

SASYNA Letterhead

October 5, 2002

Ms. Kathleen M. Falk
Dane County Executive
City County Building, Room 421
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Madison, WI 53703

RE: Reducing Noise Impacts of the County Airport

Dear Executive Falk:

Our neighborhood association represents Madison eastside residents living directly south of the county airport. An important neighborhood concern is the continuing and growing impacts of the noise on eastside residents. Despite the negative effect of the September 11th terrorist attacks on air travel, the Dane County Regional Airport continues to see growth. It was recently reported that passengers in July grew 24% compared to two years ago. With these additional flights comes additional noise in our neighborhood. Whatever might be said about compliance with lax FAA noise standards, the noise from air traffic over the eastside of Madison is unacceptable. As far as two miles from the airport, overhead planes bring conversations to a halt and are loud enough to drown out the sound of a gas lawn mower. More steps are needed to monitor the airport's noise control strategy and reduce noise in our neighborhood.

There needs to be a proportional increase in efforts by the airport to reduce noise cause by the additional air traffic. The additional income earned by the airport due to growth in air traffic comes at the expense of eastside residents. Assuming 200,000 extra passengers the year, the airport stands to gain \$1,000,000 extra in Passenger Facility Charges (PFC). Some of the PFC funds should be allocated for reducing the airport impacts caused by the increased traffic.

In addition, there have been large capital projects at the airport in the last few years. These include a new runway for \$26 million, resurfacing of the main runway for \$10 million, and the announced \$52 million improvements to the terminal and support facilities. There are obvious funds available for reducing the airport impacts caused by the increased traffic. After all, the financial success of the airport would not be possible without its ability to bear no cost for its impacts on eastside residents.

We would like to offer several suggestions for you to consider and would appreciate your response to these for improving the lives of us who must live with the airport in our backyards. We would welcome additional solutions you can offer for this problem.

Establish a Noise Monitoring System

The airport has continued to gauge the success of its noise control efforts by counting complaints recorded on its telephone noise hotline. This provides a good outlet for the frustration felt by eastside residents and the responses from airport staff are appreciated. However, airport staff always have an excuse for violating the noise control strategy of the airport and exposing residents to excessive noise. These excuses discourage residents from filing complaints, further eroding the ability of a complaint-based system for monitoring the effectiveness of the airport's noise control strategy.

Total reliance on resident complaints is inadequate and shows disregard for the health and well-being of residents. This is like waiting for illnesses to appear before reacting to the pollution. Residents should not be required to do the work of the airport. An active noise monitoring system should be installed to document sound levels surrounding the airport and exposure to our community. There are many examples of noise monitoring systems at other airports in the U.S.

O'Hare Airport in Chicago operates 43 noise monitors and reports the measurements on its web page. Each month of noise measurements are available for public review. The reports include peak noise levels. These provide a much better indicator of residents' noise exposure rather than the FAA's daily averaging method which has been used to design the county airport's noise plan. The averaging of noise levels conveniently avoids discussion of the impacts of excessively loud aircraft during takeoffs and landings. More information on the O'Hare monitoring program can be found at their web site:

http://www.ohare.com/cnrc/ohare/o_noise_monitor.shtm

King County Airport in Seattle operates 10 noise monitors, correlating high instantaneous noise levels with air traffic routes. More information on the Seattle monitoring program can be found at their web site:

<http://www.metrokc.gov/airport/noise/noisemonitoring.htm>

Logan Airport in Boston operates 29 monitors. More information on the Logan monitoring program can be found at their web site:

http://www.massport.com/logan/airpo_noise_monit.html

The San Diego County airport operates 24 noise monitors and combines the measurements with air flight tracking information to identify planes which violate the noise control strategy. More information on the San Diego monitoring program can be found at their web site:

http://www.portofsandiego.org/sandiego_airport/airportnoise/info_noise_main.asp

A few years ago the Dane County Regional Airport spent \$26 million to build a new runway with the specific purpose of reducing flights over populated areas of Madison. The only method used to monitor the effectiveness of this investment is recording resident complaints. This is totally inadequate. Any industry spending this much money on pollution abatement would undertake considerable effort to determine if the control strategy actually produced the promised improvements. A noise monitoring system in conjunction with record keeping of flights over Madison would determine the improvements, if any, which resulted from the new runway. Monitoring resident complaints falls far short of a meaningful method of evaluating the runway's effectiveness at reducing noise.

Our neighborhood association would welcome the opportunity to participate in development of the monitoring program including site selection and evaluation of noise measurements to evaluate the success of the county airport's noise control plan.

Improve Compliance with the Counter-Flow Strategy

The airport's primary noise control method is the counter-flow plan encouraging planes to land and take off to the north. The new \$26 million runway was built several years ago specifically to support this plan. More and more often, increasing flights over our neighborhood suggest this money was not well spent. While weather most often controls the ability to follow this plan, it is being more frequently violated due to increased air traffic.

It is common practice at busy airports to delay takeoffs and landings until a runway is clear. As air traffic at the county airport grows, the counter-flow strategy is the first casualty. We do not think it is too much to ask for flight controllers to delay flights a few minutes so they can comply with the counter-flow plan, and take-off to or land north of the Madison area.

Establish a Curfew for Excessively Loud Aircraft

We suggest a curfew be established for excessively loud aircraft. A similar curfew is enforced at National Airport in Washington, D.C. During the period from 10:00 pm to 7:00 am, aircraft which do not meet the noise guidelines cannot land or takeoff at National. There is a \$5,000 fine for violations of this curfew. The county airport needs a curfew for airplanes not complying with the current Stage 3 noise control standards.

Public Access

Considering the many residents affected by airport noise, there should be more effort made to inform residents of noise control efforts and encourage their participation. Upcoming dates of noise control meetings should be publicly announced to the media rather than only to the few residents who file complaints. Public comments made at the noise control meetings should be incorporated into the meeting minutes, rather than quickly forgotten and dismissed.

Like so many other airports, a web site should be established to post noise meeting minutes, complaint investigations, noise monitoring results, and provide another method for residents to file noise complaints. By avoiding public discussion and access, the airport appears to be avoiding any careful evaluation of its noise control efforts and the increasing impacts of its growth on the eastside of Madison.

Composition of Airport Noise Committee

We encourage you to make appointments to the airport noise committee using people who are concerned about the health and well-being of eastside residents. The purpose of the noise committee should not be to find excuses for the continuing and increasing impacts on residents, it should be to constantly seek ways to reduce the noise over our neighborhood. We suggest that both citizen and county supervisor noise committee members be required to live on or near the flight paths of the airport so they have a hands-on understanding of the impacts of their decisions.

Elimination of F-16 Training Flights

No commercial airplane is as loud or obnoxious as the training flights of F-16 fighter jets. The additional hazards of these flights was made clearer by the dumping of fuel tanks into Lake Mendota earlier this summer as one of the jets made an emergency landing.

During the reconstruction of the airport's main runway in 2000, F-16 training flights were relocated to Volk Field for six months. We ask that you encourage the National Guard to permanently relocate these training flights. The convenience of a few pilots should not be more important than the health and safety of local residents or protection of our lakes.

We hope you will consider these options for reducing the noise impacts of the airport and monitoring the effectiveness of the noise control strategy. It is unfortunate that area residents must make these suggestions rather than the staff responsible for managing the noise control efforts of the airport.

During the past election campaign for Wisconsin governor, all candidates, including yourself, said much about the importance of protection of the environment. We think the noise impacts of the Dane County Regional Airport is an issue ripe for your involvement and a chance for you to rise above election rhetoric. Please do not condone the impacts of the airport on our neighborhood. If you have concern for the health and well-being of eastside residents, we hope you will consider the options we have discussed and encourage airport staff to take a more proactive approach to lessening the impacts on our neighborhood.

On behalf of the neighborhood association,

Mark McFadden
SASYNA Chairperson

cc: Mayor Sue Bauman
Alder Judy Olson
Supervisor Hendrick
Dave Zweifel – Capital Times
Frank Denton – State Journal
Bill Lueders - Isthmus

reply: Schenk/Atwood/Starkweather/Yahara Neighborhood Association
P.O. Box 683
Madison, WI 5371

email: neighbors@sasyna.org