

From: Cooper, Barry (FAA)
Sent: Monday, April 04, 2016 5:52 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: NOISE

[REDACTED]

This message acknowledges the emails you have sent me in recent weeks, voicing your concerns regarding aircraft noise over your neighborhood in Chicago. I wanted you to know that I have received and have read your emails, and I also wanted to provide you some information related to your stated concerns.

First of all, I do not dispute what you are seeing in regard to aircraft in the vicinity of your home in the 5800 block of North Kingsdale Avenue in Chicago. Your neighborhood is aligned with the approach to O'Hare Runway 27L, which is one of three parallel runways (27L, 27R, and 28C) used during daytime hours for aircraft arrivals when the airport is in a "West Flow" configuration – meaning that winds are blowing generally from west to east, and arriving aircraft land into the headwind, flying from the east and landing in a westerly direction. 27L is also used regularly for O'Hare arrivals at night under certain weather conditions, as it is a designated nighttime arrival runway under the City of Chicago's nighttime noise abatement program.

Regarding daytime activity, the decision by FAA concerning what runways to use for aircraft arrivals and departures is based on a number of safety and efficiency factors, including weather, runway separation rules for simultaneous arrival operations, and efficiency of ground taxiing operations. At night, as referenced above, runways designated under the City of Chicago's "Fly Quiet" noise abatement program are used for most nighttime arrival and departure operations, with weather again being a big factor in runway selection.

Additionally, the decision of when to use the West Flow configuration (vs. "East Flow", which has aircraft land from the west) is based primarily on wind direction. For reference, FAA's analysis of 10 years of wind/weather data – an analysis that was done as part of FAA's environmental study that was completed before the O'Hare Modernization Program (OMP) was approved in 2005 – showed that winds are generally from the west, or at least favor the use of West Flow, about 70% of the time. In recent months, what I will call typical weather patterns for the late fall/winter/early spring season have dictated the use of West Flow much of the time. With the arrival of warmer spring weather, we may see increased opportunities to use East Flow. But again, weather drives those decisions.

There are a few significant things that have happened or will happen on the airfield that may have a bearing on the traffic you've been seeing:

1. First, we commissioned new Runway 10R-28L on the south side of O'Hare's airfield last fall. With the commissioning of that new Runway, our ability to move aircraft (operate the airfield efficiently) in East Flow is now comparable to the West Flow configuration, when weather conditions are favorable (visibility, cloud ceiling, etc.). The significance of this is that the addition of Runway 10R creates increased opportunities to utilize East Flow for arriving aircraft, more than we've done up to this point. I know I'm repeating myself when I say that weather is the driver of that (East Flow vs. West Flow), but we do hope to see more East Flow opportunities in the future, weather permitting.

2. The City of Chicago is currently pursuing the design and construction of future Runway 9C-27C. When that runway is commissioned, we expect a visible decrease in the use of Runway 27L for arrival traffic, as 27L will primarily be used as a departure runway at that time.
3. You may be aware that the City of Chicago and the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission (ONCC) are currently exploring options for using O'Hare's available runways in a different manner during nighttime hours, to address present-day community noise concerns. From this effort, there is a possibility that your neighborhood may see a difference in nighttime activity at some point in the future, depending on what ONCC and the City propose, and contingent upon agreement by FAA that any alternative runway use proposal is acceptable from a safety and efficiency perspective.

I do need to say that, regarding noise and other environmental impacts, the FAA completed an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for O'Hare modernization in 2005. The EIS document includes the use of runways as described above. The EIS was completed in partnership with other Federal, state, and local government agencies, including the US Environmental Protection Agency and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. The EIS process sought public input and included a series of public meetings. All comments received were addressed by FAA and factored into our final approval decision. Additionally, in 2015, FAA completed a comprehensive reevaluation of the original EIS, to ensure the conclusions and findings of the EIS were still valid. The reevaluation, in fact, confirmed FAA's initial findings. The complete EIS and reevaluation documents are included on FAA's public web site. If you would like any assistance in finding those documents, please let me know.

Lastly, I want to take a moment to highlight the importance of the role the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission plays in today's discussions about O'Hare noise issues. While these issues are challenging and ONCC cannot instantly resolve every issue, ONCC, as a body, represents the full spectrum of communities and school districts with primary interest in O'Hare noise issues. ONCC encompasses about 55 separate suburban communities, Chicago wards, and local school districts surrounding O'Hare, and each of those entities has a representative on the ONCC. I believe you reside in Chicago's 39th Ward. If you were not aware, the 39th Ward is an ONCC member and has a designated representative on the ONCC. I would encourage you to contact your ONCC representative, if you haven't already done so, to ensure your perspective is shared and included in ONCC's ongoing discussions.

I know that the information provided above does not solve the issues you've raised to me in your emails. The issues are complex, with few easy answers, which is why I see the ONCC as playing a key role in looking for enhancements that best serve the community as a whole. The FAA takes noise seriously, and we work continuously with the City of Chicago and ONCC to seek improvements where improvements can be made.

Barry Cooper
Regional Administrator
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