

SoCal Metroplex Q&A

Q: What is the Metroplex Program?

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, which are a key component of the FAA's Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen). The new procedures consist of 41 departures, 37 arrivals and 21 approach procedures that guide aircraft down until they're very close to their destination airports. The project also includes nine revised satellite-based procedures that were already in place, as well as revised or maintained conventional arrival and departure procedures that were already in place.

Additionally, the project also 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 in the sky.

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. 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 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 and reduces controller-pilot communications.

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

A: Yes. The Finding of No Significant Impact and Record of Decision enables 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. The agency grouped similar comments together and responded to all of the general substantive comments we received.

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 publishing the procedures, 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 at http://www.metroplexenvironmental.com/socal_metroplex/socal_introduction.html.

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 would not result in any significant or reportable noise increases under the National Environmental Policy Act. Some people will experience slight noise decreases, some will see no changes, and some will experience small 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: Will the FAA hold public meetings?

A: Before publishing the procedures, the agency will conduct additional public outreach to further inform people about the changes. The FAA will announce the public outreach in press releases and on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, the Metroplex website and possibly other platforms too. The agency also will notify airport and elected officials about the outreach.

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 Finding of No Significant Impact/ Record of Decision, as well as the Draft and Final Environmental Assessments, are available on the project website at http://www.metroplexenvironmental.com/socal_metroplex/socal_introduction.html. The website includes features that allow people to use Google Earth to view current flight tracks and flight tracks of the new procedures, as well as noise changes associated with the new procedures.