

Arlington County Community Meeting on Airport Noise

Thursday, June 18, 2015

Meeting Summary

Background

On Thursday, June 18, 2015, Board Member Libby Garvey hosted an Arlington County Community Meeting on Airport Noise. The meeting was attended by approximately 100 individuals. The meeting was recorded and can be viewed on the [County Board Meeting website](#).

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was represented by Mr. Terry Biggio, Vice President of Air Traffic Services and Mr. Carl Bureson, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Policy, International Affairs and Environment. The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) was represented by Ms. Margaret McKeough, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for MWAA.

Presentations

Ms. Garvey provided opening remarks, stating that airport noise has been a constant issue over decades, but that the County Board has been hearing from an increasing number of our residents over the last year. This has become a significant quality of life issue for many Arlingtonians, who have been experiencing an increase in the intensity and duration of airport noise due to growth at Reagan National Airport (DCA). Her goals for hosting this meeting were to get information out to Arlington residents and to start a conversation with the responsible parties to identify solutions to make the situation better for our residents.

Presentation by Mr. Terry Biggio (presentation attached)

Mr. Biggio stated that the FAA's role is to ensure the safe and efficient operation of the national airspace system. He presented information to compare and contrast the differences between the two northbound departures at DCA – the National (ground-based radar) and the Lazir (satellite-based). Satellite offers greater precision, increasing safety and efficiency.

The FAA began developing the Lazir procedure in 2011, and it is now in its 5th iteration. The stated goal of the procedure is to maximize time over water versus land and provide greater certainty that flights will not impinge upon the P-56 restricted airspace. Through repeated testing of this procedure, the FAA has found that when equipped properly (specific navigation equipment in the cockpit), aircraft can fly the Lazir procedure. There are currently 19 participating carriers that can fly the Lazir. The National 5 departure, which does not join the River until approximately the Georgetown Reservoir, is available to non-participating carriers or upon pilot request.

Mr. Biggio then outlined the different arrival procedures from the north: the River visual approach and the 2 instrument flight rules procedures – the Localizer and the RNP approach.

Presentation by Mr. Carl Bureson (presentation attached)

Mr. Bureson informed the audience of the FAA's efforts to identify, quantify and address the noise and environmental impacts of aircraft operations. Specifically, the FAA:

- funds research to upgrade our understanding of noise and its impacts,
- supports technology and procedure upgrades to reduce noise,

- certifies aircraft standards,
- institutes operating restrictions at airports where appropriate or necessary, and
- establishes regulations for voluntary programs jointly undertaken by airports, airlines and local communities

Finally, Mr. Burluson provided an overview of the FAA's noise metric, DNL, which was adopted in 1979 and last reviewed in 1992. The FAA is in process of launching a survey of communities near 20 airports around the nation to determine if DNL is still a valid metric and if the current DNL value used by the FAA to define significant noise impacts, currently 65 DNL, is still the appropriate level. The FAA's press release announcing this study can be found [here](#).

Presentation for Ms. Margaret McKeough (presentation attached)

Ms. McKeough provided an overview of the past and current operations at DCA and the regulatory framework in which the airport operates. DCA is unique in that it is federally-regulated:

- Slot rule: limitation of 60 aircraft slot movements/hour for the hours of 6 a.m. – midnight.
- Perimeter rule: imposes a 1,250 mile limit on non-stop flights to/from Reagan National.
- Nighttime Noise Rule: in effect between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. Clarification that it is not a curfew, it simply requires aircraft operating at those hours to be compliant with the noise rule.

Ms. McKeough pointed out that Congress has repeatedly provided additional slots and exemptions to the perimeter rule through the FAA reauthorization bill over the last decade.

Regarding level of operations, there has been very little change in total operations at DCA over the last decade, with total annual flight operations fluctuating between 270,000 and 300,000. What is changing is passenger growth, which has resulted from a combination of airline mergers, slot divestitures, market changes, including a growth in air travel, and changes in the fleet mix. All have resulted in a change in the composition and characteristics of flight activity into and out of DCA – airlines flying earlier and later flights and flying larger aircraft to accommodate the increase in passengers.

Finally, Ms. McKeough informed the audience of the pending FAA Reauthorization Bill and MWAA's opposition to any further changes to the slot and perimeter rules.

Question and Answers

While many different topics were discussed, most of the questions and comments from attendees centered on the following issues:

1. Flight paths – a desire for more flights to depart on the Lazir 5 procedure than the National, and a desire for the arrival procedures from the north to more closely track the Potomac River. Why is there not a Lazir arrival procedure?
2. Hours of Operations – concerns and opposition to the early morning and late evening flights, regardless of whether or not they were compliant with the nighttime noise rule
3. Type of Aircraft – concerns that the larger aircraft operating at DCA are creating more noise than in the past. MWAA has requested that American Airlines and Delta Airlines remove the MD-80 aircraft, one of the noisiest but still compliant aircraft, from operations at DCA. The decision to do so rests with the airlines.
4. Noise Modeling vs. Noise Monitoring – recognizing that there are many variables impacting noise levels, attendees urged the FAA to find a new metric and to lower the existing 65 DNL standard.

Many residents and Ms. Garvey highlighted the difficulty in adequately addressing the issue without a common understanding of what exactly is occurring on the ground from a noise standpoint. There is a strong feeling among residents that the FAA aircraft certification process, which establishes estimated noise levels in a controlled environment, and the manner in which actual noise is aggregated through the DNL metric do not adequately capture or identify the actual noise impacts on communities. This is an area that Ms. Garvey indicated she would be looking into with all appropriate stakeholders. The FAA reiterated their previous statement that they were studying the metric and the specific levels, but that individual noise monitor readings were not a reliable way establishing a standard. Finally, the FAA provided an update on action they are taking regarding aircraft certification. There are currently two classes of aircraft operating in the United States - Stage 3 and Stage 4. FAA is in process of rulemaking to put in place a Stage 5 Noise Standard – expected date of 2017 for first set of aircraft and 2020 for second set of aircraft.

5. Regional Coordination – In response to how impacted communities can aid in solutions, the FAA encouraged the region to come together to form an airport noise roundtable to collectively address noise issues at DCA.

In addition to those noted above, the following questions were also raised:

- A concern regarding a pending request for a waiver of building heights in Rosslyn and the potential impact this could have on flight paths if that is approved. The FAA did not have the information but promised to provide it to Ms. Garvey.
- A former Air Traffic Controller at DCA said that many more flights used to fly the river departure and approach as opposed to the 328 radial. He urged legislators to enact changes to flight paths and to establish a curfew at DCA.
- Helicopter Noise – FAA’s ability to get the flights generated from the Department of Defense to follow the FAA-approved helicopter routes. The FAA is initiating conversations with DOD and other helicopter operators in the region to discuss this issue in more detail. The FAA met last month with the Commander of Marine Helicopter Squadron One, the squadron responsible for federal government VIP transportation in the region regarding the recent uptick in Osprey traffic in the region to inform them of issues related to these operations.

Finally, MWAA provided residents with the phone number for their Noise Office (703-417-1204) and the link to the [WebTrak system](#) to find information on specific flights and to file a noise complaint.

Closing and Next Steps

In closing, Ms. Garvey thanked the representatives from FAA and MWAA for attending and providing addition information to the Arlington community. Ms. Garvey will provide all attendees with links to a video of the meeting, copies of the presentations, and a meeting summary. Additionally, Ms. Garvey committed to meeting with her colleagues in the surrounding jurisdictions and with COG officials to follow-up on the recommendation to have greater regional coordination on aviation noise issues, similar to the effort that was undertaken for the 2004 Part 150 Noise Study. Finally, Ms. Garvey indicated an interest in hosting another meeting regarding helicopter noise to include representatives from the Department of Defense and a follow-up meeting on aircraft noise to include representatives from the airlines operating out of DCA.