

DCA AIRPLANE NOISE
County Contract consultant reports on Progress

As reported in previous Newsletters (see p.7 of October 2020 Newsletter for latest report at [ca6605_880e8e52217b4dd9b68ecc488aedea65.pdf \(filesusr.com\)](https://filesusr.com/ca6605_880e8e52217b4dd9b68ecc488aedea65.pdf) or email Mary@drca.org for more information on this and previous Newsletter reports), Arlington county (ArlCo) has joined with Montgomery county (MoCo) in jointly funding a \$250k consultant contract to explore ways to mitigate the noise from departing and approaching flights to Reagan National Airport. The contract had anticipated a report to the community in 1 Qtr 2021, but covid-19 effects have caused a modest slip. Thus this latest report occurred virtually on 5 April 2021.

It included

- The findings from the community questionnaire issued after the first Outreach Meeting on 17 August 2020. The questionnaire was submitted by over 1600 respondents roughly equally from the four affected jurisdictions (Arlco, MoCo, DC, and Fairfax County)
- The consultant's baseline conditions report summarizing the current flight and noise environment,
- The draft notional approaches (flight arrival procedures) now being tested by FAA that the consultant prepared based on community inputs for flight priorities in new procedure design. This initial focus on approaches rather than departures appears to have been chosen due to the generally lower flight paths and considerably louder flight paths on approach (at least over the MoCo and DRCA areas)
- Departure flight recommendations are being formulated and will be discussed with FAA in coming months.

The major elements of the proposed approach profile changes that FAA is testing now are;

- Major reduction in overflights of MoCo by not placing all flights to DCA that are arriving from the north on the same path over MoCo to get to the Potomac River. A "share the load" approach using several paths that would overfly MoCo, Fairfax county/Mclean and Northern ArlCo essentially resolves this problem while employing altitudes sufficiently high that noise is not a major problem. There are minor tradeoffs between Rosslyn and DC neighborhoods but the jurisdictions were able to agree the additional noise over DC is concentrated in areas of low residency and were not an obstacle.
- Re other ArlCo issues, using the CIA property as a flyover point rather than private residential areas, thus allowing a slight eastward shift towards the river and a raising of the altitude of approach flights over DRCA areas (including Potomac Overlook Park and the DRRA pool) offers measureable improvements in anticipated DRCA noise
- The FAA will monitor the use of these new profiles to explore any operational issues before adopting them entirely as recommended flight paths going forward. Although by

far most DCA aircraft possess the modern GPS-based avionics (perhaps 95 %) at most half of the carriers have trained their pilots in the use of this technology. The consultant notes that based upon discussions with the FAA, it is assumed that this revised profile will first be implemented as a Special Flight Procedure that will allow for the necessary waivers from current profiles for implementation. The procedure will initially only be available to a few operators and aircraft types for testing and data gathering. Once the initial flight trials have been completed, it is expected that over time the vast majority of operators will be utilizing this profile as the preferred approach to the DCA airport.

- In this regard, the process could thus take several years to complete, although the consultant notes there are grounds for optimism that many or most major carriers will be flying the new profiles before the normal 18 to 36 month period for vetting Special Flight Procedures. An issue is the cost of training pilots in use of the GPS avionics, and individual carrier financial decisions post-covid, could delay such training. On the other hand, with the mandatory retirement of senior pilots over 65 years of age in the industry, this would incentivize at least some carriers to hire (and train) a new cohort of pilots in the nearer term.

CONCLUSIONS

This is a complex subject for which congratulations to the political level and the technical team are in order. As the study report states: “The ... notional designs of the two recommended approaches seek to create a balance between the residential areas of the counties on either side of the river by utilizing compatible land whenever possible and sharing the noise equitably between the communities along the river in accordance with the Design Philosophy developed by the North of Airport Committee (NOA) and approved by the Community Working Group (CWG).”

The long and short of the study, however, is that there are only modest adjustments to flight paths can be achieved in order reduce aircraft noise to the Arlington Community. There was strong citizen input into the proposed scope of the consultant study process before the contract was awarded that suggested that one of the prime focuses of the study should be to consider ways to mitigate aircraft noise, (i.e. such as heavier fines for early morning hour violations through legislative or regulatory action, upgrades to jet aircraft fleets to introduce quieter aircraft at a faster rate, etc) Regrettably this aspect was not included in the study. This type of activity of regulatory reform effort could have been carried out for much less cost and perhaps been able to achieve nearer term noise mitigation actions. Perhaps the Arlington County Board in conjunction with other jurisdictions and/or Congressional representatives could consider such follow-on actions.

FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

Those wishing to be immersed in the details can find the material at [ABCx2-Component-2-Report-Volumn-2-Technical-Report-Phase-1-Arrival-Procedure-Design-20210402.pdf \(secureservercdn.net\)](#)

The full panoply of documents is available on the same website as the above material' which is at.

[Available Documents - NowGEN-DCA Project](#)

The meeting was hosted by Montgomery County Councilmember Andrew Friedson and Arlington County Board Member Libby Garvey with attendance by member Takis Karantonis, with major presentations by the MoCo rep on the NOA , Ken Hartman, and consultant team members. .Also observing were representatives of Rep. Raskin (MD), Beyer (VA), and a D.C. Office