



# City of Palo Alto

## City Council Staff Report

(ID # 11139)

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**Report Type:** Informational Report      **Meeting Date:** 5/4/2020

**Council Priority:** Land Use and Transportation Planning

**Summary Title:** 2019 Annual Palo Alto Airport Noise Report

**Title:** 2019 Annual Palo Alto Airport Noise Report Identifying Noise Trends in the Surrounding Areas and Determining Compliance With Established Voluntary Noise Abatement Procedures

**From:** City Manager

**Lead Department:** Public Works

### **Recommendation**

This is an informational report only and no Council action is required.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the Palo Alto Airport Annual Aircraft Noise Complaints Report is to identify noise trends in the surrounding areas and determine compliance with established voluntary noise abatement procedures. Attachment A is the annual report prepared by the Public Works Department's Airport Division staff on the aircraft noise complaints received during the 2019 calendar year.

The Palo Alto Airport (PAO) receives noise complaints via e-mail at [pao@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:pao@cityofpaloalto.org) and a designated hotline, 650-329-2405. Staff reviews and responds timely to all complaints, ascertaining from complainants their contact information and the date, time, and description of the offending occurrence. Staff reviews and compiles the data to determine flying activity trends. Staff contacts pilots when violations are observed or reported, advising them of established procedures, requesting compliance, and reminding them about our city's strong commitment to limiting community impacts from airplane noise.

This report is generated on an annual basis and posted to the airport's webpage: [www.cityofpaloalto.org/PAO](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/PAO).

Courtesy copies to: Palo Alto Airport Association

### **Attachments:**

- Attachment A: Palo Alto Airport - 2019 Annual Aircraft Noise Complaints Report



# PALO ALTO AIRPORT

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

## 2019 ANNUAL NOISE COMPLAINTS REPORT

(January 2019 to  
December 2019)

**Vision:** Palo Alto Airport strives to balance the rights of pilots to fly with the rights of neighbors to a peaceful living environment. This document is a report of the noise complaints received by the airport in 2019. Airport staff uses this information to identify trends in neighboring communities. These trends inform communications between airport staff and pilots on the issue of noise.



## Introduction:

The following is a report of noise complaints received by Palo Alto Airport (PAO) in 2019. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) defines air travel routes and procedures, including defining separation distances between aircraft, determining hazards to aviation and all other safety criteria for aircraft, and is responsible for directing and enforcing the movement of aircraft in flight. Although organizations can petition the FAA regarding flight procedures, the FAA has the final say in what is safe and acceptable. The Airport Noise and Capacity Act (ANCA) of 1990 federally prohibits public-use airports from restricting airspace in any way.

The FAA measures noise based on the Yearly Day and Night Average Sound Level (DNL) and the Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL). While both are essentially the same, airports in California use the CNEL method to measure noise. CNEL is a method of averaging single event aircraft noise into a weighted 24-hour average. The system adds penalties to all events occurring during the evening (7pm – 10pm) and the night (10pm – 7am). The Santa Clara County Airport Land Use Commission (SCC ALUC) performed a noise study for the Palo Alto Airport using the CNEL to determine the noise contours for 55, 60, 65, and 70 decibels. The contour map is included as **Attachment A**.

Regarding safety and altitude, the FAA has in place Federal Aviation Regulations (FARs) that establish Minimum Safe Altitudes (MSAs) for aircraft. For fixed wing aircraft, the MSA is 1000 feet above ground when over congested areas and 500 feet when not over congested areas. These MSAs apply to all fixed wing aircraft except when necessary for landing and takeoff operations. Helicopters are exempt from these altitude restrictions due to the nature of their flight. These minimum altitudes are enforced by the FAA Flight Standards District Office in San Jose, not by the Palo Alto Airport. Palo Alto Airport cannot tell pilots when or where to fly; the airport, however, does have voluntary noise abatement procedures that Palo Alto Airport recommends that pilots follow. (See the Noise Abatement Procedures section below.)

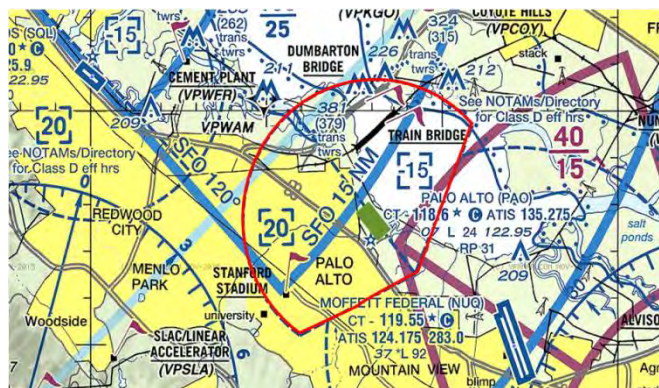
The airport receives noise complaints via email at [pao@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:pao@cityofpaloalto.org) and a noise complaint hotline, 650-329-2405. Airport staff review and timely respond to all complaints, ascertaining as much information from complainants, including contact information, date, time and description of the occurrence. Various flight trackers can be used in an attempt to help identify the aircraft involved and verify if FAA regulations or Palo Alto Airport procedures were violated. The airport staff reviews and compiles all data to determine trends with flying activities.

## Purpose:

The purpose of the Palo Alto Airport Annual Noise Report is to identify noise trends in the surrounding areas and determine compliance with established voluntary noise abatement procedures.

## Airspace:

The Palo Alto Airport airspace is unique. The congested Bay Area airspace is dominated by SFO Class Bravo airspace, which encompasses a 30 nautical mile radius around SFO.



Palo Alto Airport Sectional Map  
Palo Alto Airport in Green  
PAO Airspace highlighted in Red

Source: <http://vfrmap.com/?type=vfrc&lat=37.461&lon=-122.115&zoom=10>

Underneath the Class Bravo airspace lays the Class Charlie airspace of Oakland and San Jose international airports. Finally, Moffett Airfield lies approximately 4 nautical miles to the southeast of Palo Alto Airport.

As a result, Palo Alto Airport airspace ends only 1.5 nautical miles southeast of the Palo Alto Airport's single runway (Runway 13/31). To land at Palo Alto Airport, aircraft must turn before entering Moffett's airspace, resulting in aircraft having to space themselves in traffic patterns over the peninsula when take-off/landing volumes peak. The FAA's Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) at Palo Alto Airport has a letter of agreement with Moffett's ATCT providing Palo Alto Airport aircraft with extensions into Moffett airspace when Moffett airfield is not in use. The additional airspace is a useful mitigation tool during busy times.

Further restrictions in Palo Alto Airport airspace come from San Jose Class C airspace, starting at 1500 feet Mean Sea Level, just southeast of Palo Alto Airport and SFO Class B airspace, starting at 2500 feet Mean Sea Level, just northeast of the Palo Alto Airport. Both are identified on the Palo Alto Airport Sectional Map: San Jose Class C is shown with thick magenta lines and SFO Class B is shown with thick blue lines. These restrictions play a vital role in aircraft departures, in turn influencing noise abatement procedures for the Palo Alto Airport.

#### **Noise Abatement Procedures:**

Noise abatement procedures are voluntary procedures that the airport asks pilots to follow. The airport is prohibited from restricting airspace. Palo Alto Airport staff will speak with individual pilots and educate them about the voluntary noise abatement procedures. The Palo Alto Airport cannot levy fines on pilots that violate the voluntary noise procedures. For illustrated noise abatement procedures reference Palo Alto Airport Pilots Handout included as **Attachment B**.

The noise abatement procedures depend on the runway that is in use at the time. Depending on weather patterns, aircraft can depart on Runway 31 to the northeast or Runway 13 to the south east. Approximately 90% of the time, weather conditions require the use of Runway 31. Pilots are asked to not make a left crosswind departure from Runway 31, but instead make a "Left Dumbarton Departure" (fly to the Dumbarton Auto Bridge before making a left turn and flying over East Palo Alto) or a right 270 degree turn before departing to the south or west. When aircraft are using Runway 13, pilots are asked to make a left 270 degree turn. In addition to these procedures, pilots are asked to climb to 1500 feet or above ground before crossing Highway 101 and reduce power when safely able.

For arrivals, it is standard practice and necessary for pilots to descend to pattern altitude before entering the traffic pattern around PAO, sometimes requiring aircraft to descend below the 1500 feet minimum of departing aircraft over Palo Alto. As these aircraft are descending to land the engines are generally powered back and quieter than ascending aircraft.

Airport staff continuously engages with tenants and pilots about the voluntary noise abatement procedures, noting that safety always supersedes noise.

#### **Findings:**

The Palo Alto Airport remains one of the busiest general aviation airports in the bay area with an average of 162,831 operations per year since 2010, significantly less than the average of 190,812

operations per year between 2000 and 2009 (Table 1). An operation is defined as either a takeoff or a landing and a touch-and-go procedure will account for two operations.

**Table 1. Airport Operations**

	Air Taxi	Military	Total		Air Taxi	Military	Total
2000	2	0	197283	2010	2077	6	158217
2001	29	370	216483	2011	1572	8	170389
2002	62	1	208755	2012	1700	16	176564
2003	17	1	212981	2013	1628	14	172653
2004	619	12	199453	2014	1518	22	179900
2005	2397	28	184821	2015	1082	118	172132
2006	1932	17	176570	2016	708	52	153238
2007	1440	318	181883	2017	872	146	148769
2008	1697	280	174332	2018	760	133	146181
2009	1650	301	155556	2019	920	210	150266
Average	910.5556	114.1111	190812	Average	1284	73	162831

During the 2019 Calendar year, the Airport logged 1050 total noise complaints from 21 households. Table 2 shows the number of complaints by quarter, and includes the totals from 2018.

**Table 2. Complaints Received**

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total 2019	Total 2018
Complaints	55	467	499	29	1050	110
Households	6	8	9	10	21	32

Table 3 sorts the complaints logged into three sections. The first one is PAO which includes all complaints that involve aircraft that performed an operation at the airport. The next section is General which includes complaints that did not include a specific aircraft or incident of noise. These complaints may or may not involve aircraft from PAO. The last section is Non-PAO, which include aircraft that are not based or did not operate at the airport. These flights could include CHP, Coast Guard, Air Taxis, Survey and or banner towing operations. Also included in Table 3 are the totals for 2018.

**Table 3. Aircraft Association**

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total 2019	Total 2018
PAO	55	467	499	21	1042	100
General	0	0	0	8	8	2
Non-PAO	0	0	0	0	0	8

Table 4 below provides a detailed breakdown of the 1050 complaints by city. Most complaints came from Saratoga, with 974 complaints logged from 1 household. There were no observed violations to voluntary noise abatement procedures in flights over Saratoga, and staff explained the procedures, regulations, and nature of the airspace to the resident. Palo Alto was the second most impacted city, with 26 complaints from 9 households.

**Table 4. PAO Noise Complaints by City**

City	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Total 2019		Total 2018	
	C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H
East Palo Alto			2	2	1	1			3	3	2	2
Fremont											1	1
Los Altos	8	1	12	1	1	1	1	1	22	1	7	2
Menlo Park					1	1			1	1	3	3
Mountain View							3	2	3	2	1	1
Palo Alto	4	1	2	1	10	4	10	6	26	9	26	11
Portola Valley											5	5
San Carlos											1	1
Saratoga	32	1	447	1	480	1	15	1	974	1		
Scotts Valley											1	1
Sunnyvale	9	2	1	1	6	1			16	2	62	3
Woodside	2	1	2	1					4	1	1	1
Unknown			1	1					1	1		
Total	55	6	467	8	499	9	29	10	1050	21	110	32

Table 5 below shows the general type of aircraft identified as causing noise complaints at the airport. There are 2 types of engines for aircraft utilizing PAO. The first is reciprocating which is similar to an automobile engine, and the second is turboprop which is a turbine engine with a propeller that produces thrust. Aircraft are further differentiated by “multi” and “single” which denotes the number of engines for the aircraft. In the case of PAO all multi engine aircraft have 2 engines. As Table 5, shows single reciprocating aircraft produced the largest portion of noise complaints. This class of aircraft represents most of the fleet at PAO and usually consists of Cessna, Pipers and Cirrus aircraft. There were 10 complaints where staff was unable to identify the type of aircraft involved in the flight.

**Table 5. Aircraft Type**

	Helicopter	Multi-Reciprocating	Multi-Turboprop	Single-Reciprocating	Single-Turboprop	Unknown
2019 Complaints	12	40	15	951	22	10
2018 Complaints	2	8	2	81	5	2

Table 6 below shows the number of violations of the established noise abatement procedures. Airport staff makes every effort to talk to all pilots that violate these procedures, but it is difficult to talk to all transient pilots about noise abatement procedures. It is not the role of the FAA Air Traffic Control Tower to advise pilots of the noise abatement procedures, but the City has develop a working relationship with the ATCT and Air Controllers do advise pilots of the noise abatement procedures when they have the ability.

**Table 6. Observed Violations of Noise Abatement Procedures**

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total
Tenant	3	0	1	6	10
Transient	1	0	0	3	4
Unknown	1	0	0	1	2
Total	5	0	1	10	16
Complaints	55	467	499	29	1050
Operations	33,123	44,250	44,175	28718	150,266
% Compliance	99.98%	100.00%	99.998%	99.97%	99.99%

# Attachment A

## PAO Noise Contour Map

Following is a noise contour map for PAO, adopted by the Santa Clara County Airport Land Use Commission (SCC ALUC) in their 2008 Comprehensive Land Use Plan, reflecting the forecasted noise contours for Palo Alto Airport in 2022.

SCC ALUC used the Integrated Noise Model which considers airport altitude, mean temperature, runway configuration, aircraft flight track definition, aircraft departure and approach profiles, aircraft traffic volume and fleet mix, and flight track utilization by aircraft types. All data is entered into the CNEL formula to prepare the noise contours for Palo Alto Airport.

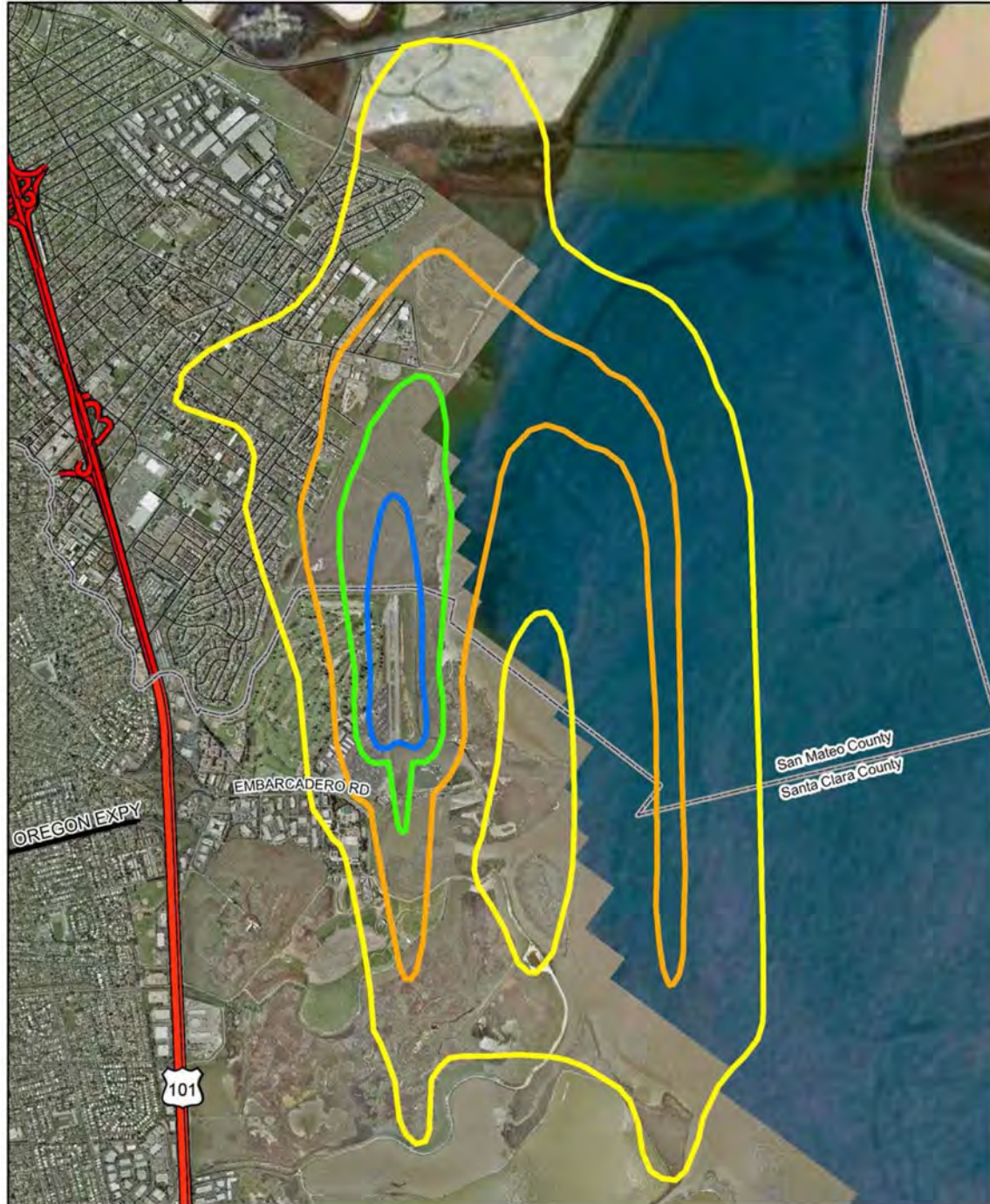
The 65 decibel (db) noise level of the airport extends beyond the airport boundaries, but is only over Palo Alto Golf Course, Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve, and the salt marshes in San Mateo County.

Refer to [https://www.sccgov.org/sites/dpd/DocsForms/Documents/ALUC\\_20081119\\_PAO\\_CLUP.pdf](https://www.sccgov.org/sites/dpd/DocsForms/Documents/ALUC_20081119_PAO_CLUP.pdf), for a more detailed description of how the SCC ALUC prepared this map.



# 2022 Forecasted Palo Alto Airport Noise Contour Map

## Palo Alto Airport



Noise Contours (CNEL)  
55 60 65 70

2022 Aircraft Noise Contours  
Figure 5

0 1,000 2,000 4,000 Feet

This map created by Santa Clara County Planning Office. The GIS data was compiled from various sources. While deemed reliable, the Planning Office assumes no liability for errors. 11/18/2022 - Y:\MUTUAL\GIS\projects\PA\PA\_noise\_figures\_5\_18.mxd

## **Attachment B**

### **PAO Pilot Handout**

Santa Clara County created a Pilot Handout for Palo Alto Airport that described the noise abatement procedures. When the City of Palo Alto assumed control of the airport, the existing noise abatement procedures were adopted, with one exception, "pilots must maintain 1500 feet or above across Highway 101" was replaced with "Aircraft are asked to climb to and maintain at least 1500 feet before crossing Highway 101." The change is consistent with the voluntary nature of noise abatement procedures as airports are federally prohibited from instructing pilots how to fly.



**CITY OF PALO ALTO**

Palo Alto Airport General Information  
 Bayside Pattern Alt - 800 feet  
 Peninsula Side Pattern Alt – 1000 feet MSL  
 ATCT hours of operation – 0700 – 2100 hrs  
 ATC / CTA Frequency – 118.600  
 ATC Ground Frequency – 125.000  
 Fuel Frequencies – 122.85 or 122.95  
 Airport Office Phone # – (650) 329-2444

Palo Alto Airport asks for your cooperation in reducing the noise impact of aircraft on the neighboring communities.

**CAUTION**

The Palo Alto Baylands preserve is located immediately to the north of the airport. Watch for birds on or near the airport.

Be alert for bikes & pedestrians crossing a levee road 290' from departure end to Runway 31.

**Noise Abatement Procedures**

Please fly neighborly and be aware of the surrounding communities. There are noise sensitive areas to the west and south of the Airport. Aircraft are asked to climb and maintain at least 1500 feet before crossing Highway 101.

Fly over the bay whenever possible.

Please use reduced power setting whenever possible to reduce noise impacts. Even a reduction in a 200 RPM can significantly reduce noise.

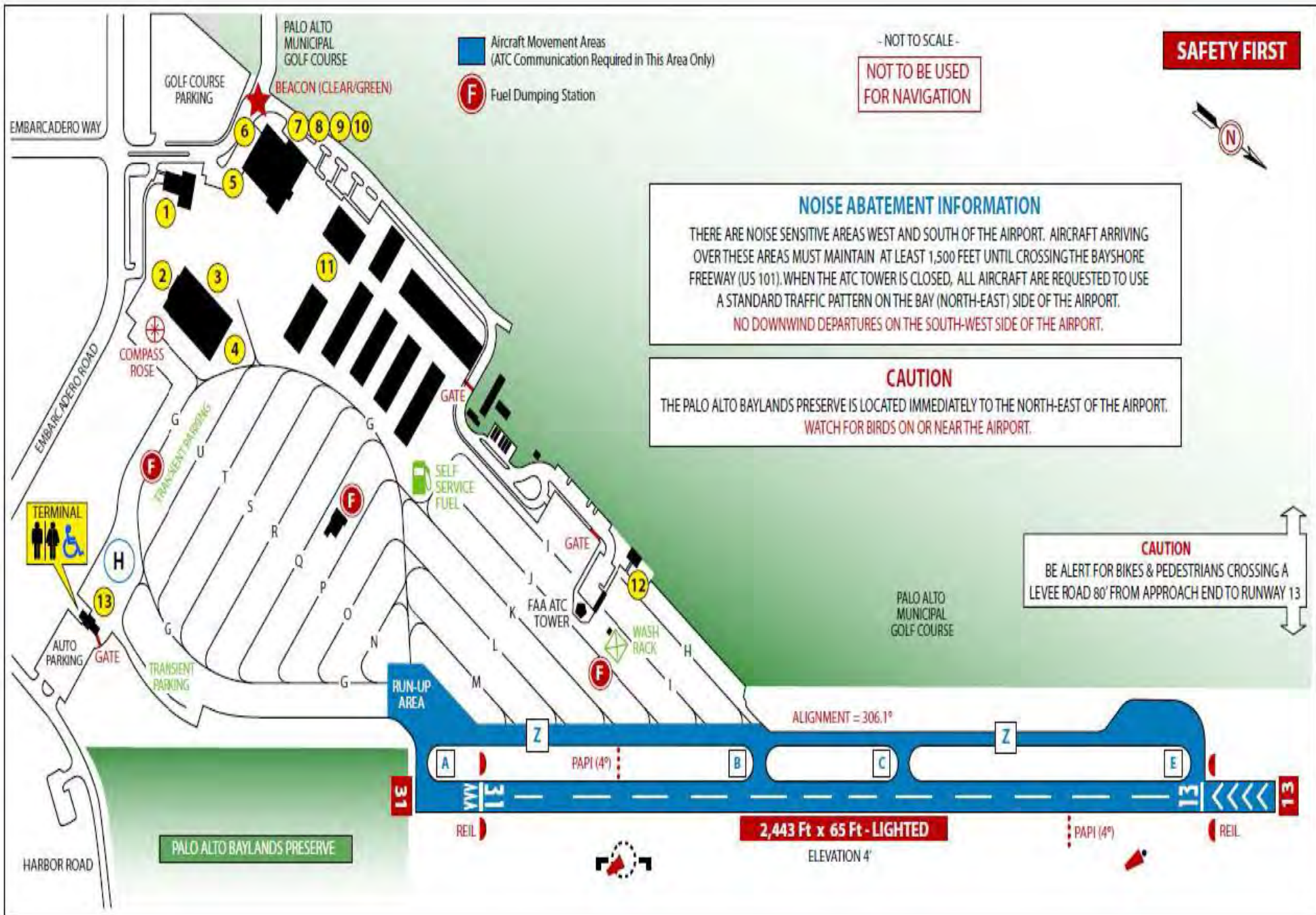
**Safety Always Supersedes Noise Abatement**

**Preferred West Bound Departures**

**Runway 31**  
**Left Dumbarton Departure**  
 When departing runway 31 turn right 10° on takeoff and climb over the bay. Fly straight to Dumbarton Auto Bridge before making a left turn to fly over the peninsula or to the south. Cross Highway 101 at or above 1500 feet.

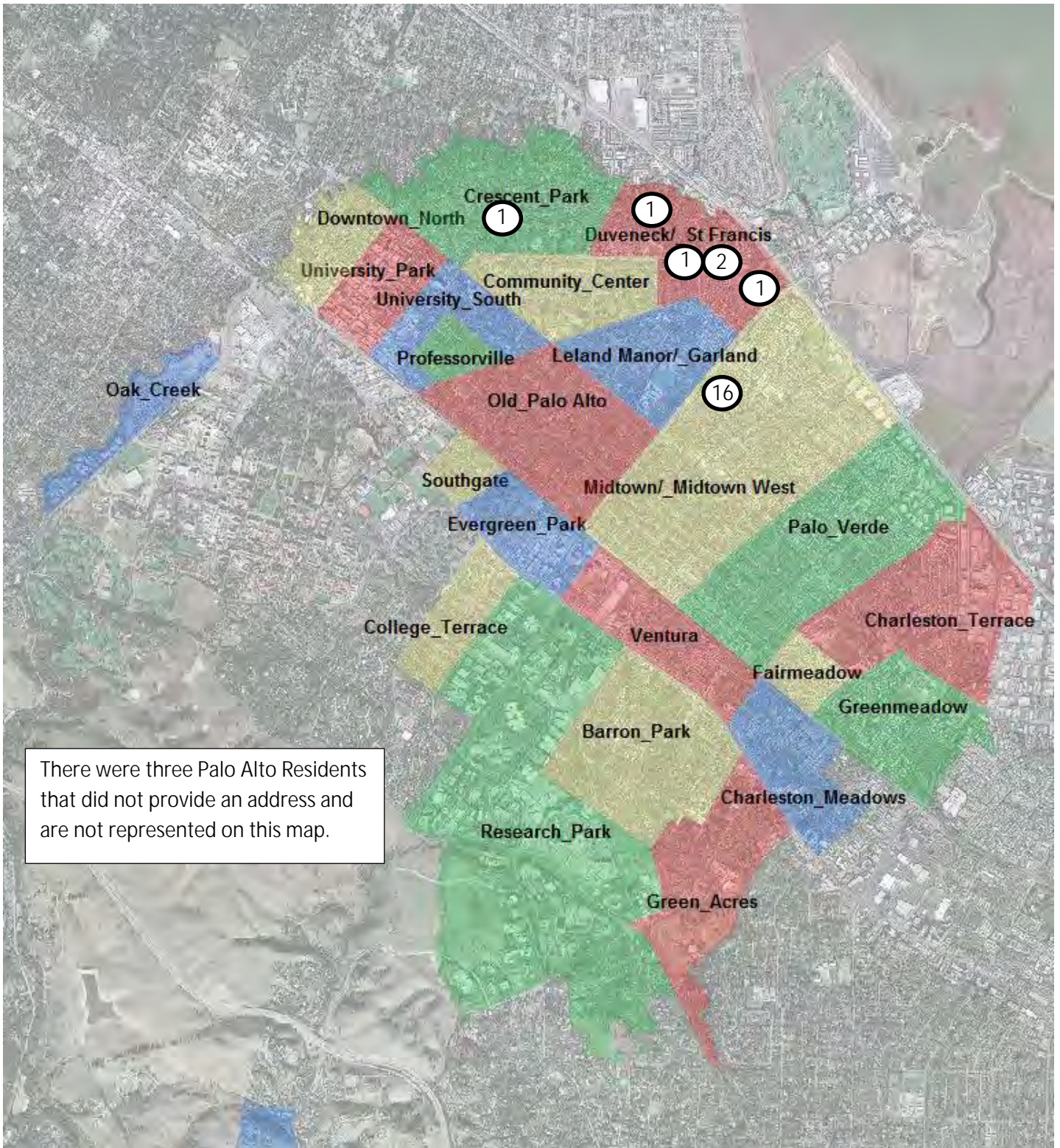
**Left 270 Departure**  
 After takeoff climb over the bay while making a 270° turn and heading west or south over the peninsula. Cross Highway 101 at or above 1500 feet.

**Runway 13**  
**Right 270 Departure**  
 After takeoff turn right over and climb over the bay while making a 270° turn and heading west or south over peninsula. Cross Highway 101 at or above 1500 feet.



# Attachment C

## Map of Palo Alto Households



This map shows the approximate location and number of complaints from households within Palo Alto. This map was generated using GIS by airport staff.