

SoCal Metroplex Questions and Answers

Q: What is the Southern California Metroplex Project?

A: The Southern California Metroplex Project is a comprehensive proposal to improve the flow of air traffic into and out of Southern California by making the airspace safer and more efficient. The project proposes to replace dozens of existing conventional air traffic procedures with new satellite-based procedures, which are a key component of the FAA's Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen). Metroplex initiatives are completed, under way, or planned in more than a dozen metropolitan areas across the country.

Q: How many new procedures does it include?

A: In all, the Southern California Metroplex Project includes 99 new satellite-based procedures. The new procedures consist of 41 departure procedures, 37 terminal arrival procedures, which guide aircraft down until they're very close to their destination airports, and 21 runway approach procedures. The project also includes revisions to nine satellite-based procedures that were already in place, as well as revised or maintained conventional arrival and departure procedures that were already in place. Although most commercial aircraft are equipped to use satellite-based procedures, some are not. Therefore, some conventional procedures will be retained to accommodate aircraft not equipped to use satellite-based procedures. Additionally, the project expands the number of entry and exit points into and out of the Southern California airspace, which is like creating more efficient on- and off-ramps on a highway.

Q: Where is the Southern California Metroplex project located?

A: The project encompasses most of Southern California and includes 21 airports, including six major airports.

Q: What is the purpose of the project and who will benefit?

A: The project will replace dozens of existing conventional air traffic control procedures with new satellite-based procedures. This will reduce the complexity of the Southern California metroplex airspace, reducing workload for controllers and pilots, as well as reducing congestion and in some cases miles flown. Nationally, the NextGen evolution from ground-based air traffic control to a satellite-based system improves safety and efficiency.

Q: Why is the project necessary?

A: Society is modernizing all around us, and it's critical that the FAA does as well. From coast to coast, we are upgrading the nation's air traffic control system and improving the safety, efficiency, reliability, and availability of air transportation in the United States. Modernization is needed because many of the current air traffic procedures in Southern California are decades old. While they are all safe, some are inefficient because they rely on ground-based navigation aids, which limit available flight paths.

Some procedures are not fully optimized, meaning they result in flight paths which are longer than necessary, or require inefficient climbs and descents, or converge and occupy the same airspace. As a result, air traffic controllers issue a series of instructions to pilots to vector aircraft onto more direct routes and to keep aircraft safely separated from each other. Vectoring, in turn, results in irregular and less predictable flight paths and increases pilot-controller communications and workload.

Satellite-based procedures, by contrast, allow for more optimized routing with fixed routes, altitudes, and speeds. Their precise flight tracks help keep routes automatically separated. This in turn reduces the need for vectoring (i.e., issuing headings for aircraft to fly) and reduces controller-pilot communications.

Q: Has the FAA made a final decision to implement the project?

A: Yes. The environmental review conducted under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) resulted in a Finding of No Significant Impact and Record of Decision (FONSI/ROD) that enable the FAA to move forward with the project.

Q: Will I get a response from the FAA on the comment I submitted during the public comment period?

A: The FAA evaluated and responded to more than 4,000 public comments we received during the 120-day public comment period as part of the environmental review. The agency grouped similar comments together and in the Final EA, responded to all of the general substantive comments we received. Please see the website for responses.

Q: What kind of outreach did the FAA do for the project?

A: The FAA held 11 public workshops on the project after releasing the Draft Environmental Assessment in June 2015. Agency officials conducted approximately 79 additional briefings for stakeholders including community groups, tribes, airport officials, and local, state, and federal officials.

Q: When will aircraft start flying the new procedures?

A: The FAA plans to begin working immediately toward phasing in use of the procedures, starting in November 2016 and continuing through April 2017. Before the FAA makes the procedures available for use by pilots, the agency will conduct additional public outreach to further inform people about the changes. Updates on procedure implementation dates will be provided on the project website.

Q: Will I see aircraft flying new routes they have not typically flown in the past?

A: When the Southern California Metroplex procedures are implemented, some people might see aircraft where they did not previously fly. This is because some air route changes will occur, and because satellite-based procedures create more concentrated flight paths than conventional procedures.

Q: Will the new procedures increase the noise generated from aircraft?

A: The FAA's environmental analysis for the project calculated noise at more than 330,000 locations throughout the study area. It showed the Proposed Action (i.e., the proposed procedures) would not result in any significant noise impacts or reportable noise increases under NEPA. The thresholds for determining significant noise impacts and reportable noise increases can be found in Section 5.1.2 in the Final EA. Some people will experience noise decreases, some will see no changes, and some will experience noise increases.

Q: What is the FAA going to do to mitigate the noise increases that some people will experience?

A: The project will not exceed thresholds of significance for any environmental impact category, so no mitigations are being proposed.

Q: Where do I file a noise complaint?

A: Noise complaints should be filed with your local airport noise office.

Q: How can I get more information on the project and more information related to impacts in my community?

A: The FONSI/ROD, as well as the Draft and Final EA documents, are available on the project website at http://www.metroplexenvironmental.com/socal_metroplex/socal_introduction.html. The website includes files for download that can be used in Google Earth to view current flight tracks, flight tracks of the new procedures, existing and proposed procedure routes, as well as noise changes associated with the new procedures.