

Airport Noise Report



A weekly update on litigation, regulations, and technological developments

Volume 38, Number 26

August 21, 2026

A Reckless ‘Boom-Doggie’

EARTHJUSTICE, SIERRA CLUB URGE FAA TO KEEP BAN ON OVERLAND SST FLIGHTS

[Following is an excerpt from the comments the Aviation Impacted Communities Alliance (AICA) in response to the FAA’s request for public input on its Aircraft Noise Complaint and Inquiry System (ANCIR) or Noise Portal.]

In a clever and biting play on words, Earthjustice and the Sierra Club called the Trump Administration’s proposal to drop the federal ban on overland flights by commercial supersonic aircraft “a reckless boom-doggie” – because it aids corporate interests in getting commercial supersonic aircraft to market – and urged FAA not to repeal its long-held ban.

“The FAA’s proposal to allow supersonic flights over our communities reverses decades of evidence-based safeguards and flies in the face of the agency’s statutory mandate to protect the public from aircraft noise and sonic booms,” said Amanda Lineberry, Senior Attorney at Earthjustice.

“Enabling supersonic flight will result in dangerous emissions that exacerbate the climate crisis and endanger our public health and the environment, all to serve only the wealthiest of customers.”

“For 50 years, the ban on supersonic flights has protected communities from deafening sonic booms, dangerous air pollution, and unnecessary harm to wildlife,” said Andrea Issod, Sierra Club Senior Attorney.

“ Trump administration is now trying to throw these protections away, not because the science has changed but to satisfy corporate interests chasing faster luxury travel. Americans shouldn’t have to sacrifice our air quality, public health, or peace and quiet so a select few can fly faster than the speed of sound. The FAA must reject this reckless ‘boom-doggie’ and keep the ban on supersonic flight in place.”

In their comments to FAA, the environmental groups argued that supersonic flight is disproportionately harmful to public health and the environment. In addition to carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and water vapor, supersonic aircraft emit sulfur oxides, black carbon, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, and particulate matter. When breathed in, these pollutants harm public health by increasing instances of respiratory illness, heart disease, and cognitive impairments in children.

They reminded FAA that greenhouse gas emissions from aircraft account for 4% of all U.S. climate emissions, and supersonic planes burn seven to nine times more fuel than regular planes.

“Along with climate-warming and unhealthy emissions, supersonic aircrafts cause ‘sonic booms’ and other types of noise including evanescent waves. These booms produce shock waves that travel for 10 miles on either side of the flight path of a supersonic jet, disturbing humans and wildlife alike,” Earthjustice and the Sierra Club stressed.

FAA Proposal Will Not Protect the Public

The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) asserted in its comments to FAA that a performance based standard focused on Mach Cutoff cannot fully protect the public from exposure to sonic boom.

The ICCT explained that it “is an independent non-profit organization founded to provide unbiased technical and scientific analysis to environmental regulators.” It participates in technical working groups at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and, along with FAA, in ongoing work to set an international sonic boom standard.

The ICCT cited federal law and research findings to underpin its assertion that FAA’s proposed rule will not reliably protect the public from the impacts of sonic boom.

“A safe level of sonic boom cannot be defined because the data needed, in the form of a dose-response curve linking varying levels of sonic boom to human annoyance, does not exist,” the ICCT told FAA, adding:

“A safe level of sonic boom also cannot be measured because FAA’s preferred metric, maximum overpressure, is neither a loudness nor an annoyance metric that can be directly linked to human impacts.”

“Finally, a safe level of sonic boom cannot be enforced because Mach Cutoff has never been achieved in commercial flight and is extremely sensitive to flight conditions,” the ICCT told FAA.

The ICCT also asserted that FAA’s claim that overland supersonic flights qualify for a categorical exclusion from the National Environmental Policy Act requirements because FAA does not anticipate any environmental impacts from the rule “is demonstrably false.”

“Research supports the argument that lifting the overland flight ban would promote supersonic flights. MIT modeling for NASA concluded that lifting the overland flight ban would increase potential supersonic flights 5.4 - 30-fold. Subsequent MIT research confirmed this finding, concluding that removing overland flight restrictions would increase the potential market for supersonic aircraft by 20 times compared to a case where overland flight remains banned.

“These expanded operations will result in large, and unmitigable, environmental impacts. Due to their very high carbon intensity and high-altitude operations, reintroducing supersonic aircraft will have significant environmental impacts. These impacts are broader than the sonic boom that MCO nominally addresses and cover airport noise, ozone depletion, and climate change.”

Unilateral U.S. Standard Not Necessary

The ICCT also argued that a unilateral U.S. sonic boom standard is unnecessary and violates decades of precedent. ICAO’s Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection (CAEP) is already working on an en route sonic boom standard and expects to complete it by 2031, the ICCT stressed.

It noted that FAA leads the U.S. delegation to CAEP and is contributing to the ICAO sonic boom standard development. Evidence of this is the central role of NASA’s Quesst (Quiet Supersonic Aircraft) community response data in helping set the stringency of the ICAO standard.

Later this year, NASA’s X-59 Quesst demonstrator will overfly an undefined number of U.S. metropolitan areas at supersonic speed to gather data on how well the X-59 noise is tolerated by communities. Those data will be given to CAEP.

“FAA has not laid out a convincing case for why it should deviate from this traditional path,” the ICCT asserted.

“FAA argues that the timetable for development of lowboom aircraft requires an interim sonic boom standard now. This is a fatuous argument given that 1) the only low-boom aircraft currently being flown is NASA’s Quesst aircraft; 2) Quesst is already flying under a Supplemental Flight Authorization (SFA); 3) Quesst’s low-boom technology would not be adequately characterized under FAA’s maximum overpressure metric; and 4) the international en route noise standard under development at ICAO requires the input of Quesst’s community response data. FAA does not provide sufficient justification for developing a rule, without the necessary data, that might conflict with ICAO’s.”

The ICCT also details in its comments a myriad of problems the two U.S. manufacturers actively developing commercial SSTs (Boom Supersonic and Spike Aerospace) have encountered in bringing their aircraft to market. It is very unlikely that either will be able to

type-certify their commercial SSTs by 2031, when ICAO's is expected to issue its en route sonic boom standard, the ICCT told FAA.