Airport panel adopts study on jet noise

By FRANK MAIN
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The Airport Commission adopted a study on jet noise Tuesday that recommends spending millions of dollars of government money to soundproof hundreds of north Baton Rouge homes or help residents move.

The study, conducted by the engineering firm Howard, Needles, Tammen & Bergendoff, said 1,904 houses need insulation to dampen airport noise at a cost of at least $19 million.

Those homes are in neighborhoods where noise levels exceed 65 decibels — the sound of a vacuum cleaner in a department store.

The study will go to the Metro Council for approval, and then to the Federal Aviation Administration. The FAA will pay for 90 percent of the noise-abatement costs, but can't provide any money until the study is approved, said Airport Director Iray Ledoux.

The study said the airport should help residents in high-noise neighborhoods either sell their homes if they don't want to stay or soundproof their homes.

For those homeowners who want to sell, the airport would pay for an appraisal and give a realtor six months to market the house. If the

realtor fails to sell the house, the airport would have another four months to sell the house before having to buy the property.

It would cost $49 million to buy all the homes in the 65-decibel zone, the study said.

Howard, Needles, Tammen & Bergendoff also recommended that the Planning Commission adopt a policy regarding airport noise.

Metro Council members Mike Babin and Thomas Woods, who serve on the Airport Commission, recommended a mechanism for informing potential home buyers about the noise zones in the Brownsfields, Harding Heights, Scotlandville and Glen Oaks neighborhoods.

Babin said the Clerk of Court could keep a record of the properties in the noise zones.

Airport Commission Chairman Walter Monsour disagreed, however, saying the local government would expose itself to lawsuits by adopting a policy to inform home buyers about potential noise problems.

Residents near the airport had flooded hearings over the noise study earlier this year. Some of them expressed fears that the proposed $219 million expansion of the airport would start before their noise problems were tackled.

Ledoux, however, has vowed that noise reduction is his top priority.