[The following article was originally published in *Airport Noise Report* newsletter on pages 133-135 in Volume 37, Number 33, September 26, 2025.]

Airport Noise Report

A weekly update on litigation, regulations, and technological developments

Volume 37, Number 33 September 26, 2025

FAA Advisory Committees
FAA SEEKS MEMBERS FOR UNMANNED AND AUTONOMOUS FLIGHT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The FAA announced in the Sept. 24 *Federal Register* that it is seeking nominations for membership on its Unmanned and Autonomous Flight Advisory Committee (UAFAC), which provides advice to DOT and the FAA Administrator on policy and technical-level issues relate to these pilotless vehicles, which include drones and potentially air taxis.

Fearful that its Federal Advisory Committees "have been overrun with individuals whose sole focus is their radical DEI and climate agenda," the Trump administration's U.S. Department of Transportation has notified its agencies, including the FAA, that it plans to "reconstitute" the membership of their Federal Advisory Committees and refocus them on "what matters," ANR was told in mid-August (37 ANR 113).

The FAA is using the *Federal Register* to announce how and when to apply for membership on its advisory committees. Last week the FAA announced that it is seeking new members for its Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee (ARAC). Today's notice seeking members for FAA's UAFAC committee is the second such *Federal Register* notice to be issued.

Nominations to serve on the reconstituted UAFAC committee must be received by FAA on or before Oct. 24. FAA's *Federal Register* notice, which provides instruction on how to apply for membership and what matters the committee will address is attached to the email that sent you this issue of ANR.

The reconstituted UAFAC committee will be chartered for two years; until Jan. 1, 2027, and is expected to meet three times a year. The committee will be comprised of no more than 12 members representing the following stakeholder groups:

(1) Commercial operators of unmanned aircraft systems;

(2) Unmanned aircraft system manufacturers;

(3) Counter-UAS manufacturers;

(4) FAA-approved unmanned aircraft system service suppliers;

(5) Unmanned aircraft system test ranges under section 44803 of title 49, United States Code;

(6) Unmanned aircraft system physical infrastructure network providers;

(7) Community advocates with safety, privacy, and noise interests related to unmanned and autonomous aviation operations and activities;

(8) Certified labor organizations representing commercial airline pilots, air traffic control specialists employed by the Administration, certified aircraft maintenance technicians, certified aircraft dispatchers, or aviation safety inspectors; and

(9) Academia or a relevant research organization.

Members will serve a 2-year term but may be reappointed. The Department is interested in ensuring membership is balanced fairly in terms of the points of view represented and the functions to be performed by the Committee.

Nominees can self-nominate or be nominated by any individual or organization.

FAA stressed in its *Federal Register* notice that the UAFAC "will provide advice on equipping and enabling communities to be informed about how unmanned aircraft systems, autonomous aviation operations, and other technologies may operate in ways that are least impactful to those communities."

Community Concerns

Comments submitted to FAA on Sept. 20 by the Aviation-Impacted Communities Alliance (AICA), which represents over 90 local and national organizations advocating on a bipartisan basis for aviation policy that reflects the lived experience of affected communities, lay out their communities' concerns about low-altitude flights.

AICA's comments below were submitted in response to FAA's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on "Normalizing Unmanned Aircraft Systems Beyond Visual Line of Sight Operations" but they apply to the work of FAA's Unmanned and Autonomous Flight Advisory Committee as well:

AICA told the FAA that to ensure safety and public confidence in drones and other Advanced Air Mobility vehicles, there should be strengthened in four critical areas:

● **Safety:** FAA must ensure that rules governing Advanced Air Mobility (AAM), including drones and other new vehicle types, can be effectively implemented and enforced in
operations with existing low-altitude aircraft.

Although the FAA has proposed right-of-way requirements, industry analysis shows that many practical issues remain unresolved. Questions remain about whether electronic conspicuity (EC) systems are viable and whether the expectations for low-

altitude users are realistic in practice. Safety concerns extend beyond aviation conflicts to risks on the ground, where crashes or debris could threaten people and property.

Equally important, there is currently no clear or consistent mechanism for the public to know who to contact when unsafe or unlawful operations occur across AAM, including drones and other low- altitude aircraft, and accountability is insufficient as current rules leave much to interpretation.

● **Airspace Management:** Airspace is not unlimited. FAA itself has acknowledged capacity constraints, stating that "because of aging equipment, staffing shortages, runway construction and severe congestion, schedule modifications are necessary" and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has warned that congestion and complexity will continue to grow, noting that "FAA expects to manage an increasingly congested and complex airspace in the future".

Capacity is constrained by staffing, technology, operational complexity, and human limits. Overlooking these limits puts safety at risk. FAA must therefore ensure that low-altitude drone operations are integrated into the NAS under a structure that is safe, accountable, and adequately resourced. The proposed framework introduces a new UAS Traffic Management (UTM) system that relies heavily on third-party providers.

This raises two concerns: whether third-party providers will be adequately staffed to manage corridors effectively, and whether FAA, already facing staffing shortfalls, will have the capacity to provide strong oversight. Given these capacity constraints, governance mechanisms are needed to resolve competing operator demands fairly, with clear limits on capacity established through objective thresholds that can flag rising safety risks and ensure timely oversight actions. FAA has also proposed new data reporting requirements for drones. This data should be leveraged within a proactive NAS Capacity and Safety System to identify triggers, ensure accountability, and make sure timely corrective actions are taken.

● **Environmental Impacts:** FAA should require environmental review that reflects how communities actually experience noise from AAM, including drones. Current noise policy is still based on metrics designed for commercial airline operations. These metrics do not count the number of events, and they do not adequately reflect the unique acoustic signatures of drones, including future AAM. As these aircraft produce tonal noise (a distinctive buzzing sound), applying thresholds like DNL 65 is inadequate. In one FAA environmental review, the analysis showed the same DNL 65 whether there was one drone flight or 499 drone flights, illustrating how the current framework can obscure real-world impacts.

In College Station, Texas, residents described the sound of Amazon's Prime Air drones as like "a hundred swarms of bees." The city urged FAA to delay approval of Amazon's expansion plans until additional noise-mitigation measures were implemented, citing resident concerns about take-off, landing, and delivery noise as well as potential zoning conflicts. Yet FAA's environmental review of the original project concluded with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) because modeled exposure did not exceed the DNL 65 dB threshold. FAA should modernize its noise policy to

incorporate drones using metrics that count the number of events and reflect their acoustic signatures, including tonal qualities that affect annoyance.

● **Community Engagement:** Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy stated that "communities have to have a say in, ''Do they want drone use in their communities'."

Provide early notice of proposed corridors or routes to local governments and community organizations before decisions are finalized. Community representatives should be included in advisory processes and technical working groups, alongside industry and FAA staff, so that impacts on health, quality of life, and local land use are considered.

Respect for local and state governance is also critical, since zoning, privacy, nuisance, and safety laws often fall within local authority. Transparent reporting must both accurately reflect the lived experience of community impacts and document when and how communities were consulted and how their input influenced outcomes, as this is essential to building public trust.

[AICA's full comments to FAA are attached to the email that brought you this issue of ANR.]