



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Great Lakes Region
2300 East Devon Avenue
Des Plaines, IL 60018

DEC 03 2014

Thank you for your recent letter to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regarding aircraft noise over your home. The FAA appreciates the opportunity to address your concerns.

The City of Chicago O'Hare Modernization Program (OMP) is a multi-year, multi-phase reconfiguration of the existing airfield to an east/west runway orientation. This project is a comprehensive redesign of the runways, taxiways, and other associated infrastructure. In planning the OMP, the City of Chicago proposed a future runway configuration that would increase capacity and efficiency and improve safety. Runway operating configurations were designed to safely accommodate changing weather conditions while maintaining airport efficiency during construction and after completion. In 2002, the FAA began evaluating all of the proposed development and reconfiguration in the OMP Environmental Impact Statement. The FAA conducted a series of public meetings and responded to public comments, before finalizing and publishing its conclusions in a Record of Decision in September 2005. Noise exposure, runway configuration, airspace configuration, air quality and impacts on surrounding communities were addressed through the extensive public process.

Since construction began in 2005, runway usage and air traffic patterns have continuously been adjusted to accommodate aircraft operations and airport construction. The most recent adjustment occurred when the City commissioned its fourth parallel runway (10C/28C) on October 17, 2013. On that date, O'Hare transitioned its airspace and runways into a primarily east-west configuration.

The airspace in and around the Chicago metropolitan area is complex, and runway utilization is based on many factors including wind and weather conditions, on-airfield work activities that may affect the availability of runways, and the interrelationship of O'Hare operations with operations at other nearby airports. As the airport operator, the City determines which of the existing eight runways are open and available for use by the airlines and the air traffic controllers. The FAA utilizes these runways based on airfield, air traffic, and weather conditions, all of which cause the number of aircraft utilizing individual runways to vary every day. Over the course of a year, the airport operates on a west flow pattern approximately 70 percent of the time and on an east flow pattern 30 percent of the time. During predominant west flow operations, three separate runways (27R, 27L and 28R) are used for arrivals. Historical runway utilization data is available on the ONCC's web site:

<http://www.oharenoise.org>

Based on your address, your home is approximately nine miles east of the end of Runway 27L and just south of the extended centerline. Unfortunately, your home does not fall within the

area that qualifies for federally funded sound insulation, nor does the FAA or the City of Chicago have programs to purchase homes in noise impacted areas.

The FAA continues to participate with other Federal agencies, universities and industry groups in research to reduce noise impacts caused by airports. Research is currently being conducted to evaluate annoyance reaction to aircraft noise in the current airport operating environment. The results of that research will be used to determine the appropriateness of continuing to use the Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) 65 decibels (dB) metric as the standard for residential land-use compatibility and eligibility for federally funded residential sound insulation.

The 65 DNL is the Federal significance threshold for aircraft noise exposure and has been widely accepted as the best available method to describe aircraft noise exposure. It is the noise descriptor required by the FAA for use in aircraft noise exposure analyses and noise compatibility planning. DNL is a 24-hour equivalent sound level and is expressed as an average noise level on the basis of annual aircraft operations for a calendar year.

It is anticipated that research being conducted will be completed in 2016 and that the results of the research will be used to determine whether changes to the FAA's use of the DNL 65 dB noise metric are warranted. If a determination is made that changes to the noise metric are warranted, a new public policy will be proposed, developed and coordinated.

We work collaboratively with the city of Chicago and the ONCC to share ideas, help to solve problems, and address the needs of the O'Hare community. We will continue this collaboration and will give full consideration to any proposed operational changes that the city wishes to explore, consistent with our roles and responsibilities under Federal aviation noise abatement policy. The modernization of O'Hare International Airport is needed to meet Chicago's aviation demands of the future in a manner that provides improved safety and efficiency for the airport and public. Through its analysis of the OMP, the FAA took great care to examine health and safety concerns to ensure that all appropriate impact mitigation actions are taken. While we acknowledge that impacts such as noise cannot be completely eliminated, the FAA has taken significant steps to minimize those impacts, and we will continue to do so as technological advancements in the aviation industry provide those opportunities.

Thank you for sharing your perspective with the FAA.

Sincerely,



for
Barry D. Cooper
Regional Administrator
Great Lakes Region