

## Introduction

### AIRPORT LAND USE COMPATIBILITY PLANNING

#### Function and Applicability of the Plan

The basic function of this *Placer County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan* is to promote compatibility between the airports in Placer County and the land uses which surround them. As adopted by the Placer County Airport Land Use Commission, the plan serves as a tool for use by the commission in fulfilling its duty to review airport and adjacent land use development proposals. Additionally, the plan sets compatibility criteria applicable to local agencies in their preparation or amendment of land use plans and ordinances and to land owners in their design of new development.

The plan is primarily concerned with land uses near the three public-use airports in Placer County:

- ❑ Auburn Municipal Airport
- ❑ Blue Canyon Airport
- ❑ Lincoln Regional Airport

(Note: This plan does not address Truckee-Tahoe Airport. Airport land use compatibility planning matters for that airport, which lies on the boundary between Placer and Nevada counties, are the responsibility of the Foothill Airport Land Use Commission.)

The influence area for each of the airports, as defined herein, extends roughly 2 to 3 miles from the airport runways. These influence areas encompass lands within three local government jurisdictions in Placer County:

- ❑ County of Placer
- ❑ City of Auburn
- ❑ City of Lincoln

Additionally, portions of the Blue Canyon Airport influence area affect lands within the jurisdiction of two other government entities: the county of Nevada and the U.S. Forest Service. Although the authority of the Placer County Airport Land Use Commission does not extend to these jurisdictions, policies in the *Compatibility Plan* address the importance of coordination on airport land use compatibility matters.

Details regarding the purpose, scope, and applicability of the *Compatibility Plan* are set forth in the two policy chapters which follow.

## **Statutory Requirements**

### ***Powers and Duties***

Requirements for creation of airport land use commissions (ALUCs) were first established under the California State Aeronautics Act (Public Utility Code Sections 21670 et seq.) in 1967. Although the law has been amended numerous times since then, the fundamental purpose of ALUCs to promote land use compatibility around airports has remained unchanged. As expressed in the present statutes, this purpose is:

"...to protect public health, safety, and welfare by ensuring the orderly expansion of airports and the adoption of land use measures that minimize the public's exposure to excessive noise and safety hazards within areas around public airports to the extent that these areas are not already devoted to incompatible uses."

The statutes give ALUCs two principal powers by which to accomplish this objective. First, ALUCs must prepare and adopt an airport land use plan. Secondly, they must review the plans, regulations, and other actions of local agencies and airport operators for consistency with that plan.

### ***Limitations***

Also explicit in the statutes are two limitations on the powers of ALUCs. Specifically, ALUCs have no authority over existing land uses (Section 21674(a)) or over the operation of airports (Section 21674(e)). Neither of these terms is defined within the statutes, although the interpretation of their meaning is fairly standard throughout the state.

**Existing Land Uses** – The precise wording of the Aeronautics Act is that the authority of ALUCs extends only to land in the vicinity

of airports which is "not already devoted to incompatible uses." The working interpretation of this language is that ALUCs have no state-empowered authority over existing land uses. The question then becomes one of determining what conditions qualify a land use as existing.

For airport land use planning purposes, a land use can generally be considered existing once the local agency has completed all discretionary actions on the project and only ministerial approvals remain. A vacant property thus can be considered "devoted to" a particular use, even if the activity has not begun, once local government commitments along with substantial construction investments by the property owner make it infeasible for the property to be used for anything other than its proposed use. Local government commitment to a proposal can usually be considered firm once a vesting tentative map, development agreement, or other land use entitlement has been approved.

**Operation of Airports** – Any actions pertaining to how and where aircraft operate on the ground or in the air around an airport are clearly not within the jurisdiction of ALUCs to regulate. ALUC involvement with aircraft operations is limited to taking the operational characteristics into account in the development of land use compatibility plans. This limitation on the jurisdiction of ALUCs cannot, however, be taken to mean that they have no authority with respect to new development on airport property. For example, the law specifically requires ALUCs to review proposed airport master plans for consistency with the commission's plans. ALUCs also are generally conceded to have authority to review proposals for nonaviation development on airport property.

A third, less absolute, limitation concerns the types of land use actions which are subject to ALUC review. The current law emphasizes local general plans as the primary mechanism for implementing the compatibility policies set forth in an ALUC's plan. Thus, the county and each affected city is required to make its general plan consistent with the ALUC plan (or to override the commission). Once a local agency has taken this action to the satisfaction of the Airport Land Use Commission, the ALUC's authority to review projects within that jurisdiction is narrowly limited. The only actions for which review remains mandatory are proposed adoption or amendment of general plans, specific plans, zoning ordinances, and building regulations affecting land within an airport influence area. For an ALUC to review individual projects, the local agency must agree to submit them.

## **Placer County Airport Land Use Commission**

State law provides two basic options regarding the structure of airport land use commissions: a standard format or designation of an existing body to serve as the ALUC. Among California's 58 counties, these two formats are used in roughly equal proportions.

Membership on ALUCs structured in the standard manner is specified to be as follows:

- Two members appointed by the county board of supervisors;
- Two members appointed by a selection committee of mayors of the county's cities;
- Two members appointed by airport managers; and
- A seventh member, representing the general public, appointed by the other six.

The designated body format has several possibilities. Most common is for a single- or multi-county council of governments or similar entity to be designated as the ALUC. This is the arrangement established in Placer County where the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency functions as the airport land use commission. Other types of bodies which serve as ALUCs in some counties include the county planning commission, the county airport commission, or the county board of supervisors.

An airport land use commission was first established for Placer County in 1985. Initially, the Sierra Planning Organization (SPO) – a four-county council of governments and economic development agency consisting of El Dorado, Nevada, Placer, and Sierra counties and most of the cities within them – functioned as the ALUC. In its ALUC role, SPO operated under the name " Foothill Airport Land Use Commission."

At the urging of Placer County and the cities of Auburn and Lincoln, the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency (PCTPA) assumed the ALUC responsibility in January 1997. The desire for greater local control over airport land use planning matters was the principal factor which prompted the change in designation. PCTPA already had certain countywide airport planning duties as the designated regional transportation planning agency for all of Placer County except the Tahoe Basin. Moreover, the governing board of PCTPA consists of elected officials from the three airport-owning entities in the county along with representatives from the four other cities in the county.

The PCTPA Executive Director serves as the ALUC secretary with support from the agency staff.

## Relationship of ALUC to County and City Governments

The fundamental relationship between the Placer County Airport Land Use Commission and the governments of Placer County and the cities affected by the *Compatibility Plan* is set by the State Aeronautics Act. The ALUC is not simply an advisory body for the Board of Supervisors or city councils in the manner that their respective planning commissions are. Rather, it is more equivalent to the Placer County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo). Within the bounds defined by state law, the decisions of the ALUC are final and are independent of the county Board of Supervisors or city councils. The ALUC does not need county or city approval in order to adopt this *Compatibility Plan* or to carry out ALUC land use project review responsibilities.

## PLAN PREPARATION AND REVIEW

### State Guidelines

Subsequent to establishment of the Foothill Airport Land Use Commission, arrangements were made with the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) to prepare airport land use compatibility plans for the Auburn and Lincoln airports. (SACOG serves as the ALUC for Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba counties). The *Lincoln Municipal Airport Comprehensive Land Use Plan* was adopted in October 1986. The *Auburn Airport Comprehensive Land Use Plan* was adopted in February 1987 and amended later. No previous plan has been prepared for Blue Canyon Airport.

These plans served their intended function while Placer County remained part of the Foothill ALUC and they have remained in effect with the transfer of ALUC responsibilities to the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency. However, as the new ALUC for Placer County, PCTPA determined that a thorough review and update of the plans was needed. It is the intent that the original plans be superseded with adoption of the new *Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan* represented by this document.

Major influences on the decision to prepare a new *Compatibility Plan* were the Caltrans Aeronautics Program's issuance of the 1993 *Airport Land Use Planning Handbook* and the legislature's enactment of two new laws pertaining to the *Handbook*. A 1994 state law requires ALUCs to be "guided by" information in the *Handbook* when formulating or amending compatibility plans. Another statute enacted in the same

year creates a tie between the *Handbook* and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documents. Lead agencies now must use the *Handbook* as "a technical resource" when assessing airport-related noise and safety impacts of projects located in the vicinity of airports. The *Handbook* provides extensive guidance on preparation and content of compatibility plans, on procedures for ALUC review of local actions, and on the responsibilities of local agencies. The second half of the document contains background information regarding noise and safety compatibility concepts, including valuable, not previously available, data regarding general aviation aircraft accident location patterns and other characteristics.

### **Relationship to Airport Master Plans**

Airport land use compatibility plans are distinct from airport master plans in function and content. In simple terms, the issues addressed by airport master plans are primarily on-airport whereas those of concern in a compatibility plan are off-airport. The purpose of airport master plans is to assess the demand for airport facilities and to guide the development necessary to meet those demands. An airport master plan is prepared for and adopted by the agency which owns and/or operates the airport. In contrast, the purpose of compatibility plans is to assure that incompatible development does not occur on lands surrounding the airports. The responsibility for preparation and adoption of compatibility plans lies with each county's airport land use commission.

This distinction notwithstanding, the relationship between the two types of plans is close. Specifically, Section 21675(a) of the state law requires that ALUC plans be based upon a long-range airport master plan adopted by the airport owner/proprietor. If such a plan does not exist for a particular airport, an airport layout plan may be used subject to approval by the Caltrans Aeronautics Program.

The airport plan status differs for each of the three airports in Placer County:

- **Auburn Municipal Airport** – An airport master plan was adopted by the city in 1996. This plan – and especially the activity forecasts, noise contours, and proposed facility improvements described within it – was utilized as a major input to the Auburn Municipal Airport policies included in the *Placer County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan*.
- **Blue Canyon Airport** – No master plan or layout plan has previously been prepared for this low-activity airport. An airport layout plan was therefore prepared in conjunction with the *Compatibility Plan* study. The drawing shows only existing

facilities; no improvements are shown or currently contemplated. The Blue Canyon Airport layout plan was approved by the Caltrans Aeronautics Program for the purposes of this *Compatibility Plan*. (See letter attached at back of this document.)

- **Lincoln Regional Airport** – No recent master plan has been prepared for Lincoln Regional Airport. However, an airport layout plan was adopted by the city of Lincoln early in 1999. The contemplated future development shown on the drawing – particularly the long-range plans for construction of a parallel runway – is taken into account in the *Compatibility Plan*.

### **Plan Review and Adoption Process**

Preparation of the *Placer County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan* was closely coordinated with the three affected jurisdictions through a Plan Advisory Committee comprised of public works, planning, and airport staff representatives of those jurisdictions. An Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the ALUC also contributed with regard to several key policy decisions.

A draft plan dated September 1999 was widely circulated for local agency and general public review and comment. Public workshops on the plan were held in Auburn and Lincoln in October 1999 and again in September 2000. Both sets of workshops were publicized by means of block advertisements in local papers. Additionally, for the second set of workshops, individual notices were sent to approximately 5,000 owners of property in the three airport influence areas. During this interval, individual meetings also were held with several affected property owners and the staffs of the three local jurisdictions. Numerous revisions to the draft plan were made in response to the comments received.

The Placer County Airport Land Use Commission held a formal public hearing on the plan in May 2000. After consideration of comments offered at the hearing, at the second set of public workshops, and in writing, a final set of revisions to the draft plan was prepared. The Commission then adopted the draft plan and accompanying addendum on October 25, 2000. At that time, the Commission also acted to find that the *Compatibility Plan* is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The present document incorporates all approved revisions. A copy of the Notice of Exemption is included as an attachment at the back of the document.

## PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

### General Plan Consistency

As noted above, state law requires each local agency having jurisdiction over land uses within an ALUC's planning area to modify its general plan and any affected specific plans to be consistent with the compatibility plan. The local agency must take this action within 180 days of when the ALUC adopts or amends its plan. The only other course of action available to local agencies is to override the ALUC by a two-thirds vote after first holding a public hearing and making findings that the agency's plans are consistent with the intent of state law.

A general plan does not need to be identical with the ALUC plan in order to be consistent with it. To meet the consistency test, a general plan must do two things:

- It must specifically address compatibility planning issues, either directly or through reference to a zoning ordinance or other policy document; and
- It must avoid direct conflicts with compatibility planning criteria.

Many community general plans pay little attention to the noise and safety factors associated with airport land use compatibility. Also, some of the designated land uses of property near an airport frequently are contrary to good compatibility planning. It is anticipated that each of the land use jurisdictions affected by this *Compatibility Plan* will need to make some modification to its general plan and/or other land use policy documents in order to meet the plan consistency requirements.

[An initial assessment of the consistency between the current local general plans and the policies set forth in this ALUC *Compatibility Plan* is contained in Appendix H herein.]

Compatibility planning issues can be reflected in a general plan in several ways:

- **Incorporate Policies into Existing General Plan Elements** – One method of achieving the necessary planning consistency is to modify existing general plan elements. For example, airport land use noise policies could be inserted into the noise element, safety policies could be placed into a safety element, and the

primary compatibility criteria and associated maps plus the procedural policies might fit into the land use element. With this approach, the majority of the *Compatibility Plan* policies would be fully incorporated into a local jurisdiction's general plan.

- **Adopt a General Plan Airport Element** – Another approach is to prepare a separate airport element of the general plan. Such a format may be advantageous when a community's general plan also needs to address on-airport development and operational issues. Modification of other plan elements to provide cross referencing and eliminate conflicts would still be necessary.
- **Adopt Compatibility Plan as Stand-Alone Document** – Jurisdictions selecting this option would simply adopt as a local policy document the relevant portions of the *Compatibility Plan* – specifically, Chapter 2 and the applicable airport policies and maps from Chapter 3, plus any background information they wish to include. Changes to the community's existing general plan would be minimal. Policy reference to the separate *Compatibility Plan* document would need to be added and any direct land use or other conflicts with compatibility planning criteria would have to be removed. Limited discussion of compatibility planning issues could be included in the general plan, but the substance of most compatibility policies would appear only in the *Compatibility Plan*.
- **Implementing Compatibility Policies Solely through Zoning** – This approach is similar to the one above except that the local jurisdiction would not explicitly adopt the *Compatibility Plan* as policy. Instead, the compatibility policies would be restructured either as an airport combining zone ordinance or otherwise incorporated into the criteria specified for regular land use zone districts. Implementation of the compatibility policies would be solely through the zoning ordinance. Policy reference to airport compatibility in the general plan could be as simple as mentioning support for the airport land use commission and stating that policy implementation is by means of the combining zone.

## **Airport Combining Zone Concept**

One mechanism available to local jurisdictions to implement various airport land use compatibility criteria and review procedures is to adopt an airport combining zone ordinance. A combining zone serves as an overlay of standard community-wide land use zones and modifies or limits the uses permitted by the underlying zone. Flood hazard combining zoning is a common example. An airport combining zone ordinance can serve as a convenient means of bringing various airport compatibility criteria into one place.

Airport-related height limit zoning ordinances adopted by the affected Placer County jurisdictions can serve as a starting point for an airport combining zone ordinance. Other components necessary to fully implement ALUC plan policies – structural sound attenuation requirements and provisions for a buyer awareness program, for example – could be added. (An outline of topics which could be addressed in an airport combining zone is included in Appendix F.)

## **Project Referrals**

In addition to the types of land use actions for which referral to the ALUC is mandatory in accordance with state law, the *Compatibility Plan* specifies other land use projects which either must or should be submitted for review. These *major land use actions* are defined in Chapter 2. Beginning with when this plan is adopted and until such time as local jurisdictions have made the necessary modifications to their general plans, all of these major land use actions are to be submitted to the commission for review. After local agencies have made their general plans consistent with the *Compatibility Plan*, the ALUC requests that these major actions continue to be submitted on a voluntary basis.

## **PLAN CONTENTS**

The most important components of this plan are found in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 presents airport compatibility and review policies applicable countywide. Chapter 3 contains the compatibility map for each airport together with individual policies and some explanatory notes for that airport.

The remainder of the document constitutes supporting material. Chapters 4 through 6 contain background information regarding each of the airports in alphabetical sequence. The appendices provide other information related to airport land use planning in general and airport land use commissions in particular.

