Phoenix Area FAA Modernization Project Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is the Phoenix Area FAA Modernization Project?

The Phoenix Area FAA Modernization Project is a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) proposal to update and improve aircraft arrival and departure procedures in the Phoenix-area airspace. The project focuses on optimizing flight paths using modern satellite-based navigation technology to improve safety and efficiency.

2. Why is the FAA proposing this project?

The FAA is committed to the continuous improvement of the National Airspace System. Aviation forecasts indicate that both commercial air travel and general aviation operations will continue to increase, reinforcing the need to modernize the system to enhance safety, increase capacity, and reduce delays at busy airports located near one another. To address these needs, the FAA is proposing to implement new satellite-based air traffic procedures, as well as updates to existing satellite-based procedures, at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport and surrounding airports. Many of the current flight procedures in the Phoenix area were designed more than a decade ago. Since that time, navigation technology and design standards have significantly advanced.

The proposed changes would improve safety and operational efficiency by making better use of available airspace and providing a flexible system capable of safely accommodating future demand and operational complexity. The FAA is not proposing changes to west flow departures prior to 43rd Avenue or to east flow departures prior to 4 DME (4.6 statute miles).

3. What was the result of the 2015 lawsuit filed by the City of Phoenix and certain historic neighborhood associations regarding the proposed PBN changes to western departure routes?

Following the decision in *City of Phoenix, Arizona v. Huerta*, 869 F.3d 963 (D.C. Circuit 2017), the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), agreed to follow a two-step plan set forth in a settlement memorandum with the City of Phoenix and certain historic neighborhood associations. Step One modified the west-flow departure procedures at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. Under Step Two, the FAA agreed to consider feedback on procedures throughout the Phoenix area — not just on the westerly departure routes—but did not require the FAA to take any further action. The FAA conducted a new round of public engagement at that time. The results of Step 2 were previously posted on the FAA's community engagement portal. At this time, the FAA has completed all its obligations under the settlement memorandum. The current action the FAA is proposing is considered a new action and is unrelated to the 2015 lawsuit.

4. What is an Environmental Assessment (EA)?

An EA is a concise document that evaluates the expected environmental effects of a proposed action to determine if there is a potential for significant impacts. An EA summarizes the most important facts and conclusions surrounding the proposed action and its reasonable alternatives, as well as documents all technical and supporting materials and makes this information available

for public comment. If, at the conclusion of an EA, it is determined that there are no significant impacts, a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) is prepared. The FAA may also decide to prepare a formal decision document called a Record of Decision (ROD). When combined with the FONSI the formal decision document may be referred to as a FONSI/ROD. To learn more about FAA environmental review policies and procedures, please visit FAA Order 1050.1F.

5. Besides noise, what other neighborhood impacts will the EA evaluate?

In addition to noise, the Environmental Assessment (EA) will evaluate potential impacts to other environmental resource categories in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and FAA Order 1050.1. These resource categories include air quality; climate and greenhouse gases; compatible land use; socioeconomics; historic and cultural resources; Department of Transportation Act, Section 4(f); visual effects; biological resources. Because the proposed action involves changes to instrument flight procedures and does not change airport capacity or the number of aircraft operations, many of these impacts are anticipated to be minimal. The FAA applies the significance thresholds and impact criteria defined in FAA Order 1050.1 to determine whether impacts are significant. If the EA identifies the potential for a significant impact, the FAA would consider mitigation or determine whether additional environmental review is required.

6. Will this project increase the number of flights?

No. The FAA does not anticipate that this project will increase the number of aircraft operations at any of the Study Airports. The FAA does not determine or dictate airline schedules, airport demand, or the number of daily aircraft operations. Those levels are driven by market factors such as passenger demand, airline business decisions, and broader economic conditions. Aviation forecasts indicate that air travel demand may continue to grow over time, which is one of the reasons the FAA periodically evaluates and modernizes air traffic procedures. This project focuses on how aircraft safely and efficiently fly within the airspace, not on increasing the number of flights. The FAA's role is to safely separate and manage air traffic using available airspace as efficiently as possible.

Additional information on FAA aviation and aerospace forecasts is available at:
https://www.faa.gov/data_research/aviation/aerospace_forecasts

7. Will this project involve/require any new construction?

No. The proposed project does not involve building new runways, terminals, or other physical facilities. It is limited to changes in flight procedures and airspace design.

8. What types of flight procedure changes are being proposed?

The FAA is proposing:

- Updated departure routes and waypoints
- Updated arrival routes and waypoints

- Changes to some existing RNAV GPS approaches
- New RNAV Required Navigation Performance (RNP) approaches

9. What is RNAV and RNP?

- **RNAV (Area Navigation)** allows aircraft to fly precise routes using satellite-based navigation rather than ground-based equipment.
- **RNP (Required Navigation Performance)** is a more advanced form of RNAV that allows even greater precision and predictability.

These technologies can improve safety and efficiency but may also change where aircraft fly.

10. Will the public be able to provide input before the FAA implements the proposed changes?

Yes. In addition to meeting and engaging with state, tribal, local, and community leaders as part of the process, the FAA will hold community meetings. There will also be an opportunity to provide written comments upon the release of the Draft EA, tentatively planned for late April, 2026.

11. After the new routes are implemented in 2027, does the FAA review them? What if members of the public have concerns with the routes after implementation?

Yes. After implementation, the FAA conducts post-implementation monitoring to ensure the new instrument flight procedures are operating as intended and continue to meet safety and efficiency requirements. This review focuses on operational performance, safety, and whether aircraft are flying the procedures as designed.

If members of the public have concerns after implementation, they may submit comments or noise complaints through the FAA Aviation Noise Complaint and Inquiry Response system (ANCIR). The FAA reviews public input along with operational data to identify trends or issues. While the FAA cannot guarantee changes to flight paths or procedures based solely on complaints, it may evaluate whether operational adjustments, outreach, or clarifications are appropriate, provided they do not compromise safety and are consistent with applicable regulations and requirements. Any substantive changes to published procedures or airspace that could result in new or increased environmental impacts would be subject to additional environmental review in accordance with NEPA and FAA Order 1050.1.

12. Will there be opportunities for public engagement?

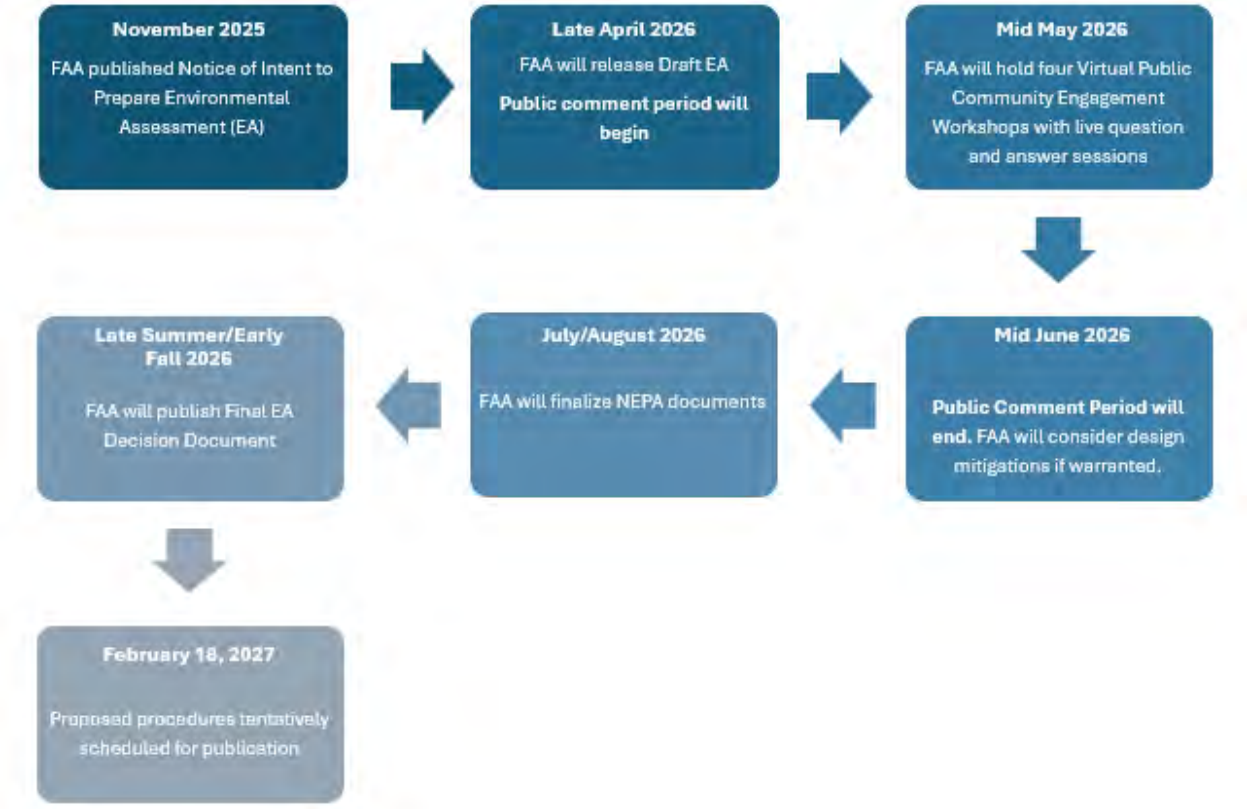
Yes, the FAA plans to hold four virtual public workshops in mid-May2026. These workshops will provide information about the project and allow community members to ask questions and share feedback. Information will be available on the FAA Community Engagement website,

Community Engagement - Phoenix | Federal Aviation Administration and FAA social media sites.

13. Has the FAA made a final decision?

No. The FAA has not finalized the Proposed Action or the contents of the Environmental Assessment. Public input and environmental analysis will inform any final decisions.

14. What is the timeline for the project?



15. How does the FAA evaluate aircraft noise?

In an EA, aircraft noise is evaluated by comparing current noise conditions with those expected under the proposed action. The FAA uses a standard noise metric called Day–Night Average Sound Level (DNL), which represents average noise over a 24-hour period and gives extra weight to nighttime operations. Noise levels are modeled using FAA-approved tools that account for aircraft types, flight paths, altitudes, and time of day. The FAA then determines whether the proposed action would increase noise by comparing it to the no action alternative. If those thresholds are not exceeded, the action is not considered to cause a significant noise impact under NEPA.

16. What noise threshold does the FAA use?

The FAA uses a DNL of 65 decibels (dB) as the threshold for identifying significant aircraft noise impacts. Under FAA policy, a significant noise impact occurs when the action would increase noise by DNL 1.5 dB or more for a noise sensitive area that is exposed to noise at or above the DNL 65 dB noise exposure level, or that will be exposed at or above the DNL 65 dB level due to a 1.5 dB or greater increase, when compared to the no action alternative for the same timeframe. We will also disclose reportable noise changes of the following:

• For DNL 65 dB and higher: + or - 1.5 dB

• For DNL 60 dB to <65 dB: + or - 3 dB

• For DNL 45 dB to <60 dB: + or - 5 dB

17. Can the FAA adjust routes to reduce noise impacts?

Noise considerations are one of several factors the FAA evaluates when designing flight procedures. While safety and efficiency are primary considerations, public input and environmental analysis may influence refinements to proposed routes where feasible.

18. Will the project affect flight schools or general aviation operations?

No, flight schools and general aviation pilots typically fly under visual flight rules (VFR) and will operate the same way that they do today. VFR pilots are flying under “see and avoid” rules, not relying on instrument procedures, therefore flight paths for those aircraft will be mostly unaffected.

19. Where can I find the details of the flight procedure changes the FAA is proposing in this project?

Detailed information regarding the proposed changes will be included in the Draft Environmental Assessment scheduled to be released for public comments in late April 2026. The FAA will also present and discuss proposed changes during the planned virtual public workshops in mid-May 2026.

20. Does the FAA have a tool to show how the proposed flight procedures will affect my location on the ground?

Yes, the FAA will publish a noise mapping tool website to coincide with the release of the draft environmental assessment in late April, 2026. The noise mapping tool will show noise data at points in the study area and will allow the public to type in their address and view potential noise changes in their area. A detailed description on how-to-use the tool will be included on the noise mapping tool website.