

THE RICHMOND STANDARD

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Richmond speaks out against proposed flight path over city

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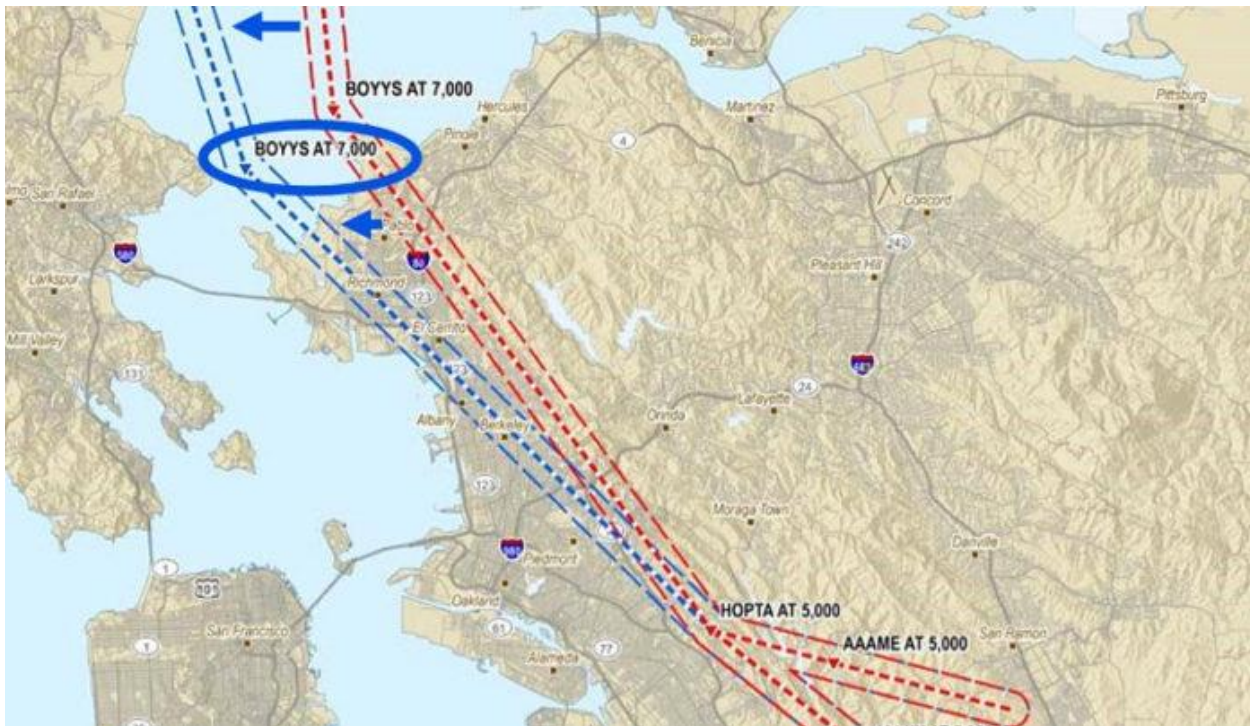


Image credit: Oakland Airport-Community Noise Management Forum

By Mike Kinney

The Richmond community is speaking out over a proposed change in a flight path into Oakland International Airport that will increase air traffic and noise in the city.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) aims to shift an existing flight path that travels over the eastern edge of West Contra Costa cities two miles west to

an area with nearly double the population in Richmond, El Cerrito and Berkeley. The change could happen in October 2021; the decision is not yet final, according to the FAA.

“It seems low-income people and existing disadvantaged communities are going to be impacted the most with these new proposals,” Richmond Deputy City Manager Shasha Curl said during the Oakland Airport-Community Noise Management Forum meeting Wednesday.

She was joined by Mayor Tom Butt and Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia in calling for public outreach and review of the plan.

“Richmond has not been thoughtfully engaged,” Curl said.

The proposal to shift the flight path is about safety, according to the FAA. In 2015, the FAA adopted a new WNDSR arrival route to replace the conventional RAIDR procedure. That shifted flight tracks to the north/northeast compared to the previous RAIDR, a spokesperson for the FAA said.

“Shortly after we published the WNDSR, we realized it did not provide the same separation from Oakland departures that the previous RAIDR arrival route did, and a fix was needed,” the FAA spokesperson said. “The FAA began designing a proposed amendment to the WNDSR route in 2017.”

Shifting flights west would keep aircraft on the arrival route safely separated from Oakland departures, according to the FAA.

Last year, the Oakland Noise Forum requested that the FAA evaluate a smaller shift to the east of the current flight path to take advantage of open space between Berkeley/Piedmont/Montclair and Orinda/Moraga.

That proposal isn't feasible, according to the FAA, "due to a number of factors related to the density and complexity of the local airspace." Terrain is higher to the east, the agency said.

"Additionally, shifting the route east would create a conflict with Hayward Executive Airport departures; increase the complexity in sequencing and spacing involving other Oakland arrivals, San Francisco departures and Napa County Airport traffic; and would encroach on Travis Air Force Base airspace," according to the FAA.

At Wednesday's Noise Forum, Richmond leaders and community members asked the FAA to reconsider. Gioia said the flight path proposal should be examined as an equity issue, with an analysis of the air quality and noise pollution impacts.

Added Richmond Mayor Tom Butt, "This is an environmental justice issue and adding noise pollution to other pollution sources already affecting Richmond is just not right. The flight path could be shifted a half a mile west and follow the Bay and affecting almost no one."

The FAA said it has not completed the environmental review for the proposed change, nor made a final decision, and added it would "continue to work through the Oakland Noise Forum on appropriate community engagement for the proposal."