

## Neighbors Press Their Own Plan for LAX

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The spare change and lace-covered kitchen table that a small group of residents used to craft their own modernization plan for Los Angeles International Airport are a far cry from the \$116 million and spacious boardrooms that city officials have had at their disposal for the official version.

But those living in the shadow of arriving aircraft at LAX expect Mayor James K. Hahn to take their humble proposal seriously.

As its first official act, the 31-member Westchester-Playa del Rey Neighborhood Council sent a letter to Hahn and L.A. Airport Commission President Ted Stein in May, asking them to include the community's LAX plan in environmental studies for the mayor's airport proposal. The voluminous document is to be released July 2.

Stein has sent a response to the council that there isn't enough time for officials to review the community's alternative, dubbed Alternative E by residents. A spokesman for the mayor also said that he doesn't plan to significantly alter his \$9.6-billion redesign proposal.

That isn't sitting well with local residents, who agree that Hahn has been more attentive to their concerns than his predecessor, Richard Riordan, but are upset about his refusal to budge on key elements of his LAX plan.

"There's more than one way to become an expert witness," said Stuart H. Garrison, a 21-year Westchester resident who worked with six others to draft Alternative E. "We don't want to be dismissed as amateurs."

The main sticking point: Hahn's proposal to build a passenger check-in center and parking facilities on a 143-acre parcel a mile east of the airport, known as Manchester Square. Those living nearby would like to see the area — now used for single-family residences and apartment buildings — developed as a park and convention center.

"The most important thing for the mayor's office to understand is that there's some real resistance to his plan," said Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Los Angeles), whose district includes the airport. "There's not enough time given to the residents to work it through and work it out."

### **Community Concerns**

City Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski, who represents several areas closest to LAX,

also has criticized Hahn for failing to include residents in discussions about his plan. The mayor's office said that he has been attentive to community concerns and plans to incorporate the thoughts of his own "blue-ribbon committee" of residents into his plan.

A team of consultants is completing environmental studies for Hahn's proposal, known as Alternative D, which the mayor describes as favoring security and safety over expansion. The public will have 45 days to comment on the plan after the environmental studies are released, and then it must pass muster with the Airport Commission, the City Council and the Federal Aviation Administration.

Hahn's alternative plan for updating the 75-year-old airport is the city's 33rd in eight years. He unveiled the major elements of the proposal last summer after scrapping Riordan's expansion plan. Riordan's plan, however, is still on the table because Hahn relied in part on data from that proposal when drafting environmental studies for Alternative D.

Nearby residents opposed Riordan's plan — with alternatives called A, B and C — because it would expand LAX to handle as many as 98 million people annually. El Segundo Mayor Mike Gordon claimed to have lined up a coalition of 100 cities against the plan and persuaded Hahn to sign a pledge in the spring of 2001, promising to discourage airport expansion beyond 78 million passengers a year.

Hahn's version of the airport master plan keeps that promise.

His plan would dramatically alter the airport by demolishing Terminals 1, 2 and 3, and by replacing LAX parking structures with a new terminal complex. Private vehicles would be rerouted to the check-in facility at Manchester Square — an area bordered by Arbor Vitae Street on the north, La Cienega Boulevard on the east and Aviation Boulevard on the west and just short of Century Boulevard on the south.

The city agency that operates LAX is buying homes and apartment buildings in Manchester Square from property owners willing to sell. The agency has acquired about 86% of the homes and 36% of the apartments in the area.

Hahn argues that the airport would be more secure if passengers checked in at a remote facility because private vehicles — and thus the threat of car bombs — no longer would be allowed on the airport's access road.

A Rand study released in May challenged the mayor's assertion, saying the check-in facility might in fact make passengers and airport personnel more vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Residents agree, and add that the center would bring increased traffic and pollution to their neighborhoods.

The dispute galvanized residents to draft their own modernization proposal.

At a neighborhood council meeting last fall, Airport Commission President Stein "flat out

said that Manchester Square was nonnegotiable," said Danna Cope, a Westchester resident who helped devise the community's plan.

### **Leaders Incensed**

The remark so incensed local leaders representing a range of neighborhood groups that they sat down at Denny Schneider's lace-covered kitchen table and started rearranging the details of Hahn's proposal.

Schneider, who is a well-known Westchester advocate for airport mitigation, sits on a variety of groups including the Westchester-Playa del Rey Neighborhood Council and the LAX-Community Noise Roundtable.

Starting last fall, Schneider's group met every Saturday for four months to devise a plan that its members believe would help modernize the airport while minimizing the effect on surrounding neighborhoods. The groups' six members spent several hundred dollars to print color versions of "Alternative E," make poster boards and produce compact discs with information on the plan.

The residents' plan would convert Manchester Square to a park and convention center. The check-in facility envisioned by Hahn would be relocated to airport land at the corner of Aviation and Century boulevards.

In addition, Alternative E would shift a consolidated rental-car facility envisioned by Hahn from the edge of Parking Lot C to an area near the intersection of Aviation Boulevard and the 105 Freeway. Hahn's plan places a transportation center, where passengers would disembark from the Green Line and buses, in that location. The residents' alternative also would:

- Retain Terminals 1, 2, and 3 and leave the north runway complex as it is now.
- Add a second check-in facility at 96th Street and Sepulveda Boulevard.
- Move the transportation center from its proposed location in Hahn's plan near the 105 Freeway to the group's proposed check-in facility at Aviation and Century boulevards.
- Move one of the two southern runways closer to the terminals, rather than shifting the outer runway 50 feet closer to El Segundo, as the mayor proposes. Airport officials want to move the runways farther apart to guard against accidents and near misses and to prepare for the 555-seat Airbus A380.

### **A Question of Time**

Because air traffic fell considerably at LAX after the 2001 terrorist attacks and amid a sluggish economy, the Iraq war and the SARS scare, residents argue that the city has time to incorporate their ideas into Hahn's plan.

"They have ample time to go back and do an environmental analysis on Alternative E," said Roy Hefner, a 49-year Westchester resident who helped draft the plan.

Stein disagrees, saying in a June 3 letter to Gwen Vuchsas, president of the Westchester-Playa del Rey Neighborhood Council, that it has taken "18 months of dedicated effort" to develop Hahn's redesign proposal and accompanying environmental studies. Adding another alternative to the LAX master plan would require another lengthy period of analysis, he said.

Residents hoped that introducing the plan to Hahn by means of the neighborhood council would give it credibility. In the past, city officials tended to dismiss residents' ideas to transform LAX, they say.

How much power the mayor chooses to give neighborhood councils when they weigh in on capital improvement decisions such as the LAX modernization is the "million-dollar question," said Greg Larson, general manager of the city's Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

Westchester-Playa del Rey council's input on LAX is a good example of the mayor's vision for these councils, said Deputy Mayor Matt Middlebrook.

But that doesn't mean Hahn will change his mind about using Manchester Square.

Middlebrook said the mayor will take Alternative E into consideration during the public comment period, but doesn't plan to change the location of his check-in facility.

"The mayor's preferred alternative is the mayor's preferred alternative," Middlebrook said.