

Historical Background of Threat to Reid Hillview Airport

In 2012, Santa Clara County was engaged in a dispute with the FAA and a Parachute Operator over parachute jumping at San Martin Airport. During that dispute, the FAA blocked AIP Grant funding for the county airports as provided in their regulations. After the dispute was resolved, and jump operations began, the Airport Director decided in 2016 to refuse to apply for additional FAA grant Funding, citing the need for more “operational flexibility” but also to avoid assuming further FAA Grant Obligations requiring the county to operate its airports for a minimum of 20 years from the acceptance of each grant.

In 2017 the county staff directed a revision of the Airport Business Plan which produced recommendations to resume accepting grant funds, and also recommended a number of facility changes and new FBO models. In December of 2018, the Board of Supervisors was to review the Business Plan, and ultimately voted 3 to 2 (Chavez/Cortese/Yeager in favor, Wasserman/Simitian opposed) to continue refusing FAA Grant funding and perform a number of studies around the use of leaded fuel, and closure of Reid Hillview Airport and relocation of its activity to San Martin Airport. One consequence of that vote is that grant obligations around operation of Reid Hillview Airport are due to expire in 2031, potentially giving the county the option to close the airport and redevelop the property. Without FAA grants to pay for capital improvements, the airport enterprise fund will operate at a deficit, costing the county general fund. The county has declined to pursue commercial development around the perimeter of the airport which could generate sufficient income to fund both airports into the future. To date, the county has only studied (at a cost of \$400,000) alternative uses for the Reid Hillview Airport site. The FAA has indicated that San Martin is not a candidate for a Control Tower, nor do the residents support expansion. San Jose State’s Aviation Department has stated clearly that they are not able to shift their programs to San Martin Airport either, and the program would terminate if Reid Hillview Airport is closed.