Proposed Departure Procedure Project Frequently Asked Questions

Background

The FAA is in the process of modernizing the technology the drives air traffic control in the National Airspace System (NAS). The FAA held public virtual workshops on August 14 and 15, 2024 to discuss the development of new Area Navigation (RNAV) Standard Instrument Departure Procedures (SIDS) at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP), one of the nation's largest airports. The FAA held a live question and answer sessions as part of those workshops. We have identified the frequently asked questions from those workshops that we are addressing below.

During the workshop you mentioned the use of the Eagan/Mendota Heights corridor. What is the Eagan/Mendota Heights corridor? If departure flights are supposed to be dispersed, why is the FAA sending airplanes through this corridor instead of dispersing them elsewhere??

According to the MAC's noise abatement webpage, the Eagan Mendota Heights corridor is a departure corridor used at MSP. Specifically:

The Eagan-Mendota Heights Corridor was developed in an effort to direct aircraft, as much as possible, over noise-compatible land use areas in Eagan and Mendota Heights, southeast of MSP. The corridor has proven to be an effective way to utilize existing compatible land uses surrounding the airport. In addition, the corridor provides flexible ways to operationally utilize airspace over such areas. When conditions allow, Air Traffic Control (ATC) will direct as many departing jet aircraft as possible to use Runways 12L and 12R so that they will overfly the corridor and stay within the corridor boundaries. ATC will assign specific headings depending on which runway an aircraft is departing from: headings for jet aircraft are inclusive of 090 degrees, 105 degrees and 120 degrees. A wind-corrected heading may also be assigned. On average, monthly corridor compliance is around 95%.

The FAA's MSP ATC at the request of the MAC and NOC currently attempts to direct as much departure traffic for departures off Runways 12L and 12R at MSP when conditions allow through that corridor.

At the onset of this project, the MAC requested the FAA to continue to look at directing traffic through that corridor as much as possible in workgroup meetings. Furthermore, in correspondence to the FAA from the NOC, the NOC emphasized the importance of utilizing the corridor when possible. RNAV technology allows the FAA to develop procedures, and ATC the ability to continue to direct traffic through this corridor, while increasing safety and efficiency of the airspace. The FAA plans to direct traffic through this corridor when feasible, but it should be noted that safety and efficiency are what drives ATC's use of these procedures at any given time.

Are you moving traffic from the Eagan/Mendota Heights corridor to the south?

Outside of any operational needs of air traffic such as weather or safety, there is no plan to move any of this traffic to the south. RNAV technology allows the FAA to use the corridor as requested by the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) and the Noise Oversight Committee (NOC). Air Traffic Control currently makes efforts to direct traffic through the Eagan/Mendota Heights corridor via assigned headings as a part of the voluntary noise abatement procedures at MSP. RNAV procedures will direct air crews to use the same headings that will direct their aircraft through the Eagan/Mendota Heights corridor using their automated flight management systems. This will increase safety by reducing communications and increasing predictability for both Air Traffic Control and air crews.

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Proposed Departure Procedure Project Frequently Asked Questions...(cont.)

What happens after the initial multiple headings on departure? Do communities suffer from more noise as a result of subsequent determined headings after the initial multiple headings on departure?

Air Traffic Control (ATC) will use multiple paths just like today to disperse aircraft. After the initial path, ATC will vector aircraft further on course to their destination. This vector segment will allow ATC to turn aircraft on course as soon as operationally feasible, while also creating dispersion. The FAA has created a video on the use of RNAV technology including its use on departures.

How will the changes affect the volume of airplanes landing over southwest Minneapolis?

These procedures will only affect the departures. These procedures will not inherently bring more flights to MSP. The FAA does not determine the frequency or number of flights scheduled by an airline, as those are driven by economic factors, airport capacity, and airline schedules.

When will these proposed procedures be in effect and what are the steps prior to this to become an approved for use by air traffic control?

The FAA is working to have the new satellite-based departure procedures in place by August 2025 when the MSP Very High Frequency Omni-Directional Range (VOR) ground based navigational aid is decommissioned at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport. Airports of all sizes, all over the country have RNAV procedures for departures and arrivals as part of the FAA's modernization of the NAS.

It seems everyday we hear about disruptions caused by computer glitches, malfunctions, and system hacks. GPS satellites are vulnerable, so how are these concerns being addressed?

The FAA is transitioning the NAS to Performance Based Navigation (PBN). As a result, some of the VOR infrastructure including the MSP VOR is no longer needed. The remaining VOR infrastructure in the contiguous United States is being re-purposed to provide a conventional backup navigation service during potential Global Positioning System (GPS) outages. Safety is always the number one priority of the FAA, and we have a robust contingency plan known as the VOR Minimum Operation Network (VOR MON) program that allows for coverage in case of a satellite outage. The VOR MON program is designed to enable aircraft, having lost GPS service, to revert to conventional navigation procedures or proceed to a MON airport where an Instrument Landing System (ILS), Localizer (LOC) or VOR approach procedure can be flown without the necessity of GPS, Distance Measuring Equipment (DME), Automatic Direction Finder (ADF), or surveillance. Any airport with a suitable instrument approach may be used for landing, but the VOR MON assures that at least one airport will be within 100 nautical miles (NM).

You discussed the environmental process, but can you tell us more about what has occurred with environmental review so far on this project and what is happening next?

The FAA is currently in the data collection and analysis phase of the environmental process. We use several tools to determine if there are potential impacts from the proposed changes, including NEPAssist, EPA's EJScreen, Environmental Visualization Tool, Aviation Environmental Design Tool, and subject matter experts. That analysis will guide us to our next steps which usually include consultation with agencies and a final decision on the appropriate level of NEPA. The public comment period will continue through September 15, 2024, at which time the comment period will close.

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Proposed Departure Procedure Project Frequently Asked Questions...(cont.)

Public comments will be reviewed and any substantive comments will be incorporated into the Community Involvement section of the Final Environmental Decision Document. The Final Environmental Decision Document will be posted to the project web page in the mid-January 2025 time frame. The proposed departure procedures are planned for publication in August 2025.

What specific feedback did the FAA incorporate from the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) and the Noise Oversight Committee (NOC)?

The MAC has been part of the project work group which included the FAA, airline, and airport stakeholders since the inception of this project in January 2023. The MAC provided input to the work group on community concerns and the goal to disperse noise when feasible. The FAA met with both the MAC and NOC in October 2023 to illustrate the initial preliminary designs. The FAA provided the NOC three months to review the preliminary designs and provide feedback. The FAA also communicated with the NOC in two letters, responding to the NOC's questions and suggestions which can be found on FAA's Community Engagement web page for MSP. The FAA was able to incorporate some of these suggestions including use of noise abatement corridors, multiple departure headings, and use of the river bed in an effort to disperse noise. With this valuable input, the FAA was able to update the preliminary designs to reflect community input while maintaining the required safety design criteria the FAA uses for procedure development.

What happens when aircraft climb upon departure under the proposed procedures versus how they climb today?

Today, aircraft climb to be at or above 3,500 feet Mean Sea Level (MSL) seven miles from the MSP VOR in all directions.

This restriction is in place to ensure that MSP air traffic is separated from the airspace delegated to satellite airports such as Minneapolis Crystal Airport (KMIC), Flying Cloud Airport (KFCM), Anoka County Airport (KANE), and St. Paul Downtown Airport (KSTP). If aircraft reach 3,500 MSL prior to reaching seven miles from MSP VOR, or ATC determines that there is no traffic or safety concern, ATC will provide additional vectors earlier to turn air traffic toward their destination and further disperse departures. When the MSP VOR is decommissioned, RNAV way points will be needed to provide aircraft with a point in space for them to cross that will ensure that this positive separation will be maintained. These way points will be associated with the various headings that will be used for each new SID, seven miles from the current location of the MSP VOR and will ensure that aircraft climb to reach these way points at or above 3,500 feet MSL, or in some cases 4,000 feet MSL. Similar to today, if aircraft reach those altitudes prior to reaching those way points, or ATC determines that there is no traffic or safety concern, ATC will provide additional vectors earlier to turn air traffic toward their destination and further disperse departures.

How do I compare the current state of aircraft flight paths with the proposed paths in the workshop videos and boards?

At workshops held in August 2024, two ATC air traffic controllers from the Minneapolis Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) facility described existing and proposed operations. These boards can be viewed here on our Community Engagement website. Each graphic shows existing flight tracks with associated shaded areas that indicate where aircraft flow. It also shows the proposed procedures and way points. The existing flight tracks are a randomized sample from January 2024. You can view the proposed procedures and existing flight track information here.

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