

March 29, 2012 - DRAFT

Dane County Executive Joe Parisi
City County Building, Room 421
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Madison, WI 53703

Subject: Reducing County Airport Noise

With Earth Day approaching, it is time to think about improving and protecting our environment. Those of us living and working on the north and east sides of Madison are reminded every day that the Dane County Regional Airport consumes a large part of our city. Airplanes, jets and helicopters shake our houses, interrupt our classrooms, stop our conversations, disrupt our sleep, lower our property values, increase poverty and decrease our quality of life. As a former resident of the Schenk-Atwood neighborhood, we hope you recall your experiences as airplanes flew over your own home and family.

In your recent article in the Isthmus, you opined about the need to reduce Dane County sprawl and said, "Quality of life matters, and environmental protection matters."¹ As urban residents, our neighborhoods of Madison wholeheartedly agree with you.

We are writing to you since there is no effective forum to discuss our concerns and suggestions for reducing county airport impacts on our neighborhoods. Like any business and industry, county airport staff measure success in expanding business and service to its customers, not controlling pollution. The only avenue for public involvement is the existing airport noise abatement subcommittee.² However, this committee is not designed to supervise the airport's noise abatement program. It only meets for a few hours each year. Hardly enough time to solve any problem. This committee does not have the required expertise, so has never criticized or suggested improvements to the noise abatement program. At its meetings, the concerns of residents are typically marginalized rather than used to make improvements.

Despite years of meetings, letters and complaints, noise generated by the county airport continues to be a significant burden to surrounding neighborhoods. We know there have been improvements over the years, but so much more can and needs to be done. Each and every one of the thousands of aircraft that flies over Madison continues to make our neighborhoods less safe, healthy and desirable.

¹ Joe Parisi, *Say no to suburban sprawl, Verona can grow without grabbing hundreds more acres*, Isthmus, Thursday 03/01/2012.

² <http://www.msnaairport.com/ecomentality/noise.aspx>

Most importantly, we are taking time with this letter to suggest significant improvements for reducing county airport impacts on our neighborhoods. These are presented below. Unlike previous county executives, we hope you do not simply pass our concerns onto airport staff to generate another generic, unproductive response. We would love the opportunity to sit down and meet with you and your staff to discuss how to implement our recommendations.

1. IMPROVE THE COUNTER-FLOW STRATEGY

The cornerstone of the county airport's noise control strategy is the so called "counter-flow strategy". This encourages flights to depart to the north and arrive from the north and thus avoid flying over the populated areas of Madison. During the year ending in September 2011, airport records show there were 83,166 flights in and out of the county airport.^{3,4} Only 46% of these flights were directed to the north, so that over 44,000 aircraft were sent over our populated neighborhoods. In most schools, 46% would receive a grade of "F" and considered a failure. Every one of these flights over our neighborhoods makes them less safe, healthy and desirable. A plan is needed to improve the effectiveness of the counter-flow strategy and bring it closer to eliminating all flights over the city. To begin, we suggest the county airport publish a monthly noise report card including the total number of flights including those over the city. This report can be included in its current publication of passengers. At this time, airport staff only investigate compliance with the counter-flow strategy when there is a public complaint. With other forms of pollution, we don't wait for complaints and sickness to manage a problem. By the time there is a complaint, the damage is already done. The airport needs to be proactive rather than reactive. Every flight over populated areas should be evaluated to determine if and how the flight could have been directed to the north away from populated areas.

2. UPDATE THE 1996 NOISE ABATEMENT PLAN

According to the Federal Aviation Administration, the last time the county airport prepared a noise abatement plan was in 1996.⁵ As with all forms of environmental protection, airport noise abatement methods have continued to improve during the past 16 years. A year doesn't pass when the airport isn't beginning some multi-million dollar construction project. There have never been any budget cuts or shortage of funds to expand and modernize the county airport, yet the county airport has been content with its outdated 16-year old noise abatement program. The county airport should update its noise abatement plan to reflect modern noise abatement methods. For example, in 2007 the Metropolitan Airport Commission in the Twin Cities adopted a program to install up to \$14,000 in noise insulation improvements to homes impacted by

³ Noise Abatement Subcommittee, Review of Noise Complaint Activity, November 2, 2011, http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/PDF/airport/2011_Fall_Noise.pdf

⁴ Noise Abatement Subcommittee, Review of Noise Complaint Activity, April 28, 2011, <http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/PDF/airport/20110428.pdf>

⁵ Federal Aviation Administration, Record of Decision, Dane County Regional Airport, Madison, Wisconsin, June 1996, http://www.faa.gov/airports/environmental/records_decision/media/rod_madison.pdf

airport noise.⁶ If the county airport had implemented such as program in 1996, over 2,000 Madison homes would have been eligible for noise abatement insulation. Besides reducing noise within the older homes surrounding the airport, these noise reduction improvements would help rebuild aging housing and reduce energy consumption. Another example is the Santa Barbara Airport, smaller than the county airport. It has a noise complaint system using a Flight Track Monitor which shows the real-time location of aircraft.⁷ A similar system at the county airport would improve the ability of staff to track every flight and residents to file noise complaints. The 1996 noise abatement plan includes noise contours showing the extent of impacts within Madison. These are out of date and need to be re-evaluated to reflect changes in air traffic, including the growth in military operations both in the air and on the ground. Updating the county airport's noise abatement plan would be far more creditable, responsive and effective if the airport funded an independent study. This should include oversight by a panel of concerned and skilled citizens, health and environmental experts, rather than just airport proponents.

3. REDUCE NOISE FROM MILITARY FLIGHTS AND OPERATIONS

The loudest source of airport-related noise continues to be military flights and operations. It's not surprising to learn that during the past 10 years, the number of military flights has increased 50% from 6,000 to 9,000 movements per year.⁸ Helicopters shake homes and the roar of F-16 jets turn our neighborhoods into war zones. Jet engine revving and testing on the ground exceeds the lax FAA noise standard as far as 3 miles from the airport. When the airport noise abatement plan is updated, reducing noise from military operations needs its own focused plan. For example, military flights should be scheduled so none fly over the city but take off and land north of the city. This would also eliminate the chance for another plane crash in residential areas of the city.^{9,10} A long-term plan is needed to move training flights to Volk Field similar to the period in 2000 when the main airport runway was rebuilt.¹¹ While a hush house was constructed to quiet jet engine testing, it is inadequate and needs to be improved. Engine testing needs to be scheduled during business hours and not late at night. If military staff are unwilling to help reduce their noise impacts and county staff do not have the authority to regulate military flights, then they should seek help from our federal representatives.

⁶ Metropolitan Airport Commission, Residential Noise Mitigation Program, <http://www.macnoise.com/residential-noise-mitigation-program>

⁷ http://www.flysba.com/contact_us/noise_abatement

⁸ Annual Military Operations, Noise Abatement Subcommittee, Review of Noise Complaint Activity, April 28, 2011, <http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/PDF/airport/20110428.pdf>

⁹ Wisconsin State Journal, Military plane crashes, June 9, 2011. http://host.madison.com/wsj/military-plane-crashes/article_c79fd9d4-92c0-11e0-8917-001cc4c03286.html

¹⁰ Wisconsin State Journal, Fifty-one years later, heroic pilot will get his due in Madison, May 5, 2009, http://host.madison.com/news/fifty-one-years-later-heroic-pilot-will-get-his-due/article_56e8eb78-a70a-50c3-8326-fdf655cb80b4.html

¹¹ Wisconsin State Journal, Isthmus flyovers to return soon, November 1, 2000.

4. REDUCING ADVERSE ECONOMIC IMPACTS

No doubt there are many people who benefit from the county airport. However, its location within Madison means there many people who bear the costs. Besides reducing our quality of life, airport noise affects city planning and poverty. The Madison Comprehensive Plan needed to remove 11 square miles or 18% of the city land area from residential development to accommodate the airport.^{12, 13} If you hope to reduce sprawl, as stated in your Isthmus article, the county airport has set a poor example. While noise makes this large area of Madison uninhabitable, it also makes adjacent neighborhoods undesirable. The City of Madison Neighborhood Indicators Project shows that outside the airport's uninhabitable area are the lowest property values in the city and the highest rates of families on public assistance.¹⁴ While Madison already has a disproportionate number of low income children and minorities in our public schools compared to surrounding suburbs, the elementary and middle schools in neighborhoods surrounding the airport have even a greater share children from low income families, comprising over 70% of the students. The goal of environmental justice is to assure that poor and minority families are not exposed to a disproportionate share of pollution. The county airport is an example where this goal has not been achieved. Besides taking proactive steps to reduce noise impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, the county airport needs a plan to work closely with surrounding neighborhoods to reduce environmental and health impacts and help provide job training and employment for people living nearby. As an example, the Los Angeles Airport adopted a \$500 million community service agreement with surrounding neighborhoods in 2004 to reduce economic and environmental impacts.¹⁵ LAX agreed to provide job training and first-source hiring; spend more than \$8.5 million annually to soundproof local schools, city buildings, places of worship and homes; and, fund studies on air quality and community health. Similarly, the county airport should evaluate how to reduce its impacts on surrounding neighborhoods. For example, employment by the airport and its contractors should give preference to those living nearby. The county airport can participate in current school district efforts to improve the academic performance of low income and minority students. County airport staff themselves can participate in school district tutoring programs.

5. CREATE INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT

Unlike other forms of pollution, there is no USEPA or DNR, no team of trained experts, or independent regulators working to reduce noise from the county airport. Instead we have a situation where the wolf is guarding the hen house. It's no surprise that the noise abatement plan is 16 years old. The county airport's noise abatement program would be far more effective if there were oversight by an independent office looking out for the health and welfare of residents

¹² City Of Madison Comprehensive Plan, Adopted January 17, 2006, <http://www.cityofmadison.com/planning/ComprehensivePlan/adoptedplan.cfm>

¹³ http://nomadisonairport.org/madison_airport_ghetto_boundaries.html

¹⁴ 2008-2010 Neighborhood Indicators Project, <http://madison.apl.wisc.edu/>

¹⁵ LAX Community Service Agreement, <http://www.laane.org/lax-community-benefits-agreement>

exposed to airport noise. The county health department already recognizes the health effects of noise.¹⁶ At a cost of only 10¢ per passenger, the county airport budget could fund an independent position in the health department to lead noise abatement efforts. This position could track the effectiveness of the airport noise abatement program, evaluate available noise control strategies, assess the impact of noise on the health of surrounding neighborhoods, recommend improvements and serve as an independent voice for residents impacted by the county airport.

6. QUESTIONS

One letter is not enough to address all of the questions and concerns we have about airport noise. We have solicited an extensive list of airport noise-related questions obtained from the neighborhoods surrounding the airport. This list of questions is attached. We hope your staff and airport personnel can take the time to respond to these questions.

Thank you for listening to our concerns about airport noise, and your leadership to reduce sprawl and improve the quality of life for all Dane County residents.

We would love the opportunity to sit down and meet with you and your staff to discuss our suggestions. Leading our multi-neighborhood effort is the SASYNA airport noise subcommittee. Please contact Melanie Foxcroft when you and your staff would like to discuss this issue further. Her email address is Melanie.Foxcroft@sasyna.

Sincerely,

Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association

Madison Environmental Justice Organization

EINPC?

NPC?

Enclosure

Cc:

Representatives

Madison Mayor Paul Soglin

¹⁶ <http://www.publichealthmdc.com/environmental/healthyhomes/noise.cfm>

Monona Mayor Bob Miller
Senator Mark Miller
Representative Chris Taylor
County Supervisor John Hendrick
County Supervisor Paul Rusk

Eastside and Northside Neighborhood Associations

Michael Goodman – Interim Director - East Isthmus Neighborhoods Planning Council

Sue Gleason – Interim Director – Northside Planning Council

Megan Maguire (Sherman NA)

Willy Holden (Berkley Oaks NA)

Beth Sweeney (Westchester Gardens NA)

Bill Grove (Majestic Oaks NA)

Cassandra Garcia (Hawthorne NA)

Char Tortorice (Lake View NA)

Dace Zeps (Worthington Park NA)

Dolly O'Laughlin (Brentwood Village A)

Jeff Mintzloff (Burke Heights NA)

Joe Campana (Ridgewood NA)

John Koch (Emerson East NA)

Jon Duxbury (Sheridan Triangle NA)

Sue Christoffersen (Glendale NA)

Susan Hill (Mendota Hills NA)

Ted Blazel (Heritage Heights CA)

Tonya Nisbet (East Buckeye NA)

Joseph Clausius (Clarendon Hills HA)

Kathy Soukup (East Moreland CA)

Mary Polancih (Rolling Meadows NA)

Mike Digman (Elvehjem NA)

Pat Hadden (Truax NA)

Paul Zumhagen-Krause (Eken Park NA)

Randall Glysch (Carpenter-Ridgeway NA)

Richard Linster (Tenney-Lapham NA)

Scott Thornton (Marquette NA)

Shelley Legried (Whitetail Ridge)

Environmental Organizations

Kristen Joiner (Sustain Dane)

Twink Jan-McMahon (Sustainable Atwood)

Maria Powell (MEJO)

Media

Lindsay Adjavor – WTMJ

Pat Schneider – Capital Times

Ron Seely – WI State Journal

DRAFT

Airport Noise Questions for County Executive Joe Parisi

DRAFT – March 29, 2012

Airport Noise Control Measures

1. What steps has county airport staff taken to reduce noise during the last 10 years?
2. Using a grading scale from A to F, how would county airport staff grade the performance of their efforts to control noise generated by airport operations?
3. If airport staff has awarded itself a grade of less than A, what improvements can be made to achieve an A?
4. What steps has county airport military staff taken to reduce noise during the last 10 years?
5. Using a grading scale from A to F, how would county airport military staff grade the performance of their efforts to control noise generated by airport operations?
6. If airport military staff has awarded itself a grade of less than A, what improvements can be made to achieve an A?
7. During 2010, what activities did airport staff to reduce the noise from airport operations and what was the estimated cost of these activities?

Evaluating Available Airport Noise Abatement Procedures

1. According to the FAA, the county airport's noise abatement plan was last updated in 1996. What would be needed to conduct a study compiling current noise abatement procedures in use by other airports and evaluating the cost and steps needed to implement each of these procedures at the county airport?

Independent Oversight of Airport Noise Control Program

1. What would be the cost to have an independent contractor audit the county airport's noise control program and provide suggestions for improvements?
2. What county department outside of the county airport is best suited to provide independent oversight of the airport's noise control program?
3. What would be the cost to county airport to fund a staff position to provided independent oversight of the airport's noise control program?

Military Flights

1. The military jet airplane flights generate the worst airplane noise and vibrations. How has the number and types of military flights changed over the past 10 years?
2. In 2000, military flights were moved to Volk Field during runway construction. What steps can airport staff take to have military flights partially or permanently moved to Volk Field?
3. What steps can airport staff take to have military flights scheduled to only takeoff, fly and land only when able to do so north of populated areas of the city?

Military Jet Engine Testing

Airport and military staff have installed a hush house for testing jet engines, but the noise from testing jet engines on the ground remains too loud, can be heard from miles away, and shakes the ground like an earthquake.

1. What tests have been conducted to determine the noise levels during jet engine testing?
2. What tests have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of the hush house?
3. What steps can be taken record the number of times that jet engines are tested so this noise generating activity can be reported to the public?
4. What steps can be taken to reduce the number of times that jet engines are tested?
5. What further steps can be taken to eliminate or reduce this noise from jet engine testing?

Home and School Noise Abatement Programs

1. In its 1997 noise study for the new Runway 3-21, the county airport determined there were 1,500 homes impacted by county airport noise above the FAA standard (i.e. inside the 75-decibel noise contour). How many of these homeowners were offered noise abatement measures by the county airport?
2. Other airports have on-going home noise abatement programs. The Twin Cities metro airport provides up to \$14,000 to add noise abatement insulation and other measures to homes within the 60-decibel noise contour. Why doesn't the county airport have a program to install noise abatement on home, schools and businesses in the populated areas of the Madison?
3. What would be the cost to implement a home noise abatement program for all residences and schools within 3 miles of the county airport?

Airport Noise Abatement Subcommittee

1. How are members of the subcommittee chosen?
2. How much influence does this subcommittee hold over changes to airport operations?
3. Is any expertise in airport noise abatement required to serve on the committee?
4. How many members of the committee live within 3 miles of the airport?
5. During each of the 10 years, please identify improvements to the airport's noise abatement procedures which have been recommended by committee members?
6. Which of these improvements have been implemented?
7. What steps would be required to require the airport noise abatement committee to prepare an annual report on improvements it has implemented to the airport's noise abatement procedures?
8. What steps would be required to assure that a majority of the subcommittee members are chosen from residents living within 3 miles of the airport?
9. What steps would be necessary to hold the semi-annual committee meetings within the city neighborhoods most impacted by airport noise?
10. What steps would be necessary to assure accurate minutes are prepared of committee meetings?

Airport Noise Control Plan

1. According to the FAA web site, the airport's noise control plan was last updated in 1996. Other airports such as the Twin Cities Metro Airport update their plan annually. Why is the county airport plan not updated on a regular basis?

2. At the April 2010 airport noise committee, airport staff gave a presentation that included a figure showing noise contours around the airport. This figure appeared to come from the 1996 airport noise control plan. County Supervisor Hendrick contacted airport staff to answer questions about this noise contour figure but received no response.
 - a) When were these noise contours developed?
 - b) Do these contours represent instantaneous noise levels or average noise levels over a day?
 - c) Does airport staff believe these contours accurately represent the noise impacts on Madison neighborhoods?
 - d) What were the air traffic assumptions used to develop these contours?
 - e) Do these contours include noise from military flights including fighter jets and helicopters?
 - f) Do these contours include noise generated by the revving of airplanes on the ground like fighter jets?
 - g) What would be the cost to update the noise contours?

Contra-Flow Noise Control Strategy

1. The airport's web site states that: "*Weather and air traffic permitting, aircraft comply with the airport's voluntary noise abatement program by landing from and taking off to the north to minimize noise above the populated areas of the city.*" This program has been called the "counter-flow strategy". What does airport staff currently call this program?
2. During each of the past five years, what were the number flights and percentage of all flights that did not land from or take off to the north, but instead flew over populated areas of the city?
3. What steps can airport staff take to reduce the number of flights which fly over populated areas of the city?
4. To help improve the counter-flow noise control strategy, how much time and cost would it take airport staff to record every flight including information such as the runway, takeoff/landing direction, type of aircraft, airline, flight controller, pilot, wind speed, wind direction and visibility?
5. What would be the cost of collecting this information for flights outside normal business hours?
6. What steps would be needed to report to the public the number of monthly flights over populated areas?

5 Knot per Hour Wind Speed Threshold

Airport staff frequently cite a 5 knot per hour wind speed as the threshold to determine when aircraft can follow the contra-flow noise control strategy. For example, if the wind from the north exceeds 5 knots per hour, airplanes cannot land from the north, but must land from the south over populated areas of the city. This wind speed threshold severely limits the number of aircraft that can follow the contra-flow noise control strategy.

1. Is this threshold mandated by the FAA or was it developed by the county airport?
2. What thresholds do other airports use, if any?
3. What is the basis for this 5 knot per hour threshold?
4. Are all aircraft required to comply with this threshold?
5. Is this threshold only used by airport staff to determine which flights should have followed the contra-flow strategy?
6. What aircraft currently ignore this threshold by landing with greater than a 5 knot tailwind, or takeoff into greater than a 5 knot tailwind?

Noise Monitoring

1. Other airports such as the Milwaukee Airport have installed noise monitors throughout the area surrounding the airport and report the noise levels experienced by the public. Why has the county airport not installed noise monitors?
2. What would be the procedures and cost for the county airport to install a noise monitoring system in areas most impacted by airport operations?

Reducing the Number of Noisy Airplanes

1. What would be the cost of developing an inventory of the noise levels generated by each type of airplane using the county airport?
2. What procedures could be implemented to encourage the use of quieter aircraft?

Flight Curfew

1. The East Hampton Airport in New York and the Santa Barbara Airport in California have voluntary curfews to limit early morning and late night flights. The Santa Barbara Airport petitioned the FAA to officially adopt the flight curfew as part of their noise abatement procedures. When the FAA did not approve the request, the airport adopted a voluntary curfew. What steps would be needed for the county airport to petition the FAA to adopt a flight curfew, or if not approved by FAA, to adopt a voluntary curfew?

Aircraft Penalties for Violating Noise Abatement Procedures

1. The East Hampton Airport in New York considered fining airplane pilots \$25,000 for violating the airport's voluntary curfew. What other airports fine aircraft operators for violating noise abatement procedures?
2. What steps would be needed for the county airport to develop a fine system to encourage compliance with its noise abatement program?

Effectiveness of New Runway 3-21

1. In 1995 the county airport built a new runway 3-21 for \$26 million to reduce traffic over populated areas of the city. Have airport staff conducted any studies to determine the effectiveness of this new runway?
2. If not, what were the number of flights which used this new runway in 2010 and what percentage of total flights does this represent?
3. What types of flights are unable to use this new runway and what percentage of total flights do these represent?

Economic Impacts

1. Madison's neighborhood indicators web site shows that the county airport is surrounded by the greatest number of families in poverty in Madison. What steps can airport staff take to reduce the amount of poverty surrounding the airport?
2. How many of current airport employees live within 3 miles of the airport?
3. What steps would be needed for the airport to give preferential hiring to those living within 3 miles of the airport?

4. What steps would be needed to require all airport staff to live within 3 miles of the airport?
5. Can the City of Madison charge a toll or airport passenger fee to pay for implementing its own airport noise abatement program?
6. In 2011 dollars, what is the average airline ticket price at the county airport currently, and then 10, 20 and 30 years ago?

DRAFT