

# Delayed Landing

**BURBANK AIRPORT MANAGER THOMAS E. GREER SAYS THE COSTLY LEGAL BATTLE OVER THE AIRPORT'S PROPOSED EXPANSION COULD DRAG ON FOR YEARS UNLESS THE CITY OF BURBANK LISTENS TO REASON**

By PAT KRAMER  
Contributing Reporter

**B**URBANK Airport made news recently when it was slapped with yet another lawsuit by the city of Burbank — the ninth filed so far — to thwart plans for a new \$250 million, 19-gate terminal.

The latest suit, filed May 29, alleges that the authority's plans for the terminal expansion do not comply with local land-use ordinances — specifically, that the 130-acre property the airport is hoping to acquire from Lockheed-Martin Corp. is not properly zoned for an air terminal.

Airport officials say the lawsuit is premature because they have not yet submitted formal plans to the city, and they dismiss the suit as yet another example of the city's attempts to block the expansion by tying it up in court.

Frustrated at the delays and the expense of a legal battle that has already cost the airport authority \$3.5 million in legal fees, Airport Authority Executive Director Thomas E. Greer, has hired crisis communications specialists Strick & Co. Inc., and is mounting an information campaign of his own.

**Question:** Officials from the city of Burbank are concerned that your expansion will bring more noise and traffic to their community. How do you respond to that?

**Answer:** Every credible source, the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) and the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, has verified the Airport Authority's position that a larger terminal will not, in and of itself, increase traffic or noise. That growth will take place regardless of whether a new terminal is built or not.

**Q:** But by building a new terminal with

more gates, aren't you encouraging growth?

**A:** No. The proposed terminal building will simply accommodate the existing demand for passenger activity. Future demands for air service will be driven largely by the ongoing development in Burbank and the surrounding area. The airport is simply trying to accommodate the demand for air service. It does not generate that demand.

**Q:** What's your position on the latest lawsuit?

**A:** I think it's another in a series of what I would call frivolous (lawsuits). Any time an entity sues another entity for what they are afraid that entity might do, it sounds a little frivolous to me. It would be sort of like if you owned a convenience store and someone was milling around outside, and you thought they were going to rob you, so you had them arrested, or worse yet, went and shot them. We have taken no action that would violate (Burbank's) zoning ordinance. I think it's paranoia.

**Q:** How do you see the demand for air travel increasing in the coming years?

**A:** I think both the FAA and SCAG (Southern California Association of Governments) both agree that there will be increases in the demand for air service and that certainly at Burbank, we expect to receive a share of that increase. We are anticipating a 4 percent to 5 percent increase during the planning period which takes up to the year 2010.

**Q:** Does the city's own growth contribute to the demand at Burbank Airport?

**A:** Absolutely. The airport, as a public

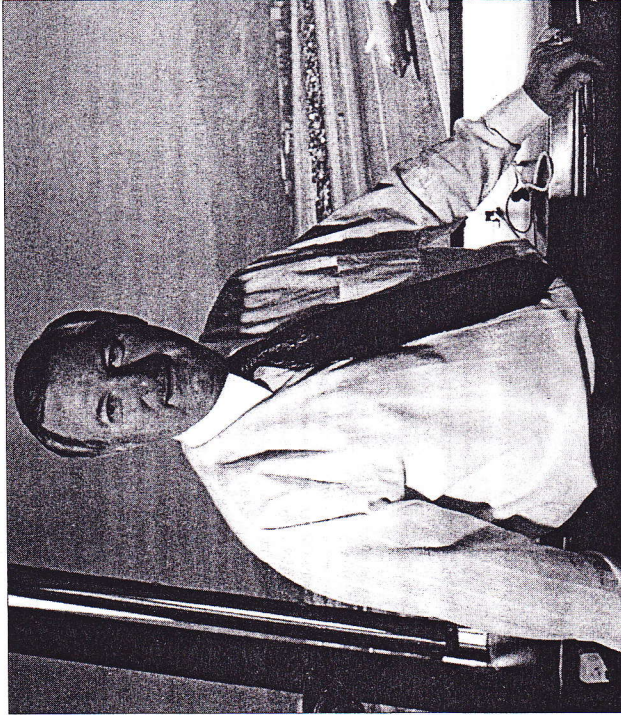


PHOTO BY CHARLAINE BROWN

**Greer: Thinks Burbank's lawsuit fighting airport expansion amounts to 'paranoia.'**

infrastructure, accommodates the demand that shows up at our front door. We are not a field of dreams — that is, if you build it, they will come. If you create a demand for air service by an increase in population, business activity, commercial development, which the city is doing by developing ... studio space, the role of the airport is to accommodate that demand. That's the role that we want to play.

**Q:** Opponents have said that you can resolve this costly dispute by agreeing to a curfew on evening flights and placing some kind of cap on the number of flights. Why don't you give them what they want?

**A:** The Airport Authority is no more able to impose a cap on flights or a mandatory curfew on flights at this airport than the city of Burbank is able to put up a barricade on the Golden State Freeway at 10 o'clock at night and stop all the cars from going through their city. It's preempted by federal law. Having said that, there is no verifiable basis on which the city of Burbank can make a claim that the flights at night are causing them irreparable harm. In fact, over 90 percent of all our flight activity takes

place between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m.

**Q:** The city is expected to spend \$7.5 million by next year fighting the expansion of the airport. You estimate you legal expenses are \$3.5 million. How long do you think this can go on?

**A:** As long as the current elected officials are not held accountable by their voters for something that they know they can't get. Until they are held accountable for those actions by the electorate, I think they feel perfectly at ease spending the money. Let's face it, they got elected on this issue. If the issue were to go away, the question is, would they stay in office?

## Thomas E. Greer

**Position:** Executive Director  
**Organization:** Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Authority

**Born:** May 14, 1943, Birmingham, AL

**Education:** Bachelor of science, aviation management, Auburn University

**Most Admired Person:** Gene Smith, airport manager at Golden Triangle Regional Airport, Columbus, Miss.

**Personal:** Married, five children

## Snapshot