

Airport Noise Report



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Overland SST Flights

AIA VOICES STRONG SUPPORT FOR LIFTING BAN; A4A, ACI-NA, OTHERS HAVE CONCERNS

[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.]

The Aerospace Industries Association (AIA), which represents the U.S. aerospace and defense industry, told FAA that it strongly supports the agency's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) to replace the longstanding prohibition on civil supersonic flights over land "with a modern, performance-based regulatory framework" and to establish an interim performance-based sonic boom standard.

FAA is proposing that supersonic aircraft be operated in a manner that the sonic boom overpressure at the surface does not exceed 0.11 pound per square foot (psf) and operators of supersonic aircraft, not the companies manufacturing SSTs, demonstrate that compliance.

AIA commended the FAA "for recognizing that the current prohibition on civil supersonic flight is no longer aligned with the state of technology. As the NPRM correctly notes, advances in aircraft design, operational techniques, atmospheric modeling, and sonic-boom mitigation have demonstrated the potential for supersonic operations that prevent sonic booms from reaching the surface. The proposal appropriately shifts the regulatory framework away from a speed-based prohibition and toward a performance-based standard [0.11 psf]," AIA asserted in comments to FAA.

Airlines Stress Lack of Supporting Data

Airlines 4 America (A4A), which represents U.S. commercial air carriers, however, was not as enthusiastic about FAA's proposal. It presented three main criticisms:

- The NPRM does not provide a rationale for establishing an operator-based certification requirement instead of a type certification requirement applicable to original equipment manufacturers;

- The selection of the metric that “sonic boom overpressure at the surface does not exceed 0.11 pound per square foot (psf)” is based on limited data; and
- There is a lack of publicly available real-world data or evidence to support the feasibility of MCO [Mach Cutoff] or other measures to prevent sonic boom.

MCO (refraction of the sonic boom before it hits the ground) occurs under certain conditions when flying in a narrow range of speeds typically 110% to 130% above the speed of sound (Mach 1) but it is sensitive to speed, altitude, temperature, wind direction, and humidity. So there is no guarantee that MCO will occur on all or any flights.

A4A told FAA, “the agency’s determination that advancement in technology and flight techniques have made it technologically practical to achieve supersonic flight without sonic booms reaching the surface is not supported by further evidence in the NPRM.”

In addition to the three issues identified above, A4A emphasized that it “is also important to evaluate how the proposed supersonic operational concepts can be implemented within the realities of commercial airline operations.

“A4A recognizes the potential benefits of future supersonic operations and supports the continued development of enabling technologies. At the same time, commercial flight operations routinely encounter weather deviations, air traffic control constraints, airspace congestion, and other dynamic conditions that may affect the ability to consistently maintain Mach Cutoff Operations or similar procedures.

“As the FAA considers a certification framework that incorporates operational compliance, it should also assess the associated operational safety considerations, flight crew workload implications, and National Airspace System (NAS) integration challenges. Such evaluation would help ensure that any future regulatory framework is both technically sound and operationally practical, particularly given the NPRM’s acknowledgment that these concepts represent a new operational construct that has not yet been demonstrated at commercial scale.”

How Will Overland Flights Affect Airports?

The Airports Council International – North America (ACI-NA), also expressed concern about moving to a performance- based standard for overland supersonic flight without additional information that is not provided in the NPRM.

“While we understand that psf is the standard for measuring sonic booms, further information should be provided to help airport operators and community members understand how this psf will be perceived on the ground. For example, how does it compare to other pressure waves, such as C-weighted noise resulting from start of takeoff roll or reverse thrust during a landing, which is a rumble as well?”

ACI-NA also raised the following questions, which its members believe need to be addressed as part of the NPRM in order to better understand the potential impact of lifting the overland supersonic flight ban on airports:

- The NPRM does not detail specific air traffic control procedures or airspace changes to integrate these operations into the NAS. Does FAA plan to make any changes to the NAS that may be addressed in future rulemakings or guidance? This is important to understand the potential impact on subsonic operations, and the associated potential impacts on airports and the surrounding communities.
- Would a flight be cancelled if the MCO [Mach Cutoff] conditions are not met? How reliable is a forecast to ensure the MCO conditions are met throughout the operation? A custom route may be needed to meet the MCO conditions. How would this impact the efficiency of the NAS if enroute flight plans for supersonic are not repeatable and predictable?
- In terms of certification, the NPRM proposes one-time approval for operators who demonstrate compliance with the 0.11 psf standard and will not require an annual renewal process. Compliance would be through measurements and modeling. There is no mention of monitoring the operator's compliance with the proposed operation to ensure the standard is met. What assurances are there that an operator will fly the aircraft in the same manner and conditions that were present at the time the measurements were taken for certification? As previously stated, if conditions are not met for a flight, the 0.11 psf standard may not be met. How would the FAA ensure an operator does not conduct the flight in this situation?

Attached to the email that brought you today's issue of ANR are the full comments on FAA's NPRM submitted by AIA, A4A, and ACI-NA as well as comments submitted by the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) and Earthjustice.

Go to www.regulations.gov and search for "FAA-2026-6935 to see all 488 comments submitted to FAA's docket.