



Kagel Canyon Civic Association

June 24, 2026

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500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, California 90012

RE: Whiteman Airport

Dear Chair Solis and Honorable Members of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors:

The Kagel Canyon Civic Association opposes: (1) the County's expenditure of taxpayer funds on studies evaluating the closure and redevelopment of Whiteman Airport; (2) the ongoing freeze on the use of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) capital improvement funding for critical airport infrastructure; and (3) any closure or redevelopment of Whiteman Airport. These actions divert public resources away from immediate and necessary investments in a facility that remains legally required to operate and that plays an essential role in emergency response, public safety, and the local economy. We urge the Board to redirect its focus toward maintaining and improving Whiteman Airport as a vital County asset rather than pursuing speculative and potentially unimplementable alternatives.

Objection to use of taxpayer funds for the Closure & Redevelopment Study:

Portions of the Whiteman Airport property were acquired using federal Airport Improvement Program funds in the 1990s, obligating the County to continue operating the property as an airport unless and until the FAA formally releases the County from those commitments. As such, the County cannot unilaterally close, redevelop, or repurpose the airport. As a result, the County has spent – and potentially wasted – nearly \$2 million of taxpayer money on its "Land Use Study and Economic Impact Analysis", a study premised upon an outcome that may never be legally viable.

Reasons we support keeping Whiteman Airport open:

(1) Whiteman Airport serves as a strategically located base for emergency operations during fire and other emergencies:

Whiteman Airport serves as a critical public safety asset during wildfires and other emergencies – not only for the Foothill Communities, but for the entire San Fernando

Valley. The airport is home to the Los Angeles County Fire Department's Air Operations unit and provides the infrastructure necessary for rapid aerial response, including immediate access to helicopters, fuel support, air traffic coordination, and staging areas for emergency personnel and equipment.

The airport's value was demonstrated during the Hurst Fire in January 2025. While Burbank and Van Nuys airports were maxed out supporting operations deployed to the Palisades and Eaton Fires, Whiteman served as a base for Cal Fire's response to the rapidly expanding Hurst Fire in Sylmar. Water-dropping helicopters utilized Whiteman for repeated attack missions, while helitenders stationed on-site enabled crews to refuel quickly and return to the fire without unnecessary delays. Had those aircraft been forced to fly from more distant locations, the fire could have quickly spread into Lake View Terrace, Pacoima, and the Angeles National Forest, creating a third catastrophic urban wildfire.

2. Whiteman Airport provides economic benefits to the greater San Fernando Valley:

Beyond its public safety functions, the airport supports a network of aviation-related businesses, including aircraft maintenance providers, flight training operations, fueling services, and other small enterprises that generate jobs, tax revenue, and economic activity throughout the region. Whiteman Airport contributes approximately \$110 million annually to the local economy and sustains more than 500 direct and indirect jobs, supporting local families and businesses that rely upon the airport's continued operation. The airport also provides an important pathway into aviation careers for aspiring pilots, mechanics, and first responders, helping to develop the local workforce in an industry that remains vital to Southern California's economy.

3. Whiteman Airport provides opportunities for our youth:

Whiteman Airport introduces our local youth to science, engineering, public service, and career opportunities they might not otherwise encounter. The airport is home to outstanding educational and nonprofit programs, including the Civil Air Patrol and the Experimental Aircraft Association's (EAA) Young Eagles program, which introduce children and teenagers to the world of aviation, engineering, and aerospace careers. Whiteman's Young Eagles chapter, the second largest in the nation, provides free introductory flights and aviation experiences to children ages 8 through 17. Two Explorer programs serving youth ages 14 through 22 offer hands-on instruction in areas ranging from flight training and aircraft maintenance to engineering, leadership, teamwork, and emergency services. These programs cultivate curiosity, confidence, discipline, and a passion for STEM fields at a time when our nation faces growing demand for pilots, mechanics, engineers, and other skilled aviation professionals.

Call for release of federal funding:

We urge the Board to immediately reverse the decision to freeze the pursuit and acceptance of FAA capital project infrastructure grants for Whiteman Airport. While

the stated purpose of this freeze was to avoid extending the airport's federal obligations while alternative futures are explored, the practical effect has been to leave millions of dollars in available federal funding untapped while critical infrastructure improvements are deferred. These grants represent an opportunity to modernize and maintain essential public assets—including aging runways, taxiways, and air traffic control facilities—at minimal cost to County taxpayers. Delaying or foregoing these investments not only jeopardizes the safety, efficiency, and reliability of a facility that plays a vital role in emergency response and economic activity but also risks increasing future repair costs as infrastructure continues to age.

We recognize that there have been recent safety incidents and concerns at Whiteman Airport, and that those concerns should be taken seriously. However, these events do not support the case for withholding investment in the airport; rather, they underscore the importance of making the very improvements that federal funding is intended to provide. Investments in pilot education, airfield safety enhancements, modernized infrastructure, updated equipment, and community engagement initiatives are precisely the measures that help reduce risk and strengthen safety for airport users and neighboring communities alike.

If the County is committed to protecting public safety, the appropriate response is to pursue every available opportunity to improve and modernize the facility, not to freeze the federal resources designed to accomplish those goals. We recognize that stakeholders may disagree about the future of Whiteman Airport, but all of us share a common interest in protecting the safety and well-being of our communities. The lesson from recent incidents should not be that Whiteman Airport deserves less attention and fewer resources, but that it deserves the investments necessary to ensure it operates as safely and effectively as possible for the benefit of the entire community. Public safety is strengthened through modernization, education, and responsible stewardship—not through deferred maintenance, frozen federal funding, and uncertainty about the future of a critical public asset.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Should you have any questions or require additional information to support our position on this important issue, please do not hesitate to reach out to me either by telephone at (818) 761-7713 or via email at Kelly@KellyKitko.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kelly E. Kitko". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kelly" being more prominent and the last name "Kitko" following in a similar style.

Kelly (Decker) Kitko
President
Kagel Canyon Civic Association