



August 24, 2023

Dear Members of the Boulder City Council

Journeys Aviation has been the FBO and flight school at Boulder Airport since 2007, with the current ownership since 2018. The current owners are all long time Boulder City or County residents whose kids either go to BVSD schools or graduated from BVSD. Journeys also owns and operates Mile High Gliding, the glider flight school at Boulder Airport. Combined, Journeys employs upwards of 50 persons, mostly part time employees who are young and starting out in aviation and the business world. Many who have learned to fly at, or were instructors at, Boulder Airport have gone on to professional aviation careers. Journeys Aviation has been a tax paying entity in the City of Boulder since the 2007 inception of business in Boulder.

I am writing to you prior to your August 24, 2023 Airport Study Session to address the many misconceptions that have crept into the Airport Community Conversation process and beyond. These misconceptions and dis-information only serve to confuse the issues and impede the ability of Council and others to properly evaluate the data presented, based upon the facts, not the drama. What follows attempts to counter several false narratives with data and facts. The misconceptions covered are:

1. Aircraft spew lead all over town poisoning our children
2. The airport is busier than ever
3. Boulder Airport is a safety risk
4. Noise complaints are exponentially increasing
5. Boulder based pilots don't care
6. The airport could be better used for affordable housing

In addition to addressing the disinformation being spread on the above points, there are two major topics that the community conversation has been missing that are critical for the future and well-being of our city:

- Electric Aircraft and Advanced Aircraft Mobility
- Emergency response for combating major Flood and Wildfire threats to our community

**Misconception - Aircraft "spew" lead all over town poisoning our children** - Nobody thinks that using lead in aviation fuel is good for our environment, and everyone, including the aviation community, believes that aviation needs to transition away from leaded fuel. The reason aviation is still using low lead fuel is to ensure that aviation engines remain as reliable as they have been for the past 80+ years. Lead helps prevent a serious engine problem called premature detonation that can lead to engine failure. The trade-off is a small amount of lead in the fuel versus the safety of aircraft operations – nobody wants aircraft overhead to be having engine failures.

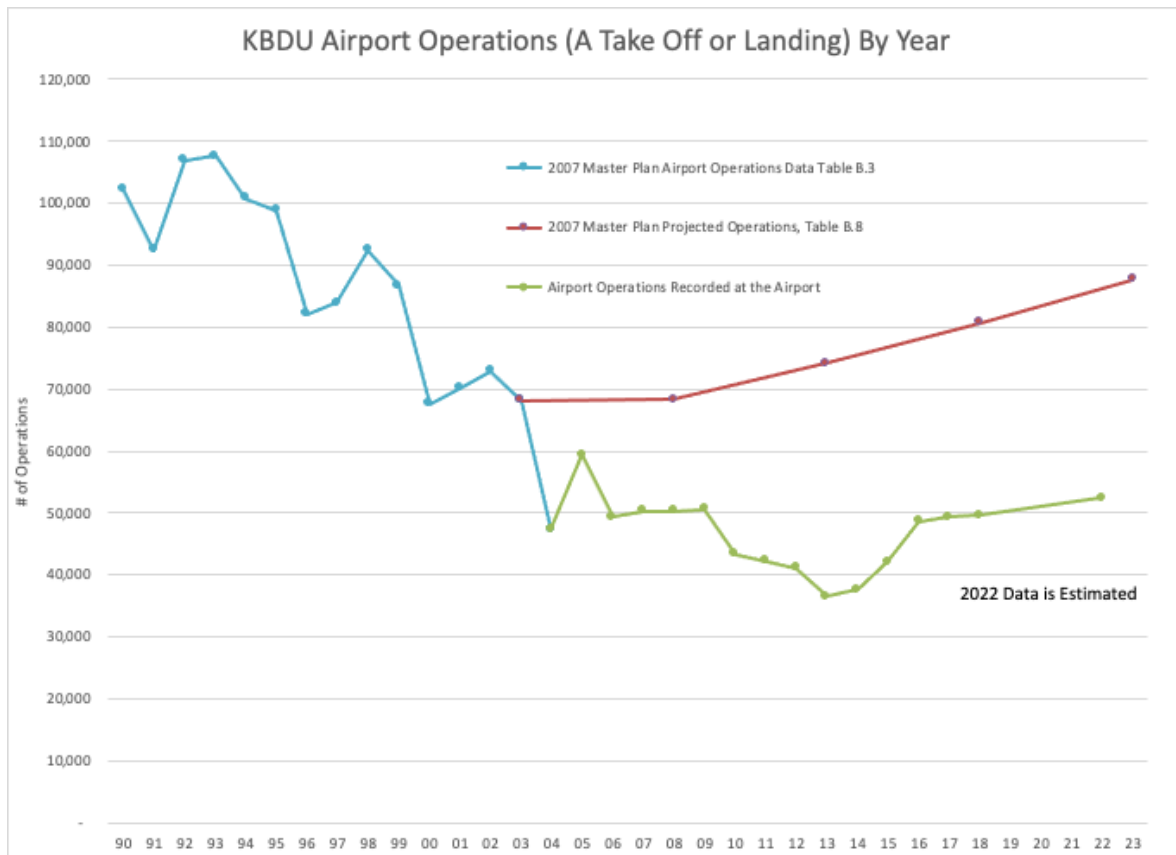
According to the CO Dept of Health, Boulder County enjoys the lowest rate of lead toxicity in the State despite the abundance of abandoned mines (including lead mines), and dispersed shooting in the County. Until all the potential sources of lead in Boulder County are identified and prioritized, it is unjustified to blame all lead contamination on the use of 100 octane low lead (100LL) aviation fuel.

Journeys Aviation has not waited for others to raise concerns about lead, we have been working on a pathway to unleaded aviation fuel for several years, and this is what drove our decision to switch fuel providers to Avfuel, a fuel distribution company whose sales representative lives in Lafayette and is committed to helping us bring unleaded fuel to Boulder as soon as possible. See <https://www.avfuel.com/Fuel/Alternative-Fuels/Unleaded-Avgas> There is an unleaded aviation fuel, UL 94, that is available today, but it does not offer a fleet wide solution and can only be used in some, but not all, piston aircraft. For Boulder Airport to be able to offer this product while still servicing the entire fleet, we need additional infrastructure at Boulder Airport, i.e. another storage tank and delivery method.



There are about a half dozen companies working on a fleet wide solution, and whatever the solution will be, Avfuel will be in position to distribute it. Journeys has requested, and our Avfuel salesperson has indicated, that Boulder will be among the first, if not the first, airport in Colorado to receive fleet wide unleaded product. Within a few years, I believe that 100LL avgas will reach a tipping point and will simply no longer be available as refiners find the volume sold is not enough to justify continued production. At that point, the problem of leaded fuel will be solved by market forces.

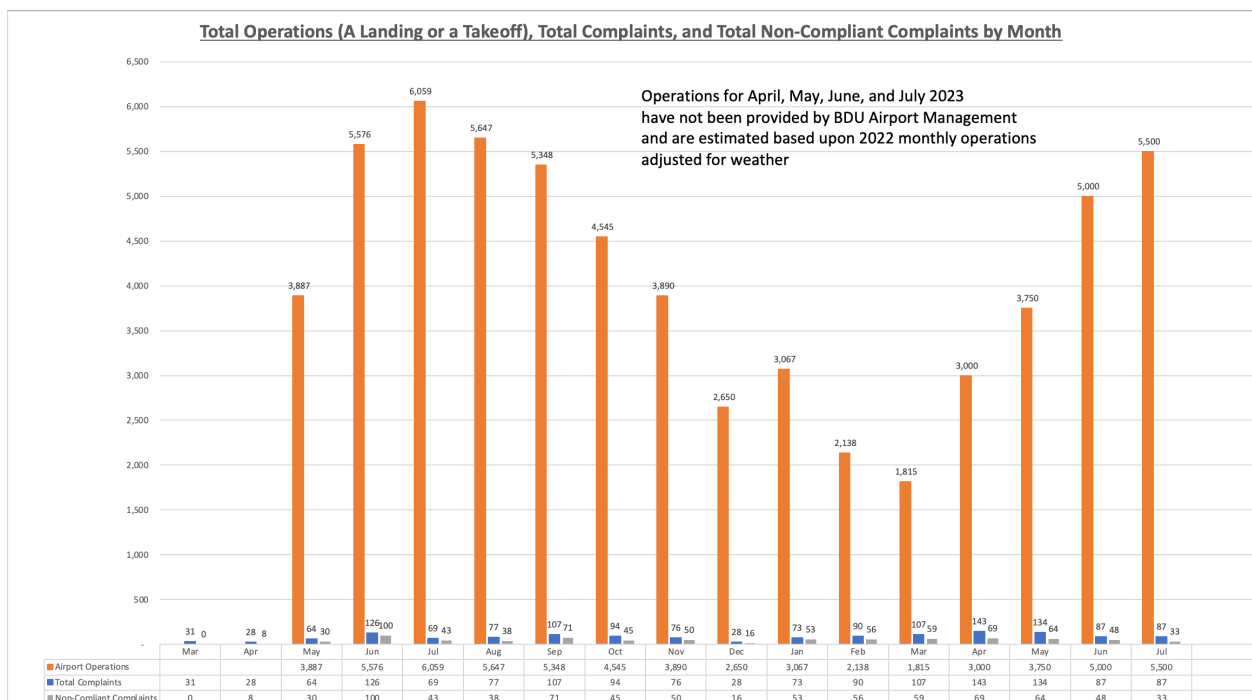
**Misconception - The airport is busier than ever!** - Airport operations (a takeoff or a landing) are not at historic highs. In fact, operations for the past year are about 50% of recorded historic highs as found in the 2007 Airport Master Plan. Operations today are significantly less (about 40% less) than what was predicted in that 2007 Master plan. See this graph:



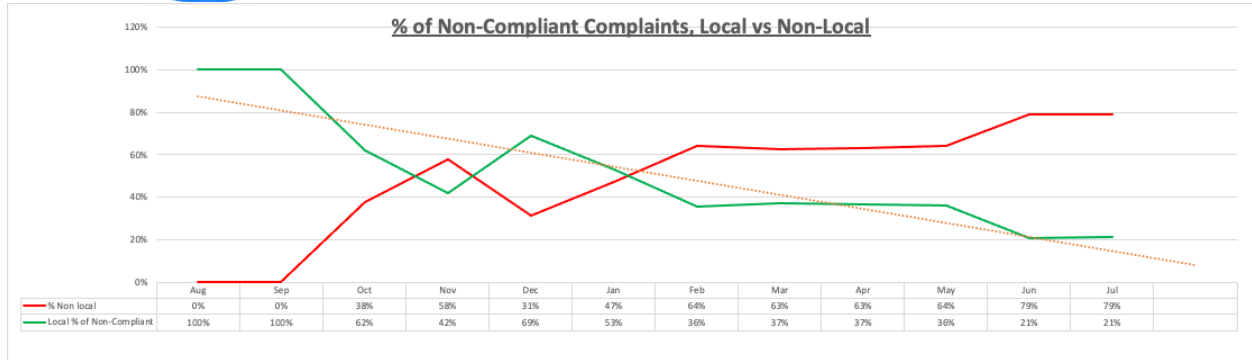
**Misconception - Boulder Airport is a safety risk** - Actually, Boulder Airport enjoys a very good overall safety record. While it cannot be said that no crashes or fatalities have ever occurred in Boulder County, the rate is extremely small, especially in comparison to other modes of transportation. Additionally, Boulder airport has never had a collision between aircraft or gliders during the landing or takeoff phase of flight, or on the ground in over 60 years and some 700,000+ glider flights.



**Misconception - Noise complaints are exponentially increasing!** - This is a popular narrative by airport opponents that has unfortunately been repeated by City Staff and even Council Members. While noise complaints did increase in 2022, this was primarily because it became easier to submit a complaint anonymously through the City Website; complaints are neither growing exponentially, nor are they "off the charts". The following graph developed from the City's own noise complaint data shows that complaints have averaged about 84 total complaints per month for the last 17 months. Of the total complaints, an average of 46 per month were about aircraft that were non-compliant to our voluntary noise abatement procedures. Compared to total operations (a takeoff or a landing, i.e. an opportunity to make noise), these numbers are actually relatively small - only about 1.1% of all operations result in a non-compliant noise complaint (702 non-compliant complaints over an estimated 61,872 operations). It is also of note that tow planes for glider operations represent an extremely small percentage of the non-compliant complaints – less than 10 non-compliant complaints in the past year. What is interesting, is that the number of complaints **does not** correlate with the number of operations, the airport gets essentially the same number of complaints whether there are 1,800 operations, or 6,000 operations. This indicates that complaints are not actually related to noise, but are related to a dedicated group of anti-airport folks who will complain regularly regardless of the actual amount of noise embodied in the number of operations. See the following graph.

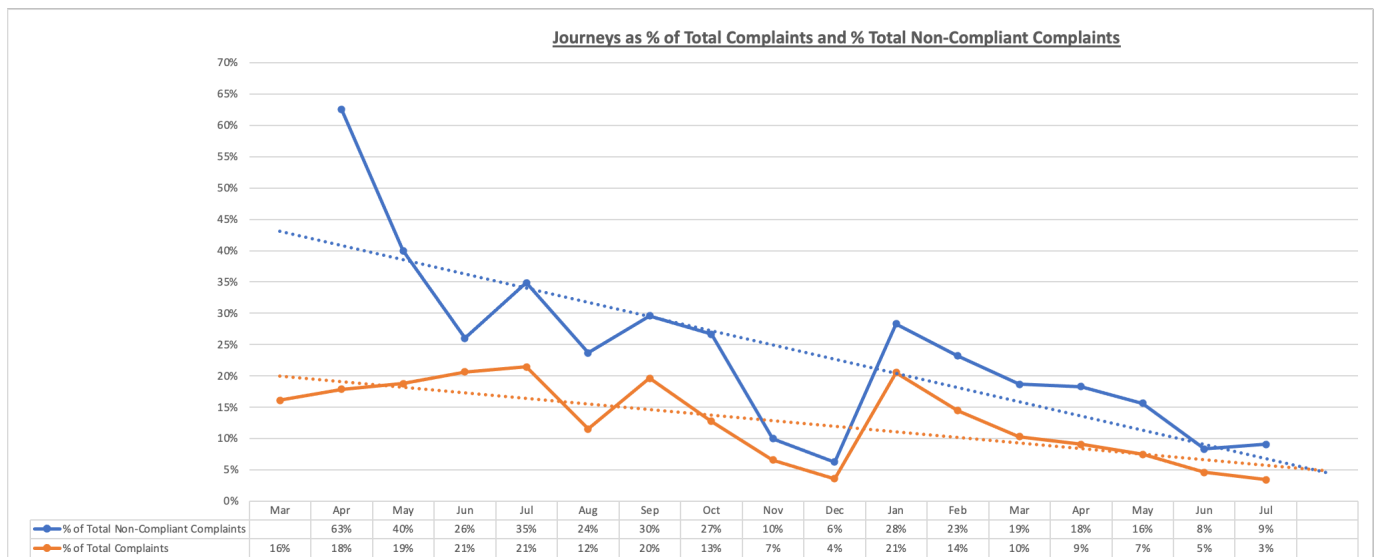


**Misconception - Boulder Based pilots don't care** - This is not true. The City's own noise data shows that the % of complaints, and % of non-compliant complaints related to locally based pilots has been declining significantly (from 100% to 21%) over the past year as efforts to educate and address the problem locally have borne fruit. Certainly, there is more work that is and can be done, but it would be unrealistic to think that we can get to zero. Given that the number of monthly complaints on average remains the same as locally based pilots have reduced the non-compliant flights, the complainers in their regular cadence of submitting complaints, have shifted focus to the non-local flights.



This reduction in complaints is also reflected in (and probably driven by) the reduction in complaints about Journeys Aviation aircraft. Where Journeys aircraft represented nearly 65% of the non-compliant complaints a year ago, the last two months Journeys aircraft represent under 10% of the non-compliant complaints. Given that Journeys, by far, is the biggest operator at the airport, these results are particularly striking. In addition, Journeys has acquired and will have in common use shortly, two Light Sport Aircraft (LSA) for training that produce significantly less noise than most other aircraft. See photo below.

Journeys leadership, staff, and pilots are concerned and have put forth a significant effort to follow the voluntary noise abatement procedures to reduce noise complaints. The results speak for themselves.





Pipistrel LSA Aircraft Recently Acquired by Journeys Aviation



**Misconception – The airport is a credible site for affordable housing** - With regards to affordable housing, the Council would be better served to look at unencumbered land already owned by the City such as The North Boulder Planning Reserve or the Transit Village Area 2 which is already approved for redevelopment. In addition to losing an incredible resource for our community, the City would owe a substantial payment to the FAA if the airport were closed. The process would also take years, probably requiring litigation with the FAA. The idea that the decision is binary – either keep the airport or turn it in to affordable housing - is a false dichotomy. Boulder can, and deserves, both an airport, and affordable housing. They are not incompatible.

**Proven Benefit – Emergency Services** - Given the critical infrastructure role the airport plays in fighting two of Boulders foremost concerns – flood and wildfires - closing the airport should not even be a consideration. While Scenario 4 of the Community Conversation reserves some space for a helipad, it is not nearly enough to accommodate the number and size of helicopters that have participated in past emergency responses. Why hamstring future emergency responders in this way?

**Future Benefit - Advanced Air Mobility** - Regarding the Airport Community Conversation, one topic that has not come up much is the imminent arrival of Advanced Air Mobility (AAM). AAM will utilize both standard and vertical take-off and landing electric aircraft (eVTOL), some pilotless, for the movement of cargo and passengers. See <https://www.nasa.gov/aam/overview/>. Billions of dollars are currently being invested into the development of these vehicles, with projected certifications starting in as early as 2024. At some point in the near future, cargo and passengers will be flown directly to and from Denver Airport and Boulder. Boulder has not put nearly enough effort into thinking about the ramifications of these technologies being deployed. Does the City want these vehicles flying over and landing all over town like a fleet of small helicopters, or would the airport be a more appropriate location? Does the City really want not to participate in this revolutionary future of transportation, or would we prefer to be bypassed by this emerging mode of transportation? What happened to towns bypassed by the railroad or the Interstate was generally not good for those towns.



Boulder Airport is an integral positive member of the Boulder Community – supporting critical emergency services for wildfire fighting and flood evacuation, contributing to the economy, a base for environmental businesses, contributing to Boulder non-profits, training much needed future commercial pilots, establishing Boulder as a sought-after destination for visitors, and positioning Boulder to benefit from the emergence of AAM services.

I invite all members of the Council and City Government to come and visit your airport. I'll enjoy the opportunity to flesh out the future of aviation at the Boulder Airport. Journeys' vision is to be a positive voice in Boulder, help the Boulder Airport become a leader in sustainable aviation, and continue to improve the opportunities in aviation at the Boulder Airport, especially for kids.

Boulder Airport is an extraordinary asset to the Boulder community in many, many ways. At Journeys, we look forward to working with the City to improve what we do, and better integrate the airport with the greater Boulder community. If you would like to visit or follow up to discuss this letter, please don't hesitate to contact me or just stop by the airport.

Best Regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "AM", is positioned above the typed name.

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