



New York/New Jersey/Philadelphia Metropolitan Area

airspace

redesign project

December 2002

Volume 5

AIRSPACE REDESIGN: LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC

This newsletter is the fifth in a series to keep interested parties informed about the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) progress in regard to the New York/New Jersey/Philadelphia Airspace Redesign Project and the associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Because the FAA's decisions and actions in regard to the redesign project may have an impact on the environment, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires the FAA to consider and evaluate the environmental impacts of any action it undertakes. Public involvement is a critical part of that evaluation. For this reason, the FAA engaged in a scoping process designed to incorporate meaningful public participation early in the airspace redesign process.

The initial emphasis of the FAA's public involvement process was a series of public meetings held throughout the five state study area between February and May 2001. Twenty-eight meetings were conducted during that period in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania. All meetings followed a standard format to ensure that citizens within the study area received the same access to information and the opportunity to provide input to the FAA, regardless of where the meeting was held.

At each meeting, the FAA presented a brief summary overview for the assembled audience. Participants were then encouraged to move to an open forum area where they could view displays detailing various aspects of the project, ask questions, and discuss their concerns with FAA representatives. A separate area was also provided for individuals to submit written comments or state oral remarks to a court reporter to be included in the official record. After the open forum, participants were encouraged to return to a question and answer session during which they could again ask FAA representatives about the airspace redesign and the environmental review process. The interaction educated the public about the FAA's goals, purposes, plans and progress, while informing the FAA about the public's interests, concerns, and opinions.

The FAA also solicited comments from individuals who were unable to attend the scoping meetings. These comments were received via postal and electronic mail. Comments were also solicited and received from Federal, State, and local agencies and Public Officials.

Over 1000 comments were received during the scoping period. The majority of the comments expressed concern with noise pollution generated by aircraft operating within the study area. Other issues raised included the altitudes of aircraft arriving and departing the airports; routing aircraft over bodies of water or industrial areas; and reducing aircraft emissions in and around the airports.

Upon the conclusion of the public scoping period, the FAA reviewed and analyzed every comment, summarized the major issues raised by commenters, and described how each issue will be addressed in the EIS. In March 2002 the FAA issued a scoping report for the EIS, which detailed the process and the issues developed during public scoping.

The final scoping report is available on the FAA's website at:
http://www.faa.gov/programs/airspace/images/Final_Scoping_Report_NYNJPHL_3-2002.pdf

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE PROJECT

- **Question:** What exactly is the purpose and need for the Airspace Redesign Project?
- **Answer:** The New York/New Jersey/Philadelphia Airspace Redesign Project is the cornerstone of an initiative to redesign airspace all across the United States. This initiative fulfills the FAA's primary statutory mission to assure safe and efficient use of the navigable airspace as defined in Title 49, Section 40103 of the United States Code. The goals of the National Airspace Redesign program are: (1) to improve the flows of aircraft in and out of all of the major airports; (2) increase airspace system flexibility, predictability, and access; (3) maintain and improve airspace system safety; (4) improve air travel efficiency and reduce delays; and (5) support an airspace system that takes advantage of emerging technologies. The purpose and need for the New York/New Jersey/Philadelphia Airspace Redesign Project is to achieve the goals of the National Airspace Redesign program within the most complex airspace in the United States.

- **Question:** Is noise reduction considered part of the purpose and need for the Airspace Redesign Project?
- **Answer:** Noise reduction, the largest public concern stemming from the scoping process, is not considered a part of the purpose and need for the project. In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision, which established airport operators as having the primary responsibility for noise issues. In 1976, the Department of Transportation and the FAA issued a National Noise Policy confirming the existing practice that airport operators have the primary responsibility to address airport related noise issues in conjunction with the affected jurisdictions, users, and other agencies. However, the FAA does work cooperatively with airport operators to consider changes in procedures developed by airport owners designed to reduce airport noise. FAA policy is that aircraft are not rerouted to remove noise problems from one community at the expense of another. Though noise is not contained in the Airspace Redesign Project's purpose and need, it is an important environmental concern that will be analyzed during the development of each alternative. The FAA will consider re-routing of air traffic for noise reduction if the proposed alternative first meets the purpose and need of the project. The Noise Integrated Routing System (NIRS) model will be used to determine impacts to individuals in the study area. Slight changes to the routes in each alternative may occur during the alternative development phase should the results from the NIRS model indicate that significant noise reductions would be realized.

- **Question:** What documents relating to the New York/New Jersey/Philadelphia Airspace Redesign Project are currently available?
- **Answer:** The only document directly related to the project that has been completed and made available to the public at this time is the Scoping Report, which was released in March 2002. Future documents that will be developed and released to the public are the Draft EIS and Final EIS. The Draft EIS is currently scheduled for publication and distribution in late 2003. Following the publication of the Draft EIS, the public, agencies, public officials and special interest groups will be given the opportunity to comment on the document. A series of meetings will be held that will give the public and others a chance to discuss the Draft EIS with FAA personnel and submit formal comments. More information on these meetings will be distributed as the publication of the Draft EIS approaches. All comments received on the Draft EIS will be addressed in the Final EIS. Any changes to the text of the Draft EIS resulting from public comments received will also be indicated. One recent project that some individuals may be confusing with the Airspace Redesign Project is a change in aircraft routing into Newark and LaGuardia Airports that was recently implemented. The project, known as the Yardley-Robbinsville "Flip-Flop," simplified the approach pattern to these two airports by removing a crossover point between the two approaches, allowing for a direct approach for aircraft to each airport. Before the project was implemented, the FAA conducted noise modeling with NIRS to determine the changes in noise that would result from the action. The results showed that noise along the approach routes would not change; however, communities directly below the crossover point in Central New Jersey would experience some reductions in aircraft noise. Because no significant impact was found and the action took place above 3,000 feet above ground level, this action was a categorical exclusion under FAA regulations and not subject to public notification or comment under NEPA regulations. The FAA did provide notification of this action to the public, though it was not required.

HOW WILL THE FAA ANALYZE AIRCRAFT NOISE?

The NY/NJ/Philadelphia Airspace Redesign Project covers five states; five major, 16 secondary and several satellite airports; and consists of numerous low and high altitude flight tracks that vary depending on weather conditions; which make noise analysis a highly complex task. This complexity requires the use of computer noise modeling to assist in the impact analysis. Therefore, the FAA will use the Noise Integrated Routing System or NIRS, which was initially developed in 1998 by the FAA's Offices of Environment and Energy, in cooperation with FAA Air Traffic, to develop projected noise levels this air traffic study.

The Noise Integrated Routing System (NIRS) is a noise-assessment program designed to provide an analysis of air traffic changes over broad areas. It is intended to work in conjunction with other Air Traffic modeling systems, which provide the source of routes, events, and Air Traffic procedures such as altitude restrictions. The outputs of NIRS include population-impact and change-of-exposure reports and graphics. Populations are evaluated as impacted or relieved based on their change of exposure. A hierarchy of rules based on FAA guidance is then employed to determine the degree of the change in noise exposure from an airspace alternative. Where possible, the system identifies the principal source of the change of exposure. Having identified the route set responsible for an increase, the air traffic planner can begin the evaluation of possible mitigation alternatives.

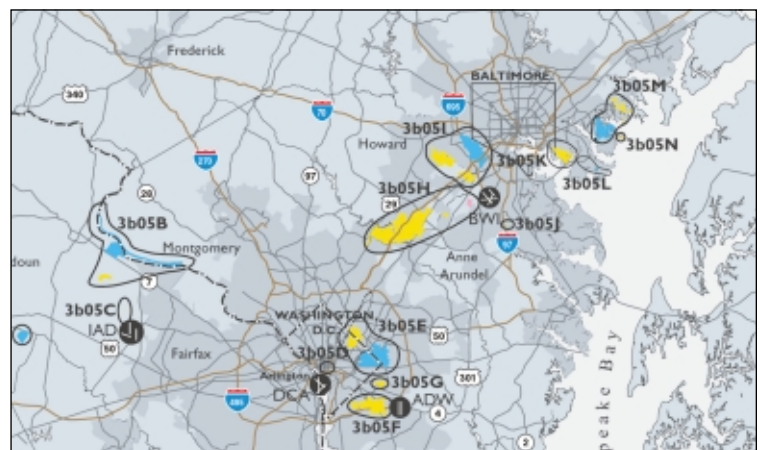
NIRS capabilities include:

- Conducting noise analyses from the ground up to 10,000 ft. AGL;
- Analyzing noise over large geographic areas, including multiple major airports;
- Evaluating noise at an almost unlimited number of locations on the ground;
- Adjusting noise calculations based on varying ground elevations;
- Displaying positive and negative noise impacts on easy to read maps;
- Identifying airspace changes associated with each noise impact; and
- Calculating the total number of individuals that are impacted either positively or negatively from airspace design changes.

Due to the strong public reaction to the Expanded East Coast Plan of the early 1990s, the use of a wide-area noise model such as NIRS was determined to be necessary in large-scale airspace projects. The first major airspace study to utilize NIRS was the Chicago Terminal Airspace Project, which was completed in August 2001. NIRS is also currently in use on the Potomac Consolidated TRACON (PCT) project, which is approaching the publication of the Final EIS.

NIRS does not directly measure ambient noise levels. Noise levels in the model are calculated based on forecasted airline activities (i.e.. future aircraft types, destinations, and flight demand) along with the redesigned airspace routing alternatives. The NIRS model is the best available tool for predicting future noise levels and the changes that would result from each alternative.

The following graphic depicts a sample noise change map developed by NIRS. The colored areas represent areas on the ground that will experience either positive or negative noise impacts. The yellow areas represent increased noise exposure and the blue represent decreased noise exposure. Graphics similar to this one will also be used to discuss impacts with the public during the formal DEIS hearing phase in the future.



New York/New Jersey/
Philadelphia Metropolitan Area
Airspace Redesign Project

Northrup Grumman IT
Mail Stop C302
12005 Sunrise Valley Drive
Reston, VA 20191



WHAT'S NEXT IN THE PROCESS?

The FAA airspace redesign team is in the process of developing the airspace alternatives. This process is expected to continue through the next several months. Once the design alternatives are complete, the environmental team will then begin the analysis of the environmental impacts of each alternative, including noise modeling. The results of the environmental analyses will be used to refine the routes proposed in each alternative in an iterative process., as presented in the diagram below.

In addition to the noise modeling, the environmental team will be analyzing the impacts to other resource categories including, but not limited to ecology, water, socioeconomic, and historic properties, and begin development of the Draft EIS document. Once the Draft EIS has been completed, the FAA will publish and make copies of the document available for public review and comment.

After the document has been published, the FAA will hold a series of public hearings to receive comments on the content of the Draft EIS similar to the meetings that took place during the scoping process in 2001. The publication of the Draft EIS is scheduled for late 2003 and the hearing phase is planned for early 2004 and will be the next opportunity for the public, elected officials, special interest groups, and agencies to interact with both environmental and airspace design members and provide direct input to the process. The FAA is committed to keeping the public informed as the process proceeds. For more information related to upcoming events please call 1-866-EISLINE (1-866-347-5463) or visit the project website at <http://www.faa.gov/programs/airspace.htm>.

