

To: Dane County Executive Kathy Falk
Dane County Board Chair Kevin Kesterson

From: Dan Melton, Chair Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association

Subject: Dane County Regional Airport Internal Audit and Monthly Reporting of Flights

Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association represents an area on the near east side of Madison - roughly from Schenk's Corners to East Washington Avenue to Olbrich Park - an area ably represented by District 6 County Supv. John Hendrick.

We have asked Dane County Regional Airport staff to do a regular, continuing internal audit of flights, to verify that air traffic is complying with the airport's strategy of directing planes to land and take off to the north - away from the populated isthmus - not to the south - over the populated isthmus.

At its April 27 meeting the airport noise committee discussed the the airport's counter-flow strategy. This is the airport's primary method for reducing noise and improving safety over the populated isthmus. The strategy directs planes to the north - away from the isthmus. At the April 27 meeting airport staff said it tried a new internal audit procedure for verifying that air traffic is complying with the counter-flow strategy.

With the audit, every flight over populated areas of the city is checked for compliance with the counter-flow strategy. If there appears to be a reason for violating the strategy, such as weather or traffic, this is documented. The internal audit is conducted by existing airport staff using readily available information. No outside contractors or costs were incurred.

The internal audit would be a far more effective and objective means of tracking noise control success than the inadequate and infrequently used noise complaint hotline. With the audit, every flight over populated areas is reviewed. With the hotline, flights are only checked if someone takes the time to call in a complaint.

For example, our members report Fed Ex planes sometimes come in over their house at 5:30 AM. These flights apparently are not justified by either weather or traffic conditions, and should use a northern approach. If a resident does not bother to telephone the noise complaint hotline, no one will know, except those awakened at 5:30 AM, that Fed Ex violated the counter-flow strategy. There are also times when two, three, or more planes land in quick succession. Unless a resident is prepared to call several times, the apparent violation of the counter-flow strategy by several planes will go unreported. Additionally, calling the hotline frequently is a practice discouraged by airport staff, as frequent users of the hotline are singled out at noise subcommittee meetings, reducing the importance of their calls. A regular continuing internal audit, on the other hand, would check every flight over the city, whether or not a complaint is filed, to verify the flight was justified in not landing or taking off to the north.

If the audit were done on a regular, continuing basis, results could be used to track long-term changes in flights over populated areas and identify ways to improve the airport's noise control plan. Monthly results could be reported to neighbors through the airport web site, airport noise subcommittee meetings, news media, and our own neighborhood internet discussion list. Violators of the counter-flow strategy could automatically be contacted by airport staff to discourage future problems.

Members of our neighborhood association, like all Dane County residents, appreciate the importance of a healthy, thriving airport to the continued health of the regional economy. However, we hope county residents would also be willing to acknowledge that those who live under the flight paths bear an unusual burden - a "cost," if you will. Air traffic noise continues to be a significant impediment to improving the quality of life in our neighborhood. This impact will increase as the airport continues to expand its facilities and there are calls for more flights to help maintain a thriving business climate in Dane County.

Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association supports measures to improve and verify the effectiveness of the airport's noise control plan. We ask that you encourage airport staff to audit all flights over populated areas on a regular, continuing basis and publish results monthly.

Thank you for listening to our request - and thank you for all you do for the people of Dane County.

Dear Neighbor, On September 6 our neighborhood association sent Dane County Executive Kathy Falk and County Board Chair Kevin Kesterson a letter asking them to encourage airport staff to audit flights on a regular, continuing basis and publish results monthly - to verify that air traffic is complying with the airport's stated policy of directing planes to land and take off to the north - away from the populated isthmus - not to the south - over the populated isthmus. We asked that airport staff do such an internal audit not just as a one-shot deal for a one-or two-month period but 12 months a year as a regular, routine part of operations. A story about this - "SASYNA asks Falk for airport noise audit" - is on Page One of the current [September / October] EastsideNews. On Thursday September 30 I received in the mail this reply from the County Executive. DM

DANE COUNTY Kathleen M. Falk County Executive

September 24, 2004

Mr. Dan Melton
Chair, SASYN Neighborhood Association
2138 LaFollette Avenue
Madison, Wisconsin 53704

Dear Mr. Melton and SASYNA members:

I want to thank you for taking the time to write to me on behalf of the Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara Neighborhood Association. The airport has worked hard to mitigate aircraft noise impacts to surrounding community residents.

The procedures audit was conducted by the Airport Operations staff for a two-month period encompassing March and April of 2004. As I write, this audit is again being conducted to monitor a typical summer period at the airport and will be reported at the next Noise Abatement Subcommittee meeting. The methodology used for this audit has been verified by an outside consultant. My understanding is that the audits currently show a 97% compliance rate. The airport does follow up with flights that do not follow the proper procedures to achieve compliance.

I would like to extend an invitation for you to meet personally with airport staff to discuss your concerns and the issues involved with mitigation of aircraft noise impacts. I also encourage you to attend the Noise Abatement Subcommittee meetings routinely held by the Airport Commission and airport staff to discuss your suggestions. These meetings are a way for the airport and other affected parties to discuss the issues involved, understand what is being accomplished, and provide a forum for researching possible solutions. The meetings provide information on a regular, continuing basis for tracking short- and long-term changes and as a means of finding ways to improve on noise abatement efforts. The information provided at the meetings is also posted to the airport's website at www.msairport.com

Sincerely,

Kathleen M. Falk
Dane County Executive

cc: Bradley Livingston, Airport Director
William White, Chair, Airport Commission