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FAA Noise Policy

21st CENTURY NOISE POLICY REQUIRES NEW THINKING, COMMUNITY ACTIVIST ASSERTS

“It will take new thinking and a change in previously held core assumptions on annoyance to realize a new FAA noise policy,” Darlene Yaplee, a founding member of the Aviation-Impacted Communities Alliance (AICA), asserted in an invited presentation at the recent NOISE-CON 2024 conference held in New Orleans.

AICA represents over 70 grassroots communities, most of which are under new concentrated NextGen flight paths and are not adjacent to airports.

An updated FAA aviation noise policy must reflect the “lived experience” of two separate noise exposure environments: communities near airports and communities farther away from airports under NextGen flight paths, general aviation flight training routes, or helicopter routes, Yaplee told ANR. The current FAA noise policy, she stressed, does not reflect the concentration of noise that occurred in the implementation of NextGen or the results of FAA’s Neighborhood Environmental Survey (NES), released in 2021, which shows that many more people are impacted by aircraft noise and at levels far below 65 dB DNL than previously thought.

Following are excerpts from a paper presented by Yaplee at NOISE-CON that explain what she believes must be included in an updated FAA noise policy:

Different Thresholds for Different Environments

The current noise policy relies on the DNL 65 metric and threshold for every decision including environmental re-views, airport noise compatibility planning, soundproofing eligibility, permanent noise monitoring eligibility, and noise abatement. As covered in section 3.1 [of the paper], the two distinct noise exposure environments of overflown communities and vicinity of airport communities require different noise reduction solutions. An incorrect assumption is that all communities want and would benefit from soundproofing. Do not equate thresholds with noise insulation.

Simplicity in a noise policy as emphasized by the FAA cannot be at the expense of Communities; different noise metrics and thresholds and different noise reduction solutions are needed to address the different circumstances of communities near an

airport versus communities away from an air-port. The two environments are different and face very different constraints from an aircraft noise solutions perspective.

New Thinking to Realize a 21st Century Noise Policy

It will take new thinking and a change in previously held core assumptions on annoyance to realize a new noise policy.

At the 2010 FAA Noise Impacts Research Roadmap Workshop regarding the “Key Issues– Annoyance - Public, Can community / public actions be predicted?” the FAA asked the question “Should we have known what would happen?” Almost 15 years later with the consequences of NextGen, the NES study, and the Request for comment on the Noise Policy Review, the answer is still a resounding “yes” we should know what will happen when aviation changes are considered. This is the litmus test for the new noise policy.

The FAA must appropriately reflect what people experience on the ground or will experience if a change is made. There should not be surprises as there were with NextGen roll outs. Only if valid metrics and tools are accurate can precise noise modeling be used to evaluate potential impacts.

DNL would not need to be replaced entirely because ASNA requires a system of metrics: more than one metric and threshold can be used to represent the true impacts of the distinct environments of near airports and overflight communities. The FAA needs to address the two noise environments differently through metrics, thresholds, and noise mitigation and abatement solutions.

The lived experience of aircraft noise impacts (how many, how loud, when, and how often) can be represented effectively by the count of events with a maximum sound level above ambient noise for the Peak day of operations after appropriate penalties such as time of occurrence and cadence have been applied, namely NAA for Peak day. The metric is simple and understandable.

Most importantly, the FAA needs to evaluate and select metric(s) that best represent the communities’ lived experience separately from setting thresholds to define significant impact for NEPA and land use compatibility.

Any metric that is neither understandable, nor a valid representation of noise impacts should not be used for decision-making. Valid noise metrics will disclose truths about the impacts of aviation noise on Communities and will enable the development of solutions to reduce impacts.

Yaplee’s scholarly paper, “Realizing a 21st Century Noise Policy,” which was co-authored by Cindy Christiansen, PhD, also a co-founder of AICA, and Marie-Jo Fremont on Concerned Residents of Palo Alto, CA, is attached to the email that brought you this week’s issue of ANR.

Aircraft Noise Advisory Committee

Don Scata, Acting Deputy Director of FAA’s Office of Environment & Energy, noted at the NOISE-CON session that the *FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024* requires FAA to establish an Aircraft Noise Advisory Committee to advise the FAA Administrator “on

issues facing the aviation community that are related to aircraft noise exposure and existing FAA noise policies and regulations.”

The FAA Reauthorization Act was signed into law on May 16 and requires the Advisory Committee to be established within 180 days after enactment, which is Nov. 12. That gives FAA about four months from now to get the Advisory Committee up and running.

The FAA Administrator must appoint members to the Advisory Committee that represent engine manufacturers, air carriers, airport owners or operators, aircraft manufacturers, advanced air mobility manufacturers or operators; and institutions of higher education; as well as “representatives of airport-adjacent communities from geographically diverse regions.”

It is unclear who added the language limiting community representatives to those from “airport-adjacent” communities but that requirement flies in the face of Darlene Yaplee’s assertion at NOISE-CON that input from communities farther from airports under NextGen flight paths also must be considered.

The Aircraft Noise Advisory Committee is tasked with:

- (1) Evaluating existing research on aircraft noise impacts and annoyance;
- (2) Assessing alternative noise metrics that could be used to supplement or replace the existing Day Night Level standard, in consultation with the National Academies;
- (3) Evaluating the current 65-decibel exposure threshold, including the impact to land use compatibility around airports if such threshold was lowered;
- (4) Evaluating current noise mitigation strategies and the community engagement efforts by the FAA with respect to changes in airspace utilization, such as the integration of new entrants and usage of performance-based navigation; and
- (5) Other duties determined appropriate by the FAA Administrator

Not later than one year after the date of its establishment, the Advisory Committee must submit to the FAA Administrator a report on any recommended changes to current aviation noise policies.

Not later than 180 days after the date the FAA Administrator receives the report, the Administrator must submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report containing the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee.

Not later than 30 days after submission of the report to Congress, the FAA Administrator must brief the appropriate committees of Congress on how the Administrator plans to implement recommendations contained in the report and, for each recommendation that the Administrator does not plan to implement, the reason of the Administrator for not implementing the recommendation.