

## **DCA Airplane Assessment Study Concludes - October 2018**

The DC Department of Energy and Environment hosted a public meeting September 20th, 2018 to provide a summary of a two-year long assessment of aircraft noise on the District. Randy Waldeck, an acoustic engineer with CSDA Design Group, provide an overview of the just completed study. There were several important take-aways from the meeting:

- The changes the FAA made in flights paths of departing and arriving planes to Ronald Reagan National Airport (DCA) in 2015 increased noise by around 2 dB in communities along the River including Georgetown to the low 60s dB, the level of loud speech. The resulting total noise when averaged over a long period did not meet the FAA's 65 dB DNL (Day Night Level) standard of when noise is considered to have a significant impact. While an individual plane may sound like a rock band going overhead and interfere with speech and sleep it is the *average* dB per day over a year that the FAA measures.
- The school measurements showed that several classrooms did not meet ANSI classroom noise criteria established to ensure exterior noise did not interfere with a good learning environment. Noisy classrooms have been shown to impede learning.
- The residential measurements showed that the sound levels in bedrooms were high enough to awaken 12-33% of the population, depending on location. Randy explained that the results are a probability because sound sleepers might not be awakened by the noise levels in those residences while light sleepers might be.
- Approximately 400 flights per day from DCA produce noise in NW DC at or above the 65 dB level which can interfere with normal speech and hearing outside.
- The FAA has performed an extensive study of aircraft noise, its impact on communities, and the adequacy of the current 65 dB DNL standard. The study was completed two years ago but has not been released by the FAA. If released it may require the FAA to reevaluate its 65dB DNL standard.
- The study contains a number of suggestions for noise mitigation including revising the North Flow departure, reducing North Flow flights from nearly 70% to 50%, climbing faster after departure, and revising approach procedures in South flow.
- Marcio Duffles, the Ward three Representative to the DCA Working Group, and Rick Murphy the Ward two representative, explained the purpose and activities of the Working Group. Marcio mentioned that considerable progress had been made on the South Flow approach but the recent suit by the State of MD had caused progress to halt. Rick mentioned that the WG can only make recommendations to the FAA and a recommendation to change the North Flow departure flight path had received no response from the FAA to date.

## **A Decision in CAG v. FAA - April 2018**

The FAA changed the departure flight path from National Airport in 2015 adversely impacting a large portion of Northwest DC with nearly constant loud aircraft noise. The Coalition promptly filed a Petition for Review in 2015 with the US Court for the DC Circuit upon learning of the change and hearing the noise increase it produced.

On Tuesday, March 27th the Court rendered its opinion. Unfortunately, the Court did not reach the merits of the case and dismissed the Petition for Review as untimely. It did so despite the lack of notice to any elected DC Government Official and the efforts by the FAA to ensure no one in the community was aware of the plan to make the LAZIR route the flight path for all northbound departures.

The Court found that two small notices posted in the back pages of the Washington Post of the intent to do an Environmental Assessment of the entire DC Metroplex and the fact that one had been completed were adequate notice of the proposed flight path. The only support for that decision is an old Supreme Court Clean Water case which sanctioned publication as a means of providing notice but did not state that it was sufficient to satisfy NEPA's requirements that agencies make "diligent efforts to involve the public". In this case, the FAA made diligent efforts to ensure no one in DC was aware of the new flight path until it was an accomplished fact.

The Coalition will consider what, if any, steps need to be considered next, but requesting rehearing by the Court and pursuing our Administrative Petition with the FAA are being considered. The Opinion is found below.

[https://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/opinions.nsf/4F6967D6DE95D0178525825D004EE457/\\$file/15-1285-1723910.pdf](https://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/opinions.nsf/4F6967D6DE95D0178525825D004EE457/$file/15-1285-1723910.pdf)