

OAK Questions for Regional Administrator Dennis Roberts

July 18, 2018

OAK Noise Forum

FAA's attendance and participation at the OAK Noise Forum's July 18 session does not constitute a final decision of the FAA or a reopening of the FAA's NorCal OAPM Environmental Assessment and its August 7, 2014 final decision.

1. Based upon comments made by Administrator Martin to the Noise Forum that requested the Forum develop specific requests from the FAA with regards to NextGen, the Noise Forum developed and subsequently submitted a letter to the FAA in March 2017 that requested FAA review and/or modify certain procedures. This letter was submitted approximately six months after the Select Committee, which is primarily concerned with SFO traffic, had submitted their proposal. As the Select Committee as received multiple responses, with the most recent being about eight months ago, it appears that the East Bay concerns are not being address concurrently with those on the Peninsula and South Bay. Although a response was received a few months ago by the Forum, that response provided very little information and did not provide a sense that issues raised in that letter would be addressed for quite some time. This is concerning for residents who are subjected to the NextGen paths due to the length of time it has taken to receive a response but also is concerning as the Forum has been advised that metroplex procedure evaluations must occur concurrently as the Bay Area airspace is so intertwined. Because of this, there are a few questions the Forum has:

- a. What is the timing of the next update to the Forum? Even if only some of the requests can be addressed, should the Forum be expecting a response within the next few months?

Representative Lee has requested a meeting with the Port of Oakland, the Forum and FAA to establish a more formalized dialogue between the parties, while the FAA appreciates the invitation we have declined the meeting. A formal response to Congresswoman Lee will be forthcoming shortly from FAA Acting Administrator Dan Elwell.

The FAA is currently analyzing the OAK Noise Forum recommendations and anticipates providing an updated response in 45 days. Based on the presentation to the OAK Noise Forum on July 18th, the FAA's update will be planned for August 31st.

- b. Have the OAK requests been evaluated concurrently with the Roundtable/Select Committee requests or are they being addressed independently?

The Oakland requests and Roundtable/Select Committee requests are being evaluated at the same time. There are many requests from different communities in the Bay Area and the FAA is actively evaluating all of them. Procedures have many interdependencies and potential changes need to be evaluated as a whole system, so the evaluation must be done regionally.

- c. Should the Forum be looking to further prioritize requests to ensure that FAA focuses on the most critical issues to the East Bay community? The Forum limited the number of requests to make evaluation by FAA easier but if further refinement would assist in this process the Forum can make some determinations.

The FAA will evaluate all the recommendations as a whole because of the interdependencies between many of the procedures in the area. Pulling out the top priority

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projects may not be productive and looking at all of them together as a system is more effective.

2. As the FAA evaluates these procedures, will they reach out to the Forum and/or Airport regarding specific issues that may arise to determine if the requests can be slightly modified? For example, if the FAA determines that what is being asked is not feasible but some version of the request may be possible, can the FAA engage directly with the Forum and/or Airport to work through these issues?

When working on changes to flight paths, the FAA engages in community outreach and carefully considers specific, substantive technical recommendations. Due to the complexity of our national airspace and the safety issues involved in changing flight paths, the agency considers multiple factors to determine if a change is operationally safe and feasible. This multi-step process can take up to two years from concept to implementation and requires collaboration across multiple organizations. With regret, the FAA cannot re-engage the Forum to discuss further potential modifications once the process has begun.

3. Besides submitting formal letters to the FAA, is there anybody within the FAA that the Forum and/or Airport can communicate with regarding NextGen issues?

The term NextGen refers to the modernization of the air traffic system and involves a transition from ground-based to satellite-based navigation and the movement from analog to digital communication. More precise flight navigation, through GPS-enabled pathways, is just one part of NextGen. The FAA can arrange a presentation to the Forum that provides insight into the different elements of NextGen and how they work with the Airport.

4. How does the FAA weigh operational benefits with NextGen vs. potential impact to communities that will be receiving increased traffic?

The airspace above our busy cities is similar to the infrastructure for the roads, bridges and railway lines that crisscross our country and support our communities. The U.S. aviation industry supports more than 10 million jobs and every day the FAA's air traffic organization provides services to 42,000 flights and 2.5 million passengers.

The agency must make these important changes toward modernizing the airspace system to accommodate the business demand for increased operations by airlines. The FAA acknowledges that with such growth, the community may have concerns about aircraft and noise. Although not legally required, the FAA is engaging in enhanced community outreach to explore possible solutions, while remaining committed to ensuring the safety and efficiency of the National Airspace System. As part of that effort, the FAA remains involved with the Oakland Airport, the Oakland Airport Noise Forum and other aviation stakeholders to understand the community concerns around the airport.

5. Has the FAA been able to develop NextGen systems that somewhat mimic the spreading out of air traffic that existed before the widespread implementation of NextGen?

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The FAA is constantly looking for enhancements in ways that make the NAS safer and more efficient. Multiple initiatives are underway and range from better understanding the impact of aviation noise to those living around airports to examining how changes in the way aircraft fly can reduce noise.

6. Will conventional departures and arrivals be completely phased out in upcoming years or will some conventional procedures, some of which are seen to provide increased benefit to the community, remain in the medium to long term?

In order to serve all aircraft types and maximize operational efficiencies, the FAA will retain some conventional procedures in combination with the satellite-based area navigation (RNAV) procedures. If in the future the FAA determines that utilization of these procedures is low or no longer needed, a further assessment will be undertaken.

7. There still appears to be a lack of a consistent process for communities to work with the FAA for metroplexes that have already been implemented. What plans are currently in place to ensure that FAA has sufficient resources to work with communities on NextGen issues for locations where the metroplex has already been completed?

The FAA acknowledges that with the demands and growth in aviation, there are concerns in the community about aircraft and noise. As such, the FAA continues to work with individual communities to explore possible solutions while remaining committed to ensuring the safety and efficiency of the National Airspace System. The FAA also continues its collaborative work with Airports, airport roundtables and airlines to address a wide range of concerns including aircraft noise. The agency encourages communities to engage with established roundtables.

8. What are the political hurdles that must be overcome to change flight paths that may impact other communities?

As we continue the efforts to upgrade and modernize our airspace, the FAA understands the challenge in finding a balance to the needs and demands of the aviation industry and the concerns in each community. As part of the FAA's engagement efforts, we regularly meet with airports, local and national elected officials, community roundtables and aviation stakeholders to better understand and address the concerns of communities surrounding airports.

9. Besides what is covered under NEPA in terms of studying noise impacts to communities impacted by changing flight paths, what consideration does the FAA have when designing procedures relative to their noise impact on communities.

The FAA undertakes a rigorous analysis process before it implements or modifies an air traffic procedure. As a Federal agency, the FAA is bound by Federal regulations, thus the FAA uses the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and FAA's Order 1050 for evaluating the effects of a

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proposed major federal action on the human environment. In regards to designing procedures, safety and operational efficiency are the primary considerations.

10. and 11. Are complaint numbers and locations a factor in influencing decisions about flight routing? Does a drop-off in complaint traffic, due to complainant fatigue, represent a factor in FAA decision making regarding potential future changes?

The FAA is responsible for managing the National Airspace System and determining the best way to safely move aircraft in that system. With this responsibility, the agency must constantly weigh the needs of a myriad of stakeholders and users of the system. Along with local community concerns, the FAA must also engage with and balance the needs of airports, passenger carriers, cargo carriers, the U.S. military, helicopter operators, the more than 150,000 general aviation pilots, and the increasingly expressed interests of commercial space and unmanned aircraft operators.

When there is a need and purpose to make a change to the system, the FAA will undertake the appropriate environmental review as well as work with airports and communities to provide a better understanding of the proposed action. As part of the FAA's engagement efforts, we actively work with Airports, community roundtables and aviation stakeholders throughout this process.

12. To what level does FAA evaluate noise complaints that are received by Airports from the community?

Generally, the FAA becomes aware of the Airport's receipt of community noise concerns through the FAA's involvement and participation at the OAK Noise Forum. Similarly, due to the FAA's close work with airports on trends or areas of concern, there are occasions when community concerns may also arise.