record at this airport is as good, if not better than the majority of General Aviation airports. In the 5 years I have worked at the airport we have had 1 fatal accident. That accident was not in any way caused by the airport, a pilot took off at night, in bad weather and went into clouds. He apparently lost control and crashed into the ocean south of the airport. We have had several wheels-up landings, either mechanical or brain failure. While some of the aircraft have suffered some damage, there have been no injuries.

When one considers our safety record against that of St Rt 1 in the area just of the airport, the airport stands out in a positive manner.

The Mid-Coast Community Council & the Airport - This is the 4th time the MCCC has, in my opinion, been stampeded into holding a public meeting to consider activities at the airport. In each instance, the meeting was pushed for by 1-4 persons. There has never been a substantial turnout by the community, only by the local pilot group. In each of the meetings I have heard nothing new in the form of a complaint. In each instance the complainant has been told by the county Airport Manager that his ability to enforce rules that conflict with the Federal Air Regulations are nil. The activities that are being complained of are consistently within the Federal guide lines and are not violations of any official rule or regulation.

I suggest to you that you are being asked to provide solutions to a non-problem. These requests are being submitted by a minute number of local residents who may well have a secret agenda.

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