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Residents worry about cargo flights' impact south of 50

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Some concerned residents are worried the flight path for cargo planes touching down at Mather Airport is just miles away from proposed growth south of Highway 50, including schools.

Mather's noise levels are already a growing issue in El Dorado County, where County Supervisor Helen Baumann said new flight approaches, particularly "shifting flight paths to south of 50" have recently received complaints.

But just over the Sacramento County line, a \$750 million bond passed in April-Measure M-will fund construction of more than 20 schools in a now rural area projected to rapidly grow in coming years.

About 13 of the new school sites are just three miles from the centerline of Mather Field's main runway, according to Folsom resident Chuck Coalson.

"The flaps will be down, the wheels down, and planes will be at a constant descent-that could reach 90 dB or more," he said.

Glen Otey, a local opponent of Mather Airport's current draft master plan, agreed.

"I wouldn't want to go to a school like that or send my kids to a school like that. But as we speak plans are moving forward to build there," he said.

"Yes, we will have future schools in the flight pattern," confirmed Deborah Bettencourt, Folsom Cordova Unified School District's deputy superintendent. However, Bettencourt said the district currently has schools in Folsom and Rancho Cordova within the flight path as well.

"There is a state approval process and design considerations--insulation for mitigating noise-that we follow," she said.

Since the 1990's, El Dorado Hills and Folsom residents have complained of noise from the former Air Force base near Rancho Cordova.

Though many types of airlines operate from the airport, cargo flights have increased significantly since 1995, said Folsom Mayor Andy Morin.

"Cargo really causes impact to Folsom, especially at night," he said, adding that Folsom is working with the Federal Aviation Administration and Sacramento County Airport System to mitigate noise.

The current draft Mather Airport master plan calls for a large cargo hub with up to a maximum of about 300,000 takeoffs or landings a year for 4 years, according to Citizens for a Responsible Mather Airport, a group that says it has managed to delay the start of Mather's environmental study.

Though flights are seasonal, typically getting heavier during the holidays, they are steadily increasing every year, said Coalson.

Sacramento County is in charge of operating Mather with unregulated access by military and civilian aircraft for the next 20 years. El Dorado County has no authority over Mather issues because of the airport's location outside the county, Baumann said.

Concerned residents can call the noise reporting hotline at 874-0800.

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