

Santa Monica Airport will close in 2028 and be replaced by a park, officials say



Los Angeles Times, January 2017. Dan Weikel and Dakota Smith Contact Reporter

Capping decades of legal battles and protests, federal and local officials announced a settlement Saturday to close [Santa Monica Airport](#) in 2028 and immediately shorten the runway to limit jet flights.

The city of Santa Monica has been fighting to shut down the general aviation airport — long a favorite of celebrities and business leaders — contending it is unsafe, noisy and pollutes nearby neighborhoods with potentially harmful aircraft exhaust.

Aviation interests and the [Federal Aviation Administration](#) have opposed the city, stating the airport must stay open at least until 2023, if not in perpetuity, under federal agreements dating to the end of World War II, when the facility was used by the military. The agreement between the FAA and Santa Monica ends years of litigation and ensures that control of the 227-acre airport will be returned to the city and its residents.

“This a historic day for Santa Monica,” Mayor Ted Winterer said. “The FAA has finally and categorically said that we can do whatever we want with our land at the end of 2028. This is a windfall for the residents” of the city.

The closure will leave the Los Angeles area with one less general aviation airport, but it will allow Santa Monica to replace the complex with a proposed park, recreational facilities and other non-aviation uses. “This is a good deal, but it is not ideal in all regards because it will keep the airport open longer than desired,” said John Fairweather of the groups Community Against

Santa Monica Airport Traffic and Airport2Park. “But we will regain the western parcel of the airport immediately, and the agreement gives us absolute certainty.”

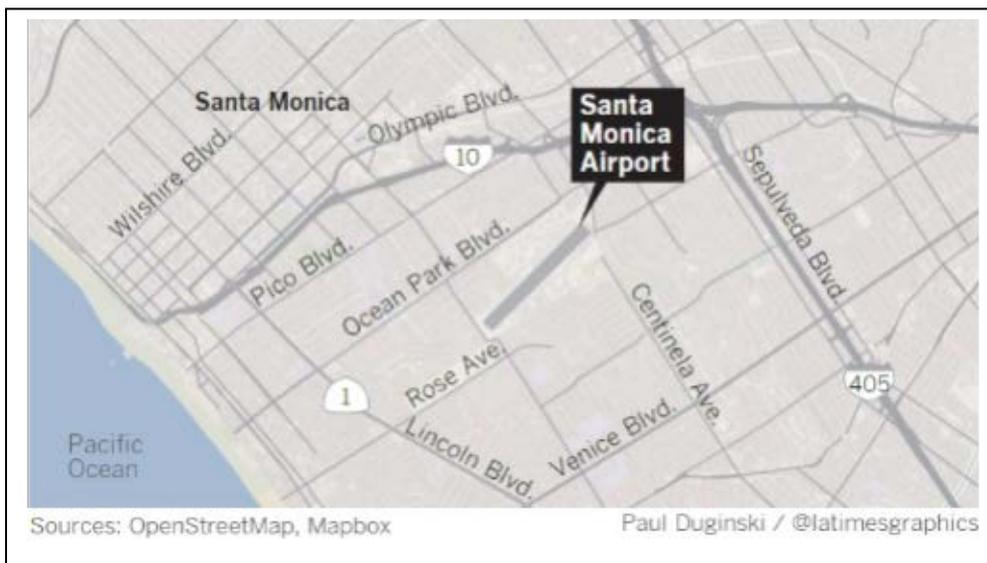
Under the agreement, Santa Monica must maintain stable and continuous operations at the airport until it is closed Dec. 31, 2028. The terms allow the city to immediately reduce the length of the 4,973-foot runway to 3,500 feet, a move that would substantially reduce jet traffic and charter operations.

The FAA also acknowledged that the city has the right to establish its own company at the airport to provide aviation services, such as fuel, hangars and tie-down space for aircraft. The city has been trying to evict two so-called fixed base operators — Atlantic Aviation and American Flyers — and replace them with its own operation run by municipal employees. Both companies have sued to halt their removals.

FAA officials say, however, that the city remains obligated to enter into leases with private aviation companies to ensure the continuity of services until the runway is shortened and it decides to provide such services on its own. The City Council voted 4 to 3 to approve the settlement, which was worked out during two weeks of negotiations with the FAA and [U.S. Department of Justice](#).

“This is a fair resolution for all concerned because it strikes an appropriate balance between the public’s interest in making local decisions about land use practices and its interests in safe and efficient aviation services,” said FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. City Councilman Kevin McKeown voted against the settlement, saying he wanted the airport closed sooner and that the city would have eventually prevailed in court.

“That’s 12 more years of planes, including some jets,” McKeown said. “That’s 12 years before we can replace the airport with parks and play fields.”



Supporters of the airport were

stunned by the agreement and the closed-door nature of the discussions — a view shared by some anti-airport activists. “I’m just shocked that a backroom decision was made without any public discussion” said Mark Smith, a pilot, aircraft owner and member of the Santa Monica Airport Assn. board. “The fact remains that this is a national asset and a critical part of the national airspace system.”

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Assn. as well as the National Business Aviation Assn. vowed Saturday to continue their efforts to keep the county’s oldest operating airport open.

Santa Monica was once home to Douglas Aircraft Co., which produced the famous DC-3 and military aircraft at the airport before it moved to Long Beach. Today, the facility has about 270 aircraft and averages roughly 250 takeoffs and landings per day. Its tenants have included celebrities such as Harrison Ford, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Tom Cruise.

Supporters say Santa Monica is a reliever airport for Los Angeles International Airport and provides substantial economic benefits to the region as well as a base of operations for major emergencies and medical flights. “I’m extremely disappointed in the FAA action to forgo further legal action” said Christian Fry, president of the Santa Monica Airport Assn. “The people who lose here are the people of West L.A. who will see major development.”

Fry said that closing the airport will eliminate height restrictions for new buildings constructed near the airport or on land that was below its flight paths. “Get ready for the high-rise wall,” Fry added. “It won’t all be a park.”

Airport opponents contend the airport should be closed because of noise, the risk of a serious crash in one of the surrounding neighborhoods, and aircraft emissions, particularly lead and fine bits of carbon. Santa Monica officials have been trying to close the airport since the early 1980s, but they have not been able prevail in legal challenges to federal agreements requiring the airport to stay open.

In January 2011, a federal appeals court rejected the city’s longstanding effort to ban certain high-performance jets from using the airport. Last year, the City Council adopted a so-called starvation strategy that aimed to close the airport by July 2018. The plan included shortening the runway, reducing aviation services and evicting aviation tenants.

More recently, the FAA ruled that the city must keep the airport open at least until 2023 under the terms of a federal grant the city received to improve the airport. Santa Monica appealed the decision in federal court. In a separate action, the city has been pursuing a federal lawsuit to gain clear title to the airport and nullify its federal obligations to keep the airport open. The agreement announced on Saturday ends the litigation.

The controversy over the airport intensified in 2015 when Ford, flying a restored World War II-era trainer, crashed on Penmar Golf Course because of engine trouble shortly after takeoff. [National Transportation Safety Board](#) records and news reports show that since 1982, there have been at least 42 crashes within five miles of the airport.

In 11 of the crashes, the planes came down in Santa Monica and West Los Angeles neighborhoods, but no one on the ground was killed or seriously injured. One plane came down in a Venice intersection, and two, including Ford's, crashed on Penmar. A decade earlier, a plane from the airport slammed into an apartment building in the Fairfax district more than five miles from the runway. Five people were killed.

Based on the number of accidents per 100,000 takeoffs and landings, Santa Monica ranks in the middle of the 11 busiest general aviation airports with control towers in Los Angeles, Orange and Riverside counties.

It is unclear how the agreement will affect several pending complaints that private aviation interests have filed with the FAA in an attempt to keep the airport open. They allege that the city has violated its federal agreements and regulations to prevent unjust discrimination against aviation uses and the diversion of airport revenue to pay for other city activities. "This is a big question," Fry said. "Does this agreement sweep these complaints under the carpet? We would like to see them run their course."

NOTE from Wikipedia page for Santa Monica Airport

On January 28, 2017, it was announced that Santa Monica City officials and the Federal Aviation Administration had reached an agreement to close the Santa Monica Airport on December 31, 2028 and return 227 acres of aviation land to the city for eventual redevelopment. It is anticipated that the airport land will be redeveloped into areas for parks, open space, recreation, education and/or cultural use.^[22]

In an attempt to reduce jet traffic, the city planned to shorten the runway from 4,973 feet to 3,500 feet by repainting the runway and moving some navigational aids.^{[23][24]} The shortening has been formally completed as of 2017 December 23.^[25]



Plans for shortening the Santa Monica Airport runway from 4,973 to 3,500 feet in length

