



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Western-Pacific Region
Airports Division

San Francisco Airports District Office
1000 Marina Boulevard, Suite 220
Brisbane, CA 94005-1835

October 26, 2016

Mr. Michael Murdter
Director, Santa Clara County Roads and Airports Department
101 Skyport Drive
San Jose, California 95110

Subject: Status of National Environmental Policy Act, Environmental Evaluations of Proposed Santa Clara County Airport Solar Energy Photovoltaic Projects at Reid Hillview Airport (RHV) and South County Airport (E16)

Dear Mr. Murdter:

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has reviewed the proposed documentation of Categorical Exclusions submitted by the County of Santa Clara on October 6, 2016, for the Solar Energy Photovoltaic Projects at Reid Hillview Airport and South County Airport. The Reid-Hillview Airport solar project Categorical Exclusion, page A-2, states that its development area includes approximately 3.2 acres of land. The South County Airport solar project Categorical Exclusion, page A-1, states that its development area includes approximately 3.2 acres of land. As explained in more detail below, the FAA cannot use Categorical Exclusions to meet the environmental impact evaluation requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act for these projects because the projects are each larger than 3 acres.


FAA Order 1050.1F, *Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures*, Paragraph 5-6.3 (i), which you cited as the basis for the two projects being eligible for Categorical Exclusions, limits the use of the Categorical Exclusion for solar projects to projects that do not involve more than 3 acres of land. That 3-acre limit includes all aspects of the projects including land needed for easements and rights-of-way associated with building and installing the equipment, any trenching and cabling that would connect the installed solar equipment to other parts of the airport or an existing electrical grid, and any access roads required for the projects. Therefore, as these projects exceed the 3-acre limit, FAA Order 1050.1F, Categorical Exclusion 5-6.3 (i) for solar projects of 3 acres or less does not apply.

In order to proceed with these projects as proposed, Santa Clara County will need to prepare a National Environmental Policy Act, Environmental Assessment (EA), for each project and submit those EAs to our office for FAA review and evaluation. The EAs must meet the requirements of FAA Order 1050.1F, *Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures*, and FAA Order 5050.4B *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Instructions for Airport Actions*. Please note our experience is that EAs typically take at least 18 – 24 months to complete from the time that an airport sponsor

initiates an EA until the FAA issues its decision on the EA and associated proposed changes to an Airport Layout Plan and approval to release land from federal obligations to allow long-term non-aeronautical use.

If Santa Clara County intends to proceed with these projects, I recommend that you contact me at 650-827-7612, or email me at Douglas.Pomeroy@faa.gov, so we can discuss the EA requirements in more detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas R. Pomeroy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Douglas R. Pomeroy
Environmental Protection Specialist