

MEMORANDUM -- June 20, 2017

TO: Elizabeth Ray, FAA Vice President, Mission Support Services
Margaret McKeough, MWAA Executive Vice President

FROM: Rick Murphy, WG delegate for Ward Two; Don W. Crockett, alternate
delegate for D.C. Ward Two; Robert P. vom Eigen, former delegate for
D.C. Ward Two.

Marcio Duffles, WG delegate for D.C. Ward Three; Dominic Patella,
alternate delegate for Ward Three.

CC: All Working Group (WG) members

SUBJECT: THE ERRONEOUS ASSUMPTION THAT INCREASING THE
“PERCENTAGE OF TIME” AIRCRAFT SPEND “OVER WATER”
WILL REDUCE POTENTIAL AIRCRAFT NOISE IMPACTS ON
“NOISE SENSITIVE AREAS” NEAR THE POTOMAC RIVER.

In the 2004 MWAA Part 150 Noise Report, p. V1-3, a Council of Governments (COG) committee recommended that a working group be established to develop new RNAV routes to “provide pilots the ability to follow more predictable and precise flight tracks along the center of the Potomac and Anacostia River corridors.” Thirteen years later, the FAA and MWAA have apparently altered and expanded that earlier concept into a goal of “maximizing the time aircraft spend flying directly over the Potomac River and minimizing the time aircraft spend flying over land in these communities.” See, e.g. Community Working Group (WG) Recommendation #1 (12/10/2015). That simplistic assumption, that increasing the “percentage of time over water,” is a valid means for reducing aircraft noise on “noise sensitive areas,” is without factual basis. Moreover, neither the FAA nor the MWAA has undertaken the

noise modeling and/or noise measurements necessary to validate the assumption with respect to the various communities and facilities north of the Airport near the Potomac River. As the 2004 report noted at p. V1-4, “It is more difficult for aircraft to stay over the center of the river to the north where the Potomac River is narrower and curved, whereas to the south the river is wider and straighter.”

At the WG meeting on May 25, 2017, the FAA presented a new proposal that would make adjustments to the recently implemented northbound RNAV flight path for the sole purpose of achieving a “greater percentage of time over water.” According to the FAA, the suggested adjustments would increase “time over water” from 42% to 69% for westbound aircraft and from 59% to 74% for eastbound aircraft. That general conceptual exercise, however, improperly assumes that “time over water” is preferable to “time over land,” regardless of what is on the land, e.g., the sewage treatment plant south of the Airport that is directly across the River from a historic residential district.

The FAA has apparently adopted its assumption as a “shortcut” designed to improperly avoid any detailed analysis of the many factors involved in determining how best to mitigate noise impacts on “noise sensitive areas” along that 10-mile stretch such as: (1) The nature and history of each area that would either be receiving more or less aircraft noise, i.e., residential, commercial, industrial, historic district, national park, farm land, or government installation. (2) The history of the areas that have been under the NATIONAL 328 flight path since 1941, including the land use,

zoning, and the types of buildings constructed under the flight path over the past 76 years. (3) The actual changes in noise impact levels on the various areas and communities on each side of the River. (4) The fact that the FAA's assumption does not properly account for the way that aircraft actually navigate over a narrow river. Indeed, the River north of Key Bridge is so narrow and curved that attempts to fly directly over it would merely tend to transfer noise from one side of the narrow River to the other. Moreover, RNAV flight tracks show a variation of at least a quarter mile, and many times much more, on either side of centerline of the current published northbound RNAV route.

The same northbound RNAV flight path is the subject of an appeal currently pending before the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, *Citizens Assn. of Georgetown, et al. v. FAA*, case No. 15-1285. In that appeal, the members of the D.C. Fair Skies Coalition have challenged the legality of the FAA's movement of the historic flight path across the River to Georgetown and away from commercial Rosslyn, where it has existed since National Airport opened in 1941 – without first conducting a valid environmental assessment of the new northbound route and providing residents and officials of the District of Columbia with adequate notice and the opportunity to participate. The Mayor and Members of the City Council of the District of Columbia also submitted an Administrative Petition to the FAA on May 17, 2016, that seeks the same relief and, in addition, relief from many other aircraft operational procedures that unnecessarily plague residents living near

the Potomac River. That Administrative Petition is available to the public [here](#). The FAA's response to D.C.'s petition was to the effect that the venue for addressing those issues would be the Community Working Group.

In our view, the percentage of "time over water" is an inadequate metric on which to base the movement of a flight path from one point to another, because it ignores the actual potential impacts on the various areas and communities near the Potomac River. A proper environmental assessment is the only lawful and practical method for determining the potential impacts of any proposed flight path changes on the differing terrain and communities along the 10-mile segment of the Potomac River from the Airport to the American Legion Bridge and beyond. Accordingly, the FAA should institute an EA for the purpose of making any adjustments to the RNAV routes north of the Airport.