

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

SAN DIEGO DISTRICT OFFICE
7575 METROPOLITAN DRIVE, SUITE 103
SAN DIEGO, CA 92108-4402
VOICE (619) 767-2370
FAX (619) 767-2384



Th11a

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STAFF REPORT: REGULAR CALENDAR

Application No.: 6-20-0447

Applicant: San Diego County Regional Airport Authority

Agent: Ted Anasis

Location: San Diego International Airport, North Harbor Drive and Lindbergh Field Way, San Diego, San Diego County

Project Description: Demolish 12 vacant structures, relocate existing Taxiway B, and construct new Taxiway A, the Terminal 1 apron, overnight parking apron, and a stormwater capture and reuse system that includes a 1.5-million-gallon underground cistern, stormwater infiltration beds, and piping.

Staff Recommendation: Approval with conditions

SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The San Diego County Regional Airport Authority (Authority) proposes to construct airside improvements north and east of Terminal 1 at the San Diego International Airport (airport) ([Exhibit 1](#)). The Authority has indicated the project is necessary to prepare for the Terminal 1 replacement project, which has been submitted to the Coastal Commission as a separate Coastal Development Permit application (CDP No. 6-20-0611) that is currently under review by staff. The project is also necessary to

comply with Federal Aviation Administration requirements for the separation of the runway from taxiways.

The primary Coastal Act concern related to this project is potential impacts to California least terns, an endangered species that is known to have nested on airport property in five oval areas between the runway and taxiways since 1970. The project site is within 800 feet of an oval potentially utilized by the California least terns for nesting between April 1 and September 15. However, the project has been redesigned to its current proposal based on comments from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Specifically, Taxiways A and B and the stormwater capture and reuse system components have been relocated to avoid direct impacts to the nesting ovals. **Special Condition No. 1** requires the applicant to submit final plans that substantially conform to the plans submitted with this application and implement the project in conformance with the approved final plans.

In addition, USFWS conducted an informal consultation of the proposed project and issued a letter that contains conservation measures that have been agreed to by the Authority and FAA to avoid and minimize potential impacts to the California least terns ([Exhibit 5](#)). These measures include requirements that, within 800 ft. of the nesting ovals, anti-predator perching treatments are applied to structures taller than 10 ft., no landscaping that is conducive to predator perching is installed, permanent lighting and signage are minimized and the lighting downcast, and no project construction will occur between April 1 and September 15 to avoid the nesting season. In addition, for construction occurring between 800 and 1,200 ft. of nesting ovals during the nesting season, a least tern biologist with the authority to stop work will be onsite to monitor construction and ensure that construction activity does not disrupt nesting. **Special Condition No. 2** requires the applicant to comply with the conservation measures in the USFWS's April 27, 2021 consultation letter.

Commission staff recommends that the Commission **APPROVE** coastal development permit application 6-20-0447, as conditioned. The motion is on page 4. The standard of review is Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act.

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EXHIBITS

[Exhibit 1 – Location Map](#)

[Exhibit 2 – Site Plan](#)

[Exhibit 3 – Demolition Plan](#)

[Exhibit 4 – Stormwater Capture and Reuse System Site Plan](#)

[Exhibit 5 – USFWS Informal Consultation Letter](#)

I. MOTION AND RESOLUTION

Motion:

I move that the Commission approve Coastal Development Permit 6-20-0447 pursuant to the staff recommendation.

Staff recommends a **YES** vote on the foregoing motion. Passage of this motion will result in approval of the permit as conditioned and adoption of the following resolution and findings. The motion passes only by affirmative vote of a majority of Commissioners present.

Resolution:

The Commission hereby approves the Coastal Development Permit for the proposed project and adopts the findings set forth below on grounds that the development as conditioned will be in conformity with the policies of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act. Approval of the permit complies with the California Environmental Quality Act because either 1) feasible mitigation measures and/or alternatives have been incorporated to substantially lessen any significant adverse effects of the development on the environment, or 2) there are no further feasible mitigation measures or alternatives that would substantially lessen any significant adverse impacts of the development on the environment.

II. STANDARD CONDITIONS

- 1. Notice of Receipt and Acknowledgment.** The permit is not valid and development shall not commence until a copy of the permit, signed by the applicant or authorized agent, acknowledging receipt of the permit and acceptance of the terms and conditions, is returned to the Commission office.
- 2. Expiration.** If development has not commenced, the permit will expire two years from the date on which the Commission voted on the application. Development shall be pursued in a diligent manner and completed in a reasonable period of time. Application for extension of the permit must be made prior to the expiration date.
- 3. Interpretation.** Any questions of intent or interpretation of any condition will be resolved by the Executive Director or the Commission.
- 4. Assignment.** The permit may be assigned to any qualified person, provided assignee files with the Commission an affidavit accepting all terms and conditions of the permit.
- 5. Terms and Conditions Run with the Land.** These terms and conditions shall be perpetual, and it is the intention of the Commission and the applicant to bind all future owners and possessors of the subject property to the terms and conditions.

III. SPECIAL CONDITIONS

1. **Final Plans. PRIOR TO ISSUANCE OF THE COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PERMIT**, the applicant shall submit, for the review and written approval of the Executive Director, one full-size set of final plans that conform with the plans submitted to the Commission, titled “ADP Airside Improvements” and dated March 15, 2021.

The permittee shall undertake development in conformance with the approved final plans unless the Commission amends this permit or the Executive Director provides a written determination that no amendment is legally required for any proposed minor deviations.

2. **Compliance with USFWS Conservation Measures.** By acceptance of this permit, the applicant agrees to comply with the conservation measures contained in the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Informal Consultation for the San Diego International Airport Development Plan letter dated April 27, 2021 and included as [Exhibit 5](#) to this report.

IV. FINDINGS AND DECLARATIONS

A. Project Description and Background

The San Diego County Regional Airport Authority (Authority) proposes to relocate the existing Taxiway B and construct a new Taxiway A, construct apron improvements, demolish vacant facilities, and construct a stormwater capture and reuse system north and east of Terminal 1 at the San Diego International Airport (airport) ([Exhibit 1](#)). The Authority has indicated the project is necessary to comply with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirements for the separation of the runway from taxiways and prepare for the Terminal 1 replacement project, which has not yet been approved by the Commission.

The proposed project is a component of the Airport Development Plan (ADP) which was adopted by the Authority on January 9, 2020 and most notably includes the replacement and expansion of Terminal 1. While the ADP was not approved by the Commission, all ADP projects are under the coastal permitting authority of the Commission. The Authority has submitted CDP application no. 6-20-0611 for the Terminal 1 expansion project and the application is currently under review by staff. Although the subject project would facilitate the Terminal 1 expansion, the subject approval does not include the Terminal 1 expansion project, which will require future review and approval by the Commission.

Specifically, the project includes the following components ([Exhibit 2](#)):

Airfield Improvements - Relocate Existing Taxiway B and Construct New Taxiway A

Taxiway B is used to taxi airplanes to and from the airport's single existing runway. The taxiway extends along the runway's full length and is located 363 ft. south of the runway. The proposed project would relocate a portion of Taxiway B approximately 37 ft. south of its present location in order to comply with a FAA recommendation that taxiways and runways be separated by 400 ft. Specifically, the eastern portion of Taxiway B contains a slight curve to the north to avoid impacting nesting habitat of the California least tern located on the airfield. Relocation of the taxiway would only occur west of this point to avoid disturbing this habitat, which is discussed in more detail in the Biological Resources section of this report.

In addition, the applicant proposes to construct a new taxiway, Taxiway A, approximately 219 ft. south of the realigned Taxiway B. Presently, aircraft can only taxi in one direction on the existing Taxiway B; however, with both a new Taxiway A and a relocated Taxiway B, aircraft will be able to travel in both directions and avoid congestion or delays from aircraft moving from the terminals to the runway. Taxiway A would not extend east into the California least tern nesting habitat.

Apron Improvements

Apron improvements would be constructed in two locations: 1) along the north side of the future Terminal 1 replacement concourse for passenger loading and unloading, and 2) to the east of the new concourse to be used as overnight parking for aircraft. To construct these improvements the existing pavement would be resurfaced or replaced in order to support the weight of aircraft.

Demolition of Vacant Facilities

Several vacant facilities would be demolished to support construction of the new Taxiway A and the future Terminal 1 replacement, including airport maintenance facilities, solid waste storage, fueling stations, and a portion of the public long-term parking lot containing 120 parking spaces ([Exhibit 3](#)).

Stormwater Capture and Reuse System

The stormwater capture and reuse system would connect to existing airport stormwater facilities ([Exhibit 4](#)) and include an approximately 1.5-million-gallon underground cistern on the south side of the airport to pump captured stormwater for both reuse and infiltration. One set of pumps will convey flow to the existing treatment facility for stormwater reuse at the existing Central Utility Plant and future Terminal 1 dual plumbing for toilet flushing, while a second set of pumps will convey stormwater to multiple new underground infiltration and storage areas located within the airfield islands between the runway and taxiways.

The airport is within the Coastal Commission's permit jurisdiction and the Chapter 3 policies of the Coastal Act constitute the standard of review.

B. Biological Resources

Section 30240 of the Coastal Act states:

(a) Environmentally sensitive habitat areas shall be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values, and only uses dependent on those resources shall be allowed within those areas.

b) Development in areas adjacent to environmentally sensitive habitat areas and parks and recreation areas shall be sited and designed to prevent impacts which would significantly degrade those areas, and shall be compatible with the continuance of those habitat and recreation areas.

While the project site is not considered an environmentally sensitive habitat area (ESHA), it is located in proximity to nesting habitat for the endangered California least tern. Listed under the Federal and California State Endangered Species Act since 1972, the California least tern (*Sternula antillarum browni*) is a migratory bird species that has managed to find suitable habitat at several locations at the airport. Typically, terns prefer to nest in small, scattered clusters on natural or artificial open areas near estuaries, bays, or harbors where small fish are abundant. At the airport, terns have been known to nest on the sand and gravel in five oval areas between the runway and airplane taxiways since 1970. The project site is within 800 feet of a designated oval potentially utilized by the least terns for nesting between April 1 and September 15.

The project has been redesigned to its current proposal based on comments from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Specifically, during the development of alternatives for the ADP, the FAA, Airport Operations and aircraft pilots advocated for the full length of Taxiway B to be relocated to 400 ft. of separation from the runway to improve airfield circulation and safety. However, due to concerns that the relocation would directly impact the nesting ovals, the project was revised to keep an existing curve in the Taxiway B through the eastern airfield to avoid the nesting ovals. Likewise, Taxiway A was originally proposed to extend the entire length of the airfield but was also redesigned to end west of the nesting ovals and instead turn 90 degrees north to connect with Taxiway B. Finally, the underground cistern and infiltration basins were originally proposed to be located below the nesting ovals but the project was redesigned to avoid any features in or below the nesting ovals by relocating the proposed underground cistern and infiltration basins to the west. As such, no direct impacts to the nesting habitat will occur as a result of relocating Taxiway B or constructing the new Taxiway A and stormwater capture and reuse system. **Special Condition No. 1** requires the applicant to submit final plans that substantially conform to the plans submitted with this application and implement the project in conformance with the approved final plans.

In addition, USFWS conducted an informal consultation of the Airport Development Plan, including the proposed project. The April 27, 2021 letter issued by the USFWS contains conservation measures that have been agreed to by the Authority and FAA to

avoid and minimize potential impacts to the California least terns ([Exhibit 5](#)). These measures include requirements that, within 800 ft. of the nesting ovals, anti-predator perching treatments are applied to structures taller than 10 ft. and no landscaping will be installed that is conducive to predator perching, permanent lighting and signage are minimized and the lighting downcast, and no project construction will occur between April 1 and September 15 to avoid the nesting season. In addition, for construction occurring between 800 and 1,200 ft. of nesting ovals during the nesting season, a least tern biologist with the authority to stop work will be onsite to monitor construction and ensure that construction activity does not disrupt nesting. **Special Condition No. 2** requires the applicant to comply with the conservation measures detailed in the USFWS's April 27, 2021 letter. As such, no impacts to biological resources are expected as a result of this project and the project, as conditioned, conforms to Section 30240 of the Coastal Act.

C. Public Access and Recreation

Section 30212.5 of the Coastal Act states:

Wherever appropriate and feasible, public facilities, including parking areas or facilities, shall be distributed throughout an area so as to mitigate against the impacts, social and otherwise, of overcrowding or overuse by the public of any single area.

Section 30252 of the Coastal Act states:

The location and amount of new development should maintain and enhance public access to the coast by (1) facilitating the provision or extension of transit service, (2) providing commercial facilities within or adjoining residential development or in other areas that will minimize the use of coastal access roads, (3) providing nonautomobile circulation within the development, (4) providing adequate parking facilities or providing substitute means of serving the development with public transportation, (5) assuring the potential for public transit for high intensity uses such as high-rise office buildings [...]

Section 30253(d) of the Coastal Act states:

New development shall do all of the following:

(d) Minimize energy consumptions and vehicle miles traveled.

The San Diego International Airport is located just inland of the San Diego Bay shoreline and near many coastal destinations, including Harbor Island, Spanish Landing Park, and the boat channel at Liberty Station. Public access at these locations could be impacted if adequate parking was not available onsite for airport employees, guests, and passengers, encouraging them to utilize public parking offsite. In this case, a portion of the project is currently a long-term public parking lot on airport property containing approximately 980 parking spaces. The proposed project would permanently remove 120 of these parking spaces. The remainder of the parking lot would be closed

to the public in order to accommodate relocated trailers and construction personnel parking (370 parking spaces) that was approved by the Commission with CDP No. 6-20-0180; of the 980 parking spaces, the Authority has indicated 580 parking spaces would be closed immediately, and 400 parking spaces would remain open to the public until the commencement of construction of the Terminal 1 expansion, which is planned for 2022.

The Authority has identified that 6,600 parking spaces currently exist at the airport, of which 62 have electric vehicle (EV) charging stations; however, parking would be reduced to 3,860 parking spaces, including 56 EV charging stations, from 2021-2025, the anticipated timeline for construction of the Terminal 1 expansion and associated improvements. Following the completion of Terminal 1, approximately 8,760 parking spaces, including 250 EV charging stations, are anticipated to be available outside of the subject parking lot. As a result of the COVID-19 virus, the airport is presently serving 35% of 2019 passenger volumes but the Authority forecasts that air traffic will return to 2019 passenger volumes of 25.2 million by 2024. When that occurs, the Authority has estimated the parking demand to be approximately 5,300 parking spaces leading to a deficit of approximately 1,500 parking spaces for the remainder of construction, from 2024 to 2025.

To offset the temporary loss of long-term parking spaces, the Authority has indicated that there are adequate parking spaces available at off-airport parking facilities with shuttles to the airport located nearby. Based on a survey completed in April 2019, there are 12 off-airport parking facilities that have a total capacity of approximately 5,000 parking spaces, of which only 62%, or 3,100 spaces, were occupied. Thus, the off-airport parking facilities are estimated to have an additional capacity of approximately 1,900 spaces to offset any on-airport parking deficit.

The Authority also has plans to implement a direct shuttle from the Old Town Transit Center (Amtrak regional train station, COASTER local train station, MTS trolley/bus station) to the airport in January 2022, prior to closure of the remaining 400 public parking spaces in the long-term parking lot, which would allow employees and passengers, as well as construction personnel, to connect to the airport via alternative transportation and reduce the demand for airport parking. Thus, the new Old Town Transit Center shuttle would provide a substitute means of serving the airport with public transportation, pursuant to Section 30252.

In addition to the subject project, the Authority does plan to also construct roads on the subject parking lot. However, while the use is included in CDP application no. 6-20-0611 for the Terminal 1 expansion which is still under review by staff, the roads have not been approved by the Commission. The Authority has indicated that, if the long-term parking spaces are approved to be removed as part of a future CDP application, long-term parking would be replaced in the proposed 5,500 spaces included in the parking structure proposed as part of the Terminal 1 expansion project (CDP application no. 6-20-0611). Regardless, any additional parking impacts would be analyzed at that time.

Therefore, no impacts to public access are expected as a result of this project and the project, as conditioned, conforms to Sections 30212.5 and 30252 of the Coastal Act.

D. Visual Resources

Section 30251 of the Coastal Act states:

The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas.

The majority of the airside improvements will be at ground surface level and will not be visible from public vista points around the airport. However, a 20 ft. wall (including a 5 ft. tall foundation and 15 ft. tall wall) to protect the public and vehicles from jet engine blasts would be located directly north of North Harbor Drive, a major coastal accessway. The blast wall would not block views of the bay or the San Diego skyline and would be setback from Harbor Drive approximately 98 ft. In addition, the elevated roadway improvements proposed as part of the Terminal 1 expansion project (CDP application no. 6-20-0611), if approved by the Commission, would be constructed shortly after the blast wall and eventually block views of the wall. As part of the Terminal 1 expansion project, the Authority has also proposed a robust landscaping plan designed to screen the proposed structures, including the proposed roadway, with trees and vegetation. Therefore, no visual impacts are expected and the project conforms to Section 30251 of the Coastal Act.

E. Water Quality

Section 30231 of the Coastal Act states:

The biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for the protection of human health shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored through, among other means, minimizing adverse effects of waste water discharges and entrainment, controlling runoff, preventing depletion of ground water supplies and substantial interference with surface waterflow, encouraging waste water reclamation, maintaining natural vegetation buffer areas that protect riparian habitats, and minimizing alteration of natural streams.

The proposed project includes the construction of a stormwater capture and reuse system. The stormwater capture and reuse system would connect to existing airport stormwater facilities ([Exhibit 4](#)) and include an approximately 1.5-million-gallon underground cistern on the south side of the airport to pump captured stormwater for both reuse and infiltration. One set of pumps will convey flow to the existing treatment facility for stormwater reuse at the existing Central Utility Plant and future Terminal 1 dual plumbing for toilet flushing, while a second set of pumps will convey stormwater to multiple new underground infiltration and storage areas located within the airfield islands between the runway and taxiways which have been sized to reuse, infiltrate, or store at least 85 percent of annual runoff volume. The Commission's water quality

specialist has reviewed the proposed stormwater capture and reuse system components and agrees they are appropriately sized and designed. **Special Condition No. 1** requires the applicant to submit final plans, including water quality plans, that substantially conform to the plans submitted with this application.

The proposed development will provide benefits by diverting stormwater for reuse or infiltration and not result in erosion or adverse impacts to water quality, as adequate drainage controls will be provided. Thus, the project is consistent with the resource protection policies of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act.

F. Local Coastal Planning

Section 30604(a) requires that a coastal development permit shall be issued only if the Commission finds that the permitted development will not prejudice the ability of the local government to prepare a Local Coastal Program (LCP) in conformity with the provisions of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act. In this case, such a finding can be made.

The airport was previously under the coastal permit jurisdiction of the San Diego Unified Port District and the standard of review for coastal development permits was the certified Port Master Plan. However, legislation which took effect in January 2003 transferred authority over airport property to the newly created Airport Authority. Thus, the airport is now within the Commission's permit jurisdiction and Chapter 3 is the standard of review. Although the airport is not anticipated to be subject to a LCP, approval of this project would not prejudice the preparation of a LCP consistent with the requirements of Chapter 3. As discussed above, the proposed project, as conditioned, is consistent with Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act.

G. California Environmental Quality Act

Section 13096 of the Commission's Code of Regulations requires Commission approval of Coastal Development Permits to be supported by a finding showing the permit, as conditioned, to be consistent with any applicable requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Section 21080.5(d)(2)(A) of CEQA prohibits a proposed development from being approved if there are feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen any significant adverse effect which the activity may have on the environment. In January 2020, the Airport Authority adopted the San Diego International Airport, Airport Development Plan Final Environmental Impact Report (State Clearinghouse No. 2017011053).

The proposed project has been conditioned in order to be found consistent with the Chapter 3 policies of the Coastal Act. Mitigation measures, including conditions addressing biological resources will minimize all adverse environmental impacts. As conditioned, there are no feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen any significant adverse impact which the activity may have on the environment. Therefore, the Commission finds that the proposed project is the least environmentally-damaging feasible alternative and can be found consistent with the requirements of the Coastal Act to conform to CEQA.

APPENDIX A – SUBSTANTIVE FILE DOCUMENTS

San Diego International Airport, Airport Development Plan Final Environmental Impact Report (State Clearinghouse No. 2017011053)