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FAA

COMMUNITIES MUST BE ENGAGED PARTNERS IN MODERNIZING PILOT SCHOOLS, FAA TOLD

FAA's effort to modernize pilot training schools, which was announced on Dec. 26, 2024, must address the responsibility of these schools to work in partnership with communities to make their operations compatible with their neighbors, the City of Phoenix and the Aviation-Impacted Communities Alliance (AICA) told the agency.

Their comments are among the first to be submitted in response to FAA's request for public comments on modernizing 14 CFR part 141 and part 61, which prescribe requirements for pilot training and certification. The deadline for submitting comments is March 21.

On March 6, FAA will hold the first of several virtual public hearings on the issue. Members of the public must register to attend. For further information, go to www.regulations.gov and search for docket FAA-2024-2531, which includes FAA's announcement and the comments submitted to date.

Flight training operations are a major source of noise complaints in communities near these schools, which are increasingly busy trying to fill a pilot shortage.

The process used to license or certificate pilot schools in the U.S. is approaching 100 years old, the FAA said in announcing its modernization effort.

'Critical Element' Missing

The City of Phoenix told FAA that community participation was the "critical element" that was missing from the scope of FAA's pilot school modernization effort.

The City recommended that the scope of the FAA's pilot school modernization effort be expanded to include "the identification of concepts and actions that improve the responsibility to, communication with, and recognition of impacted communities," Jordan D. Feld, Deputy Aviation Director, Planning & Environmental Division for the City of Phoenix Aviation Department, stressed in written comments.

These actions, he suggested, could include requirements for flight schools to:

- Conduct community engagement when operational characteristics are expected to change.
- Conduct ongoing engagement when communities express ongoing concerns.
- Collaborate with airport operators, FAA airport district offices and FAA flight standards district offices on community concerns. • Publish operational data and training schedules for community knowledge and benefit.
- Work with FAA air traffic officials to seek efficiencies and balance between pilot school business and training objectives with airspace safety and community compatibility needs.
- Ensure flight school involvement in FAA and NATCA ATO PBN design work groups and airspace modernization efforts.

Additionally, the City of Phoenix recommended that the National Flight Training Alliance (NFTA) and the FAA flight training and certification group work with airport operators that support major pilot training operations (like Phoenix) – as well as with FAA Aviation Noise Ombudsman and related FAA regional community engagement officials, and with FAA Flight Standards District Office representatives – “to understand historical community complaints and concerns with pilot training schools and specifically, to engage those communities during this modernization effort so meaningful input from the public can be achieved and sustainable policy changes implemented.”

AICA Comments

The Aviation-Impacted Communities Alliance, which represents over 90 grassroots community groups around the country, told FAA that it endorses the comments submitted by the City of Phoenix and also recommended the following key initiatives “to strengthen the modernization efforts to reflect a holistic approach to safety, operational excellence, and community well-being”:

- Incorporating Noise Abatement Training – Enhance pilot education on noise-sensitive operations in accordance with Advisory Circular 91-36D to minimize community impact.
- Optimizing Training Efficiency – Continue work to reduce student dropout rates by improving resource allocation, streamlining training programs, and minimizing unnecessary environmental impacts.
- Integrating Competency Assessments into Flight Hour Requirements – Encourage the reevaluation of the 1500-hour rule through a competency-based framework that improves student outcomes and professional readiness.
- Increasing Transparency – Consider requiring flight schools to publish graduation rates and safety track records, providing clearer insights into program effectiveness, helping students make informed decisions, and promoting accountability within the industry.

- Enhancing Flight Training with Historical Accident Analysis – Further strengthen curriculum with most current data-driven insights and advanced technologies to improve pilot competency and overall flight safety.
- Leveraging Innovation – Continue to advance modern technologies and training methods to enhance efficiency, improve pilot proficiency, and reduce community impacts from outdated systems.
- Ensuring Balanced Stakeholder Inclusion and Community Engagement – Strengthen collaboration with impacted communities to enhance transparency, reduce conflicts, and create a more efficient, safe, and community-conscious training environment that benefits both pilots and the aviation industry.

“We recognize that flight school training fulfills a fundamental role in preparing the next generation of pilots and influences the quality of life in communities across the country. As the FAA advances this initiative, we encourage a balanced approach that enhances pilot proficiency while promoting transparency, accountability, and thoughtful noise mitigation strategies,” the community alliance told the agency.