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Mayor Eric Garcetti appoints 6 to airport commission

Garcetti, saying that he wants L.A. to have modern airports, replaces all but one member of the seven-member panel overseeing LAX and Ontario and Van Nuys airports.

By Dan Weikel

7:00 PM PDT, August 13, 2013

Declaring that he wants Los Angeles to have modern airports that are also good neighbors, Mayor Eric Garcetti overhauled the city's Airport Commission on Tuesday and replaced every member except attorney Valeria Velasco, a former community activist from Playa del Rey. advertisement

Appointed to the seven-member panel were Jackie Goldberg, a former City Council member and state assemblywoman; Cynthia Telles, a civic leader and former vice president of the city's Ethics Commission; and Sean Burton, a former Warner Bros. executive, real estate developer and attorney.

Also selected were Matthew Johnson, a civic leader and entertainment lawyer; Bea Hsu, a real estate developer and former advisor to state Controller Kathleen Connell; and Gabriel Eshaghian, a real estate investment executive who has worked in the travel and airline industry.

Garcetti reappointed Velasco, a former city planning commissioner and airport activist who helped organize opposition to the LAX master plan proposed by former Mayor James K. Hahn.

The selections must be approved by the City Council.

"L.A.'s airports are a critical economic engine and our city's first impression for millions of visitors every year," Garcetti said. "I'm pleased to appoint these talented Angelenos to the airport commission and know they will focus on ensuring L.A. has world-class airports that are also first-class neighbors."

It was unclear whether the house-cleaning was meant to send a message to Gina Marie Lindsey, the executive director of Los Angeles World Airports, which operates Los Angeles International Airport, LA/Ontario International Airport and Van Nuys Airport. Lindsey said she applauded the new members and looked forward to working with them.

However, during the mayoral election in the spring, Garcetti said he supported the modernization of LAX but opposed Lindsey's plan to move the northern runway 260 feet closer to neighborhoods in Westchester and Playa del Rey, where there was strong political opposition because of concerns about air pollution and noise.

Although the runway project was approved by the previous airport commission, Garcetti said Tuesday, "I don't think we should be moving it."

Garcetti also said during the campaign that he supported transferring control of Ontario International to Inland Empire officials as long as Los Angeles gets revenue from any agreement and the plan bolsters the struggling airport's passenger levels.

Earlier this year, airport officials entered into negotiations to sell Ontario, but talks fell apart when both sides could not agree on the price, which Los Angeles set at \$475 million. After the discussions broke off, Inland Empire officials sued the city.

The new members replace commission President Michael Lawson, Joseph Aredas, Fernando Torres-Gil, Ann W. Hollister, Raul Perez and Robert Byer. Hollister, Perez and Byer were recent appointees of former Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

Denny Schneider, president of the Alliance for a Regional Solution to Airport Congestion and an opponent of the runway plan, said he was encouraged by Garcetti's appointments because they should reflect the mayor's views on the north runway proposal.

Gary Toebben, president of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, also praised the new commissioners, adding that chamber officials looked forward to working with them. If they reconsidered the north runway plan, Toebben said, he hoped they would reach the same conclusions as their predecessors.

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