**FACTS ABOUT AIRCRAFT NOISE**

**Background**:

Aircraft noise is a long-standing issue in communities across the nation, including the D.C. area, which is served by Reagan National and Dulles International airports. Washington’s airports are owned by the federal government and operated on the government’s behalf by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority.

Under current laws and regulations, airports do not have jurisdiction over the noise output of aircraft in flight or any other aspect of aircraft in flight. But as a voluntary public service, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority receives community noise complaints and questions and is involved in a number of initiatives to help mitigate the impact of aircraft noise on communities.

**Key facts concerning aircraft noise**:

* Flight paths, altitudes and other aspects of commercial planes in the air are regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration and its Air Traffic Control function.
* Flight schedules are set by individual airlines.
* Both of Washington’s airports are 24-hour, 7-day facilities. Airplanes may take off and land at either airport at any hour.
* There are no laws or regulations governing the noise output of aircraft in flight.
* There are no laws or regulations prohibiting planes from flying over residential areas (other than government-imposed no-fly zones, such as the area around the White House and National Mall.)
* To mitigate the impact of aircraft noise, the Airports Authority has worked with the airlines and the FAA to direct planes approaching and departing Reagan National Airport to generally follow the Potomac River. The Potomac flight path has been in use for many years and is considered a noise-abatement procedure. (Airplanes have the most noise impact on people directly below them, and nobody lives in the river.)
* Recently, the FAA has begun implementing a new flight navigation system called NextGen, designed to make the airspace safer and more efficient. NextGen implementation has resulted in a narrowing of flight paths, reducing overflights near many communities but increasing them for those closest to the flight paths. This has prompted a rise in noise complaints from communities near the narrower flight paths.
* The FAA considers several factors when directing airplanes where and how to fly, including weather conditions such as cloud cover, wind speed and direction and visibility, as well as factors such as airspace congestion and the traffic needs of other nearby airports.

**Noise Issues at Dulles International Airport**

* Most aircraft noise complaints around Dulles are focused in areas around the ends of the runways, particularly the runway centerline areas, which receive most traffic from arriving and departing aircraft.
* Local governments use local zoning ordinances to create airport-compatible land uses around the airport. For example, Loudoun County has imposed an Airport Overlay District around Dulles, which restricts zoning for residential development in areas most affected by aircraft noise.
* The Airports Authority works with local zoning staff and other government officials to protect the non-residential zoning areas, as residential development is considered non-compatible with airport uses.
* The Airports Authority discourages residential development in noise-prone areas and opposes any changes in zoning regulations that would permit residential construction of any kind in these high-noise areas.
* Some developers are proposing residential development in areas directly under the Dulles runway flight paths. Such development, if permitted, would create significant ‘quality of life’ issues for residents and possibly lead to restrictions on airport operations.

**Airports Authority Noise-Mitigation Initiatives**

**MWAA Noise Information Office**

* The Airports Authority operates a Noise Information Office to provide noise-related information, discuss noise-related issues, provide noise-monitoring services in communities around the airports, and receive public complaints about airplane noise.
* The Noise Information Office provides online tools for the public to track flight paths, altitudes and other aspects of aircraft in flight on a near real-time basis.
* The Noise Information Office operates a network of noise monitors in communities near flight paths of Reagan National and Dulles International to provide various types of noise measurement data. Noise-data monitoring sites were established with input from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. Under current laws and regulations, these noise-monitor readings cannot be used for any enforcement or regulatory purposes and are provided to the public for informational purposes only.
* The Noise Information Office receives aircraft noise complaints from citizens through an online form available on the Airports Authority website. The Noise Information Offices forwards noise complaints to the FAA and airlines as appropriate.
* The Noise Information Office can be reached by email at mike.jeck@mwaa.com or during normal business hours by telephone at (703) 417-1204.
* Additional aircraft noise-related information, including complaint forms, background information and information on the activities of the Reagan National Community Working Group, can be found on the Airports Authority website at [www.flyreagan.com/dca/reagan-national-aircraft-noise-information](http://www.flyreagan.com/dca/reagan-national-aircraft-noise-information).

**Reagan National Community Working Group**

* The Airports Authority organized and facilitates a Reagan National Community Working Group, which brings community representatives together with officials of the FAA and the airlines to identify potential ways to lessen the impact of noise on densely populated communities near the DCA flight paths. Communities along the Potomac and Anacostia river flight paths (District of Columbia, Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax County, Montgomery County, Prince George’s County) are represented in order to address community concerns on a regional basis. Airlines serving Reagan National are also represented.
* The Airports Authority’s Chief Operating Officer serves as facilitator of the Working Group. High-ranking officials of the FAA attend meetings as technical advisers. A representative of American Airlines (the dominant carrier at DCA) and a representative of the Reagan National airline community have a vote on any Working Group motions or recommendations. The Airports Authority and FAA do not vote.
* The Working Group studies and recommends potential solutions to be considered by the FAA. The group began in October 2015 and will work through the end of 2016.
* As of April 2016, The Working Group has made two recommendations to the FAA to modify Potomac River Corridor flight paths to keep planes over water for a longer time and reduce their time over land. The FAA is working to implement a recommendation adjusting departure paths north of Reagan National. The FAA is studying potential modifications to departure paths south of the airport to keep aircraft more centered over the river and keep planes over the river for a longer distance before turning. More recommendations are expected.

**DCA Nighttime Noise Rule**

* To help mitigate noise at Reagan National, the airport enforces a Nighttime Noise Rule, developed by the FAA in the 1980s when FAA operated the airport. The rule restricts takeoffs and landings at Reagan National by certain types of planes between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. The rule was implemented to keep the very loudest planes from flying during those hours.
* Most aircraft covered by the rule when it was implemented in the 1980s are no longer in service, and most planes serving Reagan National are in compliance with the rule and, therefore, may take off or land at night.
* The Nighttime Noise Rule is not a restriction on the noise output of airplanes in flight, nor is it a curfew on airport operations. Rather, it limits certain planes based on their type, engine configuration and weight.
* During 2015, the Airports Authority levied fines for 36 violations of the Nighttime Noise Rule. Most of these were for overweight planes.
* Traditionally, very few flights operated between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. at Reagan National. (This led to a popular but incorrect myth of the airport having a curfew.) But recent changes in the airline business and consumer demand have prompted airlines to schedule flights during those hours. This has resulted in an increase in noise complaints.
* Federal legislation passed in 1990 limits the ability of airports to impose or modify noise-based restrictions on aircraft, including the Reagan National Nighttime Noise Rule, which was “grandfathered” when Congress created the Airports Authority in the 1980s. It is unlikely the Airports Authority would be permitted to impose a nighttime noise rule today.

**MD-80 Aircraft Reductions at DCA**

* The Airports Authority has asked airlines to limit their use of MD-80 aircraft, which are considered among the loudest commercial airliners currently in service at Reagan National, particularly during the early morning and nighttime hours.
* The airlines have cooperatively responded by either eliminating or greatly reducing the use of this particular type of aircraft in their flight operations at Reagan National.
* American Airlines has agreed to eliminate scheduled service by MD-80-class planes at Reagan National.
* Delta Air Lines has agreed to refrain from scheduling MD-80-class planes after 3 p.m. each day.
* The airlines’ agreements to limit MD-80 service at Reagan National are voluntary.

**Working with FAA, Airlines to Modify DCA Flight Paths**

* Working with the Airports Authority, American Airlines agreed to modify an arrival procedure to reduce the time approaching spend over a D.C. neighborhood near the Georgetown Reservoir.
* Working with the FAA has resulted in modifications of two procedures that result in reducing the amount of time aircraft are over land and increasing the time they are over water.