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**A CRMA position**

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## ADJUSTING AIR FREIGHT PLANS USING INSIGHTS FROM SACOG AND FAA

Just over seven years ago the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors sent to environmental review a draft Mather Airport Master Plan centered on the proposition that Mather should become a premier air freight hub.

Today's reality renders the premier hub notion preposterous, and the environmental results, not yet available to the public, can only worsen the outlook.

In the July 2008 Sacramento Area Council of Governments "Regional Goods Movement Study" only a couple of pages are devoted to air freight (since it accounts for a mere 0.1% of Sacramento Area freight tonnage), but some very important points are made. Quoting from pages 29 & 30:

- SMF [Sacramento International] handled just over half of the region's air cargo tonnage. [Since DHL pulled out of Mather in January 2009 SMF's share has risen to about two thirds of the total.]

- There is no direct relationship between economic and population growth of the SACOG region and the amount of air cargo moving through SMF and MHR [Mather].
- Forecasting future levels of air cargo at SMF and MHR is problematic. . . The operating strategies of those carriers [chiefly FedEx and UPS] are dictated by . . . their need to move air cargo through complex national and international transportation networks where timing is critical. Much of the air cargo handled at the two airports is being transferred between aircraft, not starting or ending its trip in the SACOG region. The selection of SMF or MHR as a “hub” for one or more carriers is based on the airport’s location within the carrier’s network, not on local cargo business. What the air carriers regard as optimal routing patterns can and do change, sometimes abruptly, and for reasons which are often opaque to an outside observer.

The County is obligated to operate both airports with unfettered access, 24/7, and is prohibited by federal law from limiting the aircraft that can use the facilities or imposing curfews and the like. So, Sacramento International is fully available to air carriers should they, for whatever “opaque” reasons, decide to create a major hub in Sacramento. SMF can easily satisfy such air cargo uses for a fraction of the over \$100 million in facilities improvements identified for this purpose in the draft MHR Plan. The 2010 Federal Aviation Administration Terminal Area Forecast projects SMF passenger traffic growing at only 2.3% annually for the next 20 years – a far more modest increase than previously thought. SMF isn’t going to be that busy, and cargo is largely an off-hours activity. (London Heathrow, with about the same acreage, handles six times as many passengers and fourteen times as much cargo as SMF.)

The FAA forecast also says that Mather operations will increase only at an annual average of 1.5% for the next 20 years (which implies that major cargo activity there is unlikely). This means that operations will remain below actual levels experienced during the past dozen years. (It would take an increase in tonnage of about 7% per year for 20 years just to get back to the level of cargo handled at MHR in the year 2000.) The expensive expansion items will not be needed which is good news for all.

To deal with this reality, the Board of Supervisors should delete from the draft Mather Master Plan those features (e.g. extended parallel runway, high-speed exit taxiway, CAT III ILS, etc.) associated with large-scale hub operations. That action would define a clear, cost-effective means for handling future freight contingencies, and, very importantly, free land owners, home owners and developers from the fear that their plans might be wrecked by the night-time operation of large numbers of low-flying, noisy air freighters having little to do with Sacramento’s needs or prosperity.