

# MONTEREY REGIONAL AIRPORT: UNDERSTANDING NOISE



*Commercial aircraft takes off over Canyon del Rey neighborhood. Photo by Civil Grand Juror.*

## **SUMMARY**

The Monterey County Civil Grand Jury (CGJ) received a complaint regarding the noise aircraft produce when approaching and departing from the Monterey Regional Airport, particularly the annoyance of early morning and late evening flights. The complaint instigated an investigation by the CGJ into the operation of the airport and its response to community noise complaints.

The Monterey Peninsula Airport District (MPAD) regulates and manages all operational functions which take place on the ground. MPAD does not have the authority to regulate what happens in the airspace, including flight paths. Those regulations are dictated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and are done so uniformly across the United States.

The CGJ found that the public is largely unaware of the multiple factors involved in airport noise, flight paths, and schedules.

MPAD identifies “Voluntary Procedures” on its website for pilots. Noise management recommendations for non-operational hours are unenforceable because Monterey Peninsula Airport operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week according to the FAA regulations. A 24/7 airport must be available for emergencies, military operations, commercial carriers, weather delays, and aircraft operational issues.

MPAD regularly reviews and logs complaints received. In many cases MPAD responds to specific complaints; however, it does not respond to mass-generated complaints. Most complaints are derived from a single event, such as the California International Airshow Salinas or the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

The CGJ found that MPAD could improve its community outreach efforts, especially regarding noise complaints. In addition, public complaints and MPAD responses should be more easily found on its website.

MPAD has a distinguished history of providing the Monterey Bay area with a variety of services responsive to our community's air transportation needs.



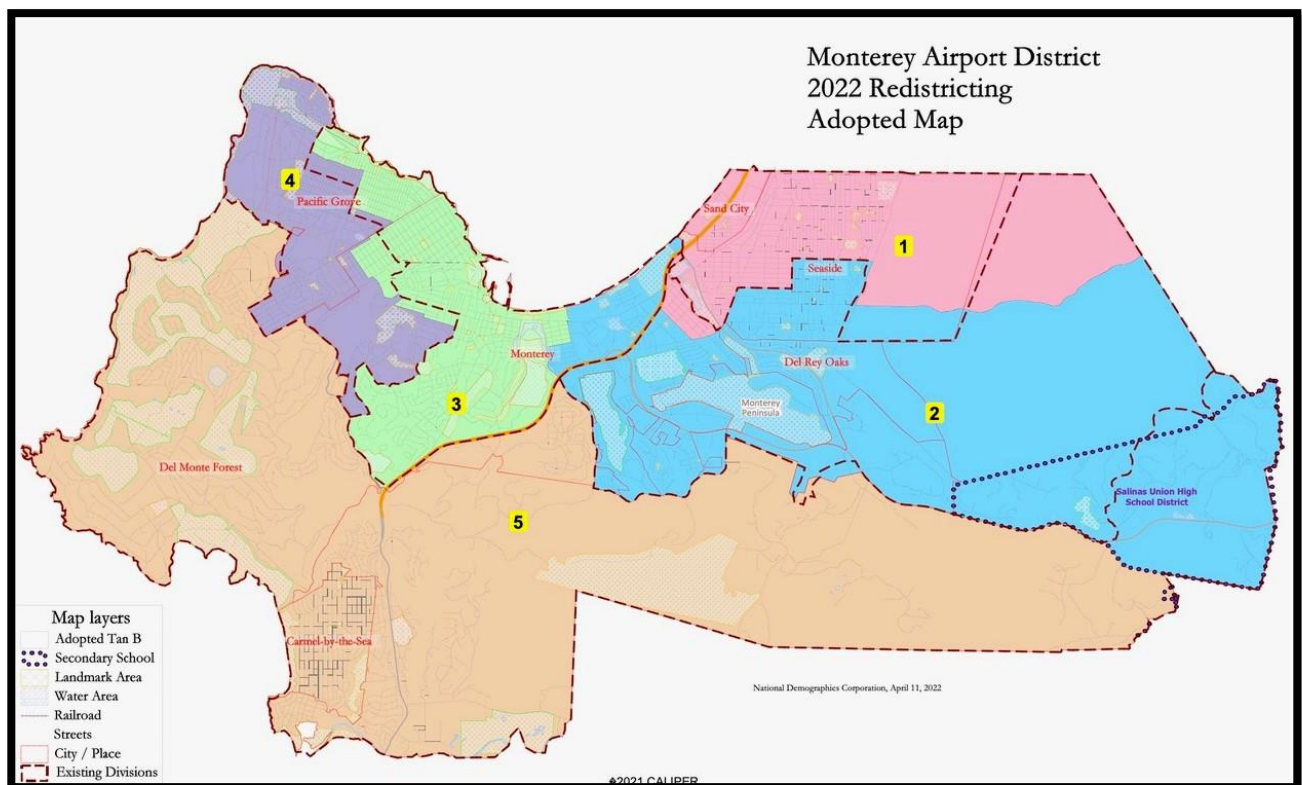
*Aerial photography on display at Monterey Regional Airport. Photo taken by Civil Grand Juror.*



## BACKGROUND

On March 31, 1941, the Monterey Peninsula Airport District, a California Public Agency, was created. MPAD is governed by five publicly elected board members, one from each district represented in the map below. The primary role of the Board of Directors is to establish and oversee policy implementation.

This Special District is not incorporated into the County of Monterey or any municipality. It currently occupies 498 acres of land. Its boundaries encompass the cities of Carmel, Del Rey Oaks, Monterey, Pacific Grove, and Sand City; portions of Seaside, Pebble Beach, and Carmel Highlands; the west end of Carmel Valley and the Monterey-Salinas Highway to Laureles Grade.



*Airport District Map provided by MPAD*

A special district is directly accountable to its voters and taxpayers through its elected board. It is required to submit annual financial and compensation reports to the State Controller and follow meeting requirements mandated by state laws pertaining to public

meetings, bonded debt, record keeping, and elections. MPAD operates as an enterprise district that collects its fees for services from customers and leaseholders. In addition, it receives grants to fund specific projects. Unlike most enterprise districts, MPAD serves populations beyond its board district boundaries.

The mission of the Monterey Regional Airport is to provide the region with convenient commercial and general aviation access to the national air transportation system; operate the airport in a safe, efficient, sustainable, fiscally responsible manner; and develop the airport to meet future needs, opportunities, and challenges.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The CGJ conducted multiple interviews with individuals familiar with the operations of MPAD and toured its newly constructed fire station to gain a wider perspective of its overall operations.

The MPAD website was reviewed as a source of information to supplement the interviews and provide historical context. Information about the management of MPAD, its contracts, logs, policies, and procedures were obtained and reviewed.

The CGJ also examined third-party reports on airport noise including the Federal Aviation Administration policy regarding noise restrictions such as the Congressional Research Service, Federal Airport Noise Regulations, and Programs dated September 27, 2021. In addition, the CGJ researched other California Grand Jury Reports regarding airports.



*Commercial aircraft deplanes at gate with North Monterey neighborhood in the background.  
Photo taken by Civil Grand Juror.*

## **DISCUSSION**

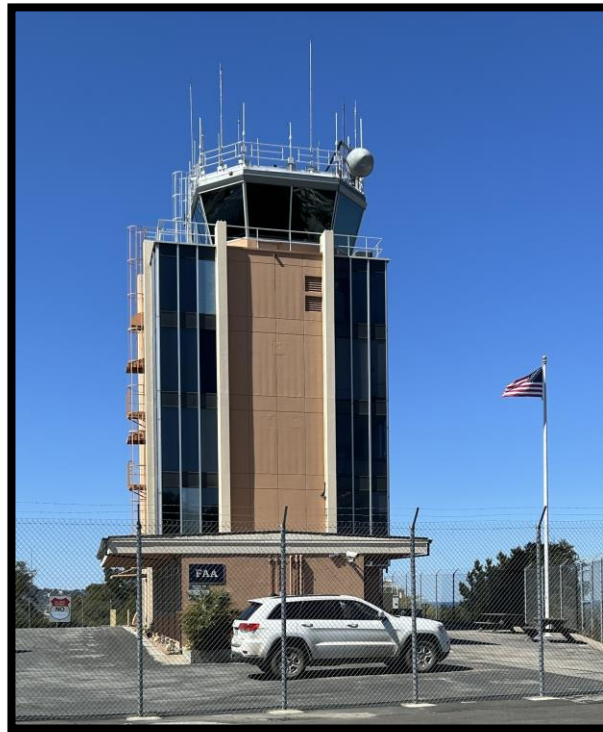
The FAA is empowered with overseeing both airports and airspace in the United States. The intent of the FAA is to achieve safe airport operations and to fulfill its responsibilities of assuring that safe conditions exist. This demands experienced professionals to manage ground operations and to control air traffic above and around all airports.

The FAA categorizes all airports according to several criteria including runway length, lighting, and tower staffing. According to the FAA, the Monterey Regional Airport must operate 24/7 and remain open for all commercial, private, or military aircraft to land or take off.

FAA regulations control the flight paths and aircraft routing into and out of every airport. MPAD does not control airspace routing. An airport can only encourage pilots on Visual Flight Rules (VFR) flights to fly over unpopulated areas.

MPAD provides valuable travel and hospitality services to the communities of California's Central Coast. MPAD is governed by an elected board of directors who represent the community in its local air transportation needs. MPAD is managed by staff

with multiple years of experience in the business of airport operations. It promotes transparency in its operations and is financially stable.



*Monterey Regional Airport control tower. Photo taken by Civil Grand Juror.*

MPAD operates similarly to a shopping mall, earning a significant portion of its revenue from rent received from commercial airlines, car rental properties, private aircraft hangars, shops, restaurants (including Woody's at the Airport and Tarp's), and other tenants. The sale of jet fuel is also an important source of revenue.

Noise is a common nuisance related to airports, especially to people living along common flight paths or close to the airport. This issue is being addressed slowly nationwide as newer commercial and private aircraft are considerably quieter and more fuel efficient. Aircraft are louder when landing than when taking off as greater surface area, essential to slowing down, generates more sound. General laws of aerodynamics dictate that aircraft land and take off into the wind. This explains why aircraft use different flight paths and land in different directions.

The planned creation of a new terminal will end MPAD's noncompliance with FAA regulations, largely due to the insufficient size of the current airplane taxiway. The new

terminal is also designed to provide an electric system for recharging aircraft. This will eliminate the noisy, diesel-powered vehicles currently used for this vital purpose.



*Commercial aircraft deplanes on tarmac with Monterey neighborhood in the background.  
Photo taken by Civil Grand Juror.*

## **FINDINGS**

- F1. A summary of noise complaints is only available inside monthly board packets making it difficult for the public to find and review them, adding to community misunderstanding.
- F2. MPAD's complaint response is not well understood by the community causing frustration.
- F3. Although the MPAD has community relations committees, these committees do not effectively communicate, involve, or educate the public regarding air traffic noise resulting in community complaints and dissatisfaction.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. MPAD create a more visible area on its website that shares public complaints and MPAD's response to them within 72-hours of receipt by October 31, 2024.
- R2. MPAD create a more prominent statement on its website explaining the parameters regarding a 24/7 airport specific to noise management by August 31, 2024.
- R3. MPAD create and approve an internal written policy and procedure for responding to citizen noise complaints by August 31, 2024.
- R4. MPAD develop a more proactive community outreach program regarding air traffic noise, construction updates, and other information impacting the community by October 31, 2024.
- R5. MPAD develop a Citizens Committee to provide community input regarding operations and noise mitigation efforts by October 31, 2024.
- R6. MPAD increase its visibility on social media to convey information regarding the Airport District by October 31, 2024.



*Commercial aircraft awaits servicing on the tarmac with North Monterey neighborhood and the Monterey Bay in the distance. Photo taken by Civil Grand Juror.*

## REQUESTS FOR RESPONSES

The following responses are required pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05:

From the following governing bodies within 90 days of the publication of this report:



- Board of Directors, MPAD
  - Findings: F1 - F3
  - Recommendations: R1 - R6

## INVITED RESPONSE

From the following individual:

- Executive Director, MPAD
  - Findings: F1 - F3
  - Recommendations: R1 - R6

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

## GLOSSARY

CGJ	Civil Grand Jury
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
MPAD	Monterey Peninsula Airport District
VFR	Visual Flight Rules relate to aircraft without auto pilot equipment

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Monterey Regional Airport  
<https://www.montereyairport.com/>

Districts make the Difference  
<https://www.districtsmakethedifference.org/home>

Federal Aviation Administration  
[https://www.faa.gov/air\\_traffic/publications/atpubs/pham\\_html/chap10\\_section\\_3.html](https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/pham_html/chap10_section_3.html)

Congressional Research Service, Federal Airport Noise Regulations and Programs dated September 27, 2021  
<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46920>

## DISCLAIMER

One civil grand juror recused themselves from all meetings and discussions regarding this report and abstained from voting on its approval.