



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., SW.
Washington, DC 20591

July 1, 2020

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman, Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter is the report to Congress from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as required under Section 176(b) of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018.

Section 176(b) directs the FAA to submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report on:

- (1) How the FAA will improve community involvement practices for NextGen projects located in metroplexes;
- (2) How and when the FAA will engage airports and communities in performance-based navigation proposals; and
- (3) Lessons learned from NextGen projects and pilot programs and how those lessons learned are being integrated into community involvement practices for future NextGen projects located in metroplexes.

We look forward to continued collaboration with your staff and would be happy to schedule time to brief you further if desired.

We have sent identical letters to Chairman DeFazio, Senator Cantwell, and Congressman Graves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Dickson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Steve Dickson
Administrator

Enclosure



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July 1, 2020

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
Chairman, Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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Steve Dickson
Administrator

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July 1, 2020

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell:

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Steve Dickson
Administrator

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Washington, DC 20591

July 1, 2020

The Honorable Sam Graves
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Graves:

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**Federal Aviation Administration
Air Traffic Organization**

FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, Section 176(b)

Report on Community Involvement in FAA NextGen Projects Located in Metroplexes

Introduction

Congress has asked the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to complete a review of its community involvement (CI) practices for NextGen projects located in metroplexes identified by the FAA. This report describes:

- (1) Lessons learned from NextGen projects and pilot programs and how those lessons learned are being integrated into CI practices for future NextGen projects located in metroplexes;
- (2) How and when the FAA will engage airports and communities in performance-based navigation proposals; and
- (3) How the FAA will improve CI practices for NextGen projects located in metroplexes.

Background

A Metroplex is a metropolitan area where multiple commercial and general aviation airports operate within the same airspace. A Single Site initiative optimizes the airspace surrounding smaller cities. Metroplex and Single Site initiatives allow airports to replace legacy conventional procedures or to provide new precision procedures for airports wherein none existed previously. Over the past few years, the FAA has developed a new framework for CI during Metroplex and Single-Site Performance Based Navigation (PBN) projects, incorporating best practices and lessons learned from prior work. The following sections describe the evolution of the FAA approach to community involvement as well as an overview of the Metroplex Program.

Community Involvement for PBN

As the FAA transitions to a National Airspace System (NAS) built around more efficient, satellite-enabled PBN procedures (as outlined in the PBN NAS Navigation Strategy 2016), flight paths are adjusted for many reasons. Typically, the revisions are intended to increase safety and efficiency, but they can also result in changes to the aircraft noise experienced by nearby communities. The FAA is committed to giving meaningful consideration to community concerns when making aviation decisions that affect these localities and their residents.

Enhancing CI has been an FAA-wide effort. Over the past few years, the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) has focused on creating a more robust, transparent, and consistent CI process through new or updated policies and guidance. These efforts have resulted not only in best practices to be applied to future projects, but also with lessons learned for continuous improvement of the process.

Metroplex Program Overview

A key NextGen goal is to safely improve the overall efficiency of the NAS by increasing efficiencies in metroplexes—metropolitan areas with multiple airports and complex air traffic flows. The FAA’s goal is to enhance the way aircraft navigate this complex airspace to improve airport access and provide efficient flight routes.

Through the Metroplex program, the FAA is collaborating with aviation stakeholders to improve regional traffic movement by optimizing airspace and procedures based on precise satellite-based navigation. Metroplex projects have resulted in and are expected to continue providing many benefits. In addition to improving navigation, metroplex projects can reduce distance flown, create repeatable and predictable flight paths, deconflict procedures, and improve flight safety. Passengers and the general public benefit from more direct routes.

In collaboration with the aviation industry, the FAA identified metroplexes where improved performance could yield benefits not only to the region but the entire NAS. The 11 active or completed metroplex sites are shown on the map in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Metroplex Locations¹

Table 1 summarizes the status of each Metroplex site in terms of the Finding of No Significant Impact/Record of Decision (FONSI/ROD) date as well as the CI activities that were conducted during the project. For the three projects that are still ongoing, completed or planned CI activities are reflected. There may be future CI activities for these projects that are not currently planned or reflected in Table 1.

¹ The New York-New Jersey-Philadelphia area is a metroplex by definition, and the airspace in that region is being addressed by the joint FAA/Industry Northeast Corridor Initiative, which focuses on making continuous improvements to the system in the Northeast that operationally benefit the entire NAS.

Table 1 Summary of CI Activities at Metroplex Sites

Metroplex Site	FONSI/ROD Date	Airport Outreach Briefings	Other Outreach Briefings*	Public Workshops	Webinars	Documented CI Plan
Houston	June 2013	✓				
Washington DC	December 2013	✓				
North Texas	June 2014	✓				
Atlanta	July 2014	✓				
Northern California	July 2014	✓	✓	✓		
Charlotte	June 2015	✓	✓	✓		
Southern California	August 2016	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Cleveland-Detroit	April 2018	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Denver	January 2020**	✓	✓	✓		✓
Las Vegas	March 2020**	✓	✓	✓		✓
South-Central Florida	September 2020**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
*Elected or appointed officials, agencies, etc.						
** Projected dates						

As seen in Table 1, as the Metroplex program has progressed, the CI activities have expanded to include additional public workshops, outreach briefings, webinars, and documented CI plans.

Lessons Learned from Metroplex and Other NextGen Projects

Recent Metroplex and other PBN projects have given the FAA the opportunity to mine lessons learned and evolve guidance and best practices.

2017 ATO Survey

In 2017, ATO’s Mission Support Services organization (AJV) conducted an internal survey to collect lessons learned and best practices from recent CI activities associated with airspace and procedures projects. The survey was distributed to the ATO Service Center Directors, the Director of Airspace Services, and select members of their staff. The purpose was to collect information from a representative sample of projects that demonstrate how ATO CI activities have evolved and to collect feedback from a mix of Metroplex and Single-Site projects with a range of small- to large-scale changes and varying levels of controversy.

The best practices and lessons learned collected from this exercise shared some common threads that are being leveraged in ongoing and future PBN projects. The following summarizes the fundamental themes for engaging key stakeholders:

- **Internal FAA**
 - Engage with Lines of Business/Staff Offices across the agency as needed for coordination and support. The Regional Administrator, Office of Communications, Airports District Office, Operations Support Group, Environmental Protection Specialist, Administrative Services Group, Business Services Group, and air traffic control facility staff were all identified as contributing to CI activities.
 - Develop a strategy to ensure key stakeholder participation, effective public outreach materials, and productive outreach meetings when appropriate.
- **Airport operators**
 - Consult with and seek buy-in/support from all airport operators affected by the project at the outset and continually during the project.
 - Ensure users and industry are aware of community characteristics and constraints and share their insights with the FAA.
 - Involve airlines or other aircraft operators in developing a consistent message about the project mission.
 - Involve aircraft operators, as NAS users, to be a part of FAA engagement efforts, from airport and local elected and/or appointed officials' briefings to community workshops.
- **Elected and/or Appointed Officials²**
 - Elected and/or appointed officials should advise in determining the type of outreach to the public and the number and location of public workshops, if needed.
- **Public**
 - Apply the appropriate type and amount of outreach to the public, depending on the potential impact of the action.
 - Consider different methods of engaging the public, to include websites, social media, webinars, and in-person workshops.

Other Metroplex Lessons Learned

As part of this review and report, the FAA conducted an informal update to the original survey and reaffirmed the same key themes, including:

- Clearly define and communicate the purpose and mission of the project.
- Align expectations and responsibilities with FAA lines of business and staff offices on their expected roles in the execution of community outreach activities throughout the entire lifecycle of an airspace project.

² Representatives at appropriate levels of Federal, State, local, and Tribal government agencies with jurisdiction over potentially affected communities, including surrounding municipalities, national parks, and state departments of transportation.

- Early and frequent engagement is essential, particularly with airport owners.
- Partnering with elected and/or appointed officials and local municipalities assists in reaching out to their constituents.
- It is critical to give attention to the graphical way that information, including the procedures, is presented to a public audience. Consider the use of videos or relevant base maps to convey the changes. Clearly depict views of current air traffic and how air traffic is expected to change based on the proposed action.

How and When the FAA Will Engage Airports and Communities in PBN Proposals

The FAA has enhanced its approach to CI. Central to this enhanced approach is developing and implementing practices for earlier and ongoing community involvement as well as the development of community partnerships. The agency's approach is reflected in its updated policies and guidance, which include a framework for its CI efforts.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles to approaching CI include:

- Airport operators and aircraft operators are considered strategic partners in CI and are expected to support the FAA with CI efforts for current and future NextGen projects by being active participants in CI activities.
- The level of CI will be tailored to the NextGen improvements under consideration and the potential impact of the specific initiatives

Policy and Guidance Updates

In 2016, the FAA completely updated its [Community Involvement Manual](#), available on the [FAA Community Involvement Website](#). This manual reaffirms the agency's commitment to give the public an opportunity to be informed, become involved, and have their concerns and views considered as the FAA makes aviation decisions that affect them. It also provides guidance for FAA employees who are involved in planning, conducting, or approving aviation actions that may raise concerns within a community, and emphasizes the need for internal alignment of expectations and responsibilities of FAA community outreach practitioners.

Additionally, in its [Community Involvement Plan](#), the ATO established a standard, repeatable process to ensure productive and effective CI for PBN implementation projects.

The ATO has developed a [Community Involvement PBN Desk Guide](#), which supplements the FAA *Community Involvement Manual* and the ATO *Community Involvement Plan* with roles and responsibilities for CI activities throughout a PBN project.

A new online training course, *Enhancing Community Involvement for ATO Airspace Actions*, is now required for various managers in the FAA AJT and AJV organizations.

Engagement with Airports and Communities through the PBN Project Lifecycle

Guidance focused on executing CI activities during PBN projects has been developed for use by FAA practitioners. The Community Involvement PBN Desk Guide was developed to guide CI activities and roles and responsibilities for PBN projects following the process outlined in FAA Order 7110.41A. The Metroplex Handbook has also been expanded to include CI recommendations for each phase of the project lifecycle.

In general, the approach to conducting CI for a PBN project is dependent on the scope of the project and magnitude of expected changes. As summarized in Table 2, the CI process is scaled based on the expected impact of the project.

Table 2 Community Involvement Process by Expected Impact

Potential Impact	Potential CI Process
Change to airspace, or flight paths at higher altitudes	Notification to airport operators, aircraft operators, and elected and appointed officials
Change to flight paths, utilization, or the concentration of flight tracks at lower altitudes	Outreach to airport operators, aircraft operators, elected and appointed officials, and community groups (e.g., roundtables) using Community Involvement Manual five-phase CI process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pre-planning 2. Initiation 3. Planning 4. Implementation 5. Close-out

The appropriate level of CI and public engagement will vary to some degree depending on the project and local community characteristics. Many smaller projects may require very limited CI beyond notification, while some may require outreach to and feedback from the general public.

For PBN projects that are expected to change flight paths, their utilization, or the concentration of flight tracks at lower altitudes, as well as those that have potential Environmental Justice impacts or perceived controversy, the five-phase process outlined in the FAA Community Involvement Manual is followed during the project lifecycle. The five-phase process is summarized at a high level in the following sections.

Pre-Planning

- Conduct internal FAA coordination
- Understand community characteristics – background, history, etc.
- Coordinate with airport operators
- Identify existing community concerns
- Develop CI plan/level of CI

Initiation

- Prepare materials
 - Set up project page on FAA Community Involvement website (https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/community_involvement/)
 - Informational materials (fact sheet, public notice, etc.)
- Initiate CI
 - Overall principles, timeline, notional schedule

Planning

- Coordinate with airport operator on proposed project(s)
- Coordinate with elected and appointed officials on proposed project(s)
- Conduct public engagement activities, which may include:
 - Posting project page of FAA Community Involvement website
 - Webinars
 - Other notifications
 - Roundtable engagement
 - Public workshops, if necessary
 - If appropriate, solicitation and consideration of public comments

Implementation

- Notification of implementation to airport operator and elected and appointed officials
- Public information and notification activities, which may include:
 - Posting on project page of FAA Community Involvement website
 - Webinars
 - Other notifications
 - Roundtable engagements
 - Public workshops, if necessary

Close-out

- Notification of project completion to airport operator and elected and appointed officials
- Posting on the project page of FAA Community Involvement website, where appropriate
- Public information and notification activities, if necessary

How the FAA Will Improve Community Involvement Practices

The FAA has accomplished many improvements in its CI activities, policies, and guidance, including the following:

- Creating the ATO CI Repository, which houses guidance and tools for use by FAA personnel conducting CI activities (e.g., how to work with community roundtables, checklists for staging

public workshop, CI activities tracking templates, videos for the layperson explaining the basic concepts of PBN, fact sheet templates, elected official letter templates, etc.);

- Collecting and streamlining guidance for conducting CI in FAA Order JO 7400.2, *Procedures for Handling Airspace Matters*—the CI section of the Order refers practitioners to CI guidance such as the *FAA Community Involvement Manual*, the *Community Involvement PBN Desk Guide*, the *FAA Air Traffic Organization Community Involvement Plan*, and FAA Order 1050.1, *Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures*;
- Developing an electronic Learning Management System (eLMS) course on community involvement, which is required course material for targeted FAA personnel. The course teaches the basic elements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and related community involvement, when CI might be needed for airspace actions, the important role of air traffic personnel in the FAA’s partnership with stakeholders, and common community involvement activities;
- Reviewing roles, responsibilities, and capacity for conducting CI activities, including the hiring of personnel for placement in FAA Air Traffic Service Areas to assist with outreach efforts and noise analysis;
- Conducting Service Area CI Forums to share information, examine case studies, explore lessons learned, and refine best practices with FAA CI practitioners;
- Developing process and policy changes regarding instrument flight procedures (IFP) development and associated implementation tools (e.g., updates to FAA Orders JO 7100.41, JO 7400.2, and the IFP Gateway); and
- To ensure actions are in accordance with applicable laws and policy, providing training for FAA environmental protection specialists to deepen their understanding of the nuances of environmental law and how it applies to airspace actions

The FAA is committed to continuing to improve CI practices in the following ways:

- Ensuring policy and guidance are up-to-date and consistent with current FAA practices;
- Encouraging further coordination and collaboration across lines of business, staff offices, and stakeholders to address a wide range of concerns including aircraft noise;
- Developing additional training for FAA practitioners involved in CI activities;
- Maintaining and updating a collection of CI best practices and lessons learned from ongoing projects;
- Providing consistent guidance on the recommended level of CI activities based on project circumstances; and,
- Continuing to note lessons learned and apply them to future projects.

Conclusion

The FAA has developed a process that considers best practices and lessons learned for conducting CI during Metroplex and PBN projects. A standardized approach to how and when the FAA engages airports and other stakeholders during Metroplex projects was developed and deployed for those projects still in progress and has been adapted for use on future PBN projects. Policy and guidance documents have been updated, renewing the FAA’s commitment to involving the community and reflecting the

additional CI activities and stakeholder engagement expected to happen during PBN projects. The FAA is continually working to develop further tools, guidance, resources, and practices to effectively involve stakeholders.