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OC Board of Supervisors Win Landmark Settlement with the FAA

(Orange County, CA) – The settlement of legal objections by the County of Orange along with the City of Newport Beach (pending approval this evening) against the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to prevent flight pattern variations around John Wayne Airport is a significant victory for the residents of Orange County.

“I’ve fought hard to protect our residents from the unwanted consequences of the altered flight paths allowed by the FAA,” said Supervisor Todd Spitzer, Third District. “I led the effort to sue the FAA in order to protect our communities, which is my duty as an elected official.”

Residents in the region experienced drastic differences in the air traffic above their neighborhoods and businesses as the FAA’s NextGen air traffic control system was implemented in 2016. Citizens and community advocate groups were very vocal about the changes in flight patterns that, in various cases, created more noise, more exhaust residue, and air traffic in parts of the county where there never was before. Supervisor Spitzer led the Board effort to pursue legal action against the FAA as his Third District encompasses the arrival corridor in to JWA. He also toured the county with an informative presentations to help citizens understand the legal objections and rally support for a letter-writing campaign.

NextGen advances air traffic control through GPS satellite technology, replacing the long-used ground radar system. Supervisor Spitzer endorsed the new, safer technology but not at the expense of noise, elevation and wider area alterations to flight patterns.

The Board of Supervisors approved the negotiated settlement in during the January 9, 2018 regular meeting. The settlement secures the commitment to adhere to traditional flight patterns, eliminating FAA discretion to utilize the larger swaths of area the agency had designated around JWA for future flight paths without conducting additional environmental impact documentation to comply with the National Environmental Impact Act (NEPA).

Supervisor Spitzer and the Board of Supervisors directed the County legal action in November, 2016 by joining the City of Newport Beach in a previously filed suit against the FAA. The City of Laguna Beach filed a separate, similar lawsuit. All NextGen cases nationally were referred to the D.C. District Court, the home district of the FAA.

“This is a satisfactory resolution to more than a year of conflict over altered flight paths in and out of John Wayne Airport,” added Supervisor Spitzer. “We demanded the FAA, the airlines, and pilots adhere to our noise abatement guidelines as established in the JWA Settlement agreement dating back to 1985 and we convinced them to comply.”

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