

To: Dane County Executive Kathy Falk  
Dane County Board Chair Kevin Kesterson

From: Dan Melton, Chair Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association

Subject: Dane County Regional Airport Internal Audit and Monthly Reporting of Flights

Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association represents an area on the near east side of Madison - roughly from Schenk's Corners to East Washington Avenue to Olbrich Park - an area ably represented by District 6 County Supv. John Hendrick.

We have asked Dane County Regional Airport staff to do a regular, continuing internal audit of flights, to verify that air traffic is complying with the airport's strategy of directing planes to land and take off to the north - away from the populated isthmus - not to the south - over the populated isthmus.

At its April 27 meeting the airport noise committee discussed the the airport's counter-flow strategy. This is the airport's primary method for reducing noise and improving safety over the populated isthmus. The strategy directs planes to the north - away from the isthmus. At the April 27 meeting airport staff said it tried a new internal audit procedure for verifying that air traffic is complying with the counter-flow strategy.

With the audit, every flight over populated areas of the city is checked for compliance with the counter-flow strategy. If there appears to be a reason for violating the strategy, such as weather or traffic, this is documented. The internal audit is conducted by existing airport staff using readily available information. No outside contractors or costs were incurred.

The internal audit would be a far more effective and objective means of tracking noise control success than the inadequate and infrequently used noise complaint hotline. With the audit, every flight over populated areas is reviewed. With the hotline, flights are only checked if someone takes the time to call in a complaint.

For example, our members report Fed Ex planes sometimes come in over their house at 5:30 AM. These flights apparently are not justified by either weather or traffic conditions, and should use a northern approach. If a resident does not bother to telephone the noise complaint hotline, no one will know, except those awakened at 5:30 AM, that Fed Ex violated the counter-flow strategy. There are also times when two, three, or more planes land in quick succession. Unless a resident is prepared to call several times, the apparent violation of the counter-flow strategy by several planes will go unreported. Additionally, calling the hotline frequently is a practice discouraged by airport staff, as frequent users of the hotline are singled out at noise subcommittee meetings, reducing the importance of their calls. A regular continuing internal audit, on the other hand, would check every flight over the city, whether or not a complaint is filed, to verify the flight was justified in not landing or taking off to the north.

If the audit were done on a regular, continuing basis, results could be used to track long-term changes in flights over populated areas and identify ways to improve the airport's noise control plan. Monthly results could be reported to neighbors through the airport web site, airport noise subcommittee meetings, news media, and our own neighborhood internet discussion list. Violators of the counter-flow strategy could automatically be contacted by airport staff to discourage future problems.

Members of our neighborhood association, like all Dane County residents, appreciate the importance of a healthy, thriving airport to the continued health of the regional economy. However, we hope county residents would also be willing to acknowledge that those who live under the flight paths bear an unusual burden - a "cost," if you will. Air traffic noise continues to be a significant impediment to improving the quality of life in our neighborhood. This impact will increase as the airport continues to expand its facilities and there are calls for more flights to help maintain a thriving business climate in Dane County.

Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association supports measures to improve and verify the effectiveness of the airport's noise control plan. We ask that you encourage airport staff to audit all flights over populated areas on a regular, continuing basis and publish results monthly.

Thank you for listening to our request - and thank you for all you do for the people of Dane County.