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

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

JAN 12 2010

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate
230 South Dearborn Street
Suite 3892
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Senator Durbin:

Thank you for your letter dated December 16, 2009 regarding your constituent's concerns with the O'Hare Modernization Program (OMP) and operations at O'Hare International Airport. Your constituent's letter primarily expressed concerns about flights arriving and departing over Maine South High School located in Park Ridge. The letter also mentions concerns that are beyond Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) jurisdiction and expertise. This letter is to respond to those issues that fall within FAA responsibilities.

The letter identified a number of concerns, which the FAA considered carefully through the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process that began in 2002. During this process we worked with several other Federal and state agencies, before approving the O'Hare Modernization Program (OMP). Noise exposure, runway configuration, airspace configuration, air quality and impacts on surrounding communities were addressed through this public process. The FAA presented the analysis publicly through a number of mechanisms, including a series of public meetings, before finalizing and publishing its conclusions in a Record of Decision in September 2005. The final EIS and Record of Decision are available on line at: http://www.faa.gov/airports/airport_development/omp/eis/ In this document you can find analysis regarding noise, air quality, water quality, compatible land uses, social impacts and many other topics that may be of interest to you and your constituent.

We do recognize the proximity of Maine South High School (and many other schools) to Chicago O'Hare International Airport. As you may know, airfield and airspace configuration is driven by a number of factors, including prevailing wind direction and aircraft performance requirements. The basic airfield configuration of O'Hare was unchanged for more than 37 years, from 1971 until 2008. It was developed at a time when a much higher percentage of the aircraft were propeller aircraft rather than jets. The airfield reconfiguration approved as part of the OMP is intended to improve a long-standing capacity problem resulting from the outdated configuration.

Please be advised the flight tracks for the existing runways have not changed as a part of the OMP. East-bound departures from Runway 4L (the northeast diagonal runway referenced) continue to use the tracks established and used prior to the OMP. The airspace in and around the Chicago metropolitan area is complex, and runway utilization is based on many

factors including available runways, current winds, projected winds, weather, precipitation, visibility, ceiling, impacts on surrounding air traffic facilities, and on-airfield construction activities. Under normal operating conditions, flights are not being switched from the southern east-west runway (currently Runway 10/28 future Runway 10L/28R) to land on Runway 27R. You may reference Table F-39; page F-82 in Appendix F of the Final EIS to see the planned runway utilization for the completed OMP. Similar information is displayed graphically in Exhibit E-19; page E-65 in Appendix E. These exhibits are enclosed for reference.

The FAA has partnered with the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission (ONCC) for many years to provide noise mitigation funding. Over a period of more than 15 years, we have been pleased to provide more than $275 million in Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) funds for school sound insulation. Maine South High School was sound insulated as part of this program.

The letter expressed concern about noise levels from planes flying over the athletic fields at Maine South High School. The standard for compatible land use is established in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 150, *Airport Noise Compatibility Planning*. In particular, 14 CFR Part 150, Table 1 identifies compatible land use guidelines as a function of day-night average sound level (DNL) values. According to Table 1, DNL 70 is specifically identified as being compatible for athletic fields. Based on modeling, the OMP Build-Out noise contour places the athletic fields at Maine South High School outside of the 70 DNL contour, meaning the sound is lower than 70 DNL. You may reference Exhibit 5.1-10 of the final EIS (also enclosed) to see O'Hare's noise contours when the OMP is complete.

Since there is an industrial area west of the airport, the letter shared a concern that funding is being expended for soundproofing in residential areas east of Runway 9L/27R, suggesting that traffic not arrive or depart to the east of the runway. Due to wind and weather conditions, all of the east-west runways will be used in both directions, as shown on the enclosed exhibits. This is why the FAA works with the ONCC to provide noise mitigation funding for residential areas and schools that fall within incompatible noise levels. The FAA uses all available runways in the best configuration possible to provide the safest, most efficient use of the airspace. The air traffic is operating as described in the approved EIS.

The letter referenced issues regarding the safety of airfield operations and the FAA's Letter of Correction to the City of Chicago in September 2009. As part of the airport certification program, the FAA routinely issues Letters of Correction to commercial service airports we regulate to identify areas that need enhancement. The process highlights that FAA's oversight of such airports is effective at identifying issues before they become serious regulatory problems. The airport certification program also encompasses wildlife hazard management, including "bird strikes". O'Hare has four United States Department of Agriculture wildlife biologists assigned full time to the Airport. The FAA works closely with the Chicago Department of Aviation and United States Department of Agriculture to take steps that help reduce risks wildlife may introduce and find methods to improve overall airfield safety.

In closing, with this letter and supplemental information we have attempted to address the issues raised in your constituent's letter that are within the FAA's purview. Please be assured that the process followed in establishing the OMP conformed to all existing Federal requirements for analysis and decision making.

The OMP was designed with the highest regard for the safety of the flying public and the communities surrounding the airport. Through its analysis the FAA took great care to examine health and safety concerns and continues to ensure that all appropriate impact mitigation actions are taken during OMP implementation.

We have received several inquiries similar to the one your constituent wrote, and have established an email address, website with frequently asked questions, and posted copies of relevant correspondence. You may reference this information at: http://www.faa.gov/airports/airport_development/omp/FAQ/index.cfm.

If you or your staff need any further help, please contact me at 847-294-7294 or Mary Walsh, Acting Assistant Administrator for Government and Industry Affairs, at 202-267-3277.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by
Barry D. Cooper

Barry D. Cooper
Regional Administrator
Great Lakes Region

4 Enclosures
Transmitted Correspondence

cc: Washington Office