

AIRCRAFT NOISE AND THE ASPEN COMMUNITY



Photo by Pete McBride

Every day hundreds of planes take off or land at the Aspen Airport, 99% in opposite directions. ASE is known as one of the most dangerous airports in the country.

The Aspen/Pitkin County Airport is Colorado’s third-busiest, yet just a few miles from downtown —convenient for users but noisy for neighbors. Noise from flight operations is a longstanding community concern and complaint.

Current plans to rebuild the airside to allow bigger airplanes would admit noisier planes as well as potentially quieter ones, with unknowable net results. Noise could worsen with larger planes—and with more flights to bring in the 24% more passengers planned for 2050.

The FAA is under pressure to halve the perceived aircraft noise allowed in residential neighborhoods, updating that standard’s 1978 basis with modern evidence. Like the FAA, Aspen uses the weakest noise metric, averaging noise over 24 hours a day including the eight curfew hours so it looks one-third smaller.

The Fly Quiet program emphasizes encouraging quiet operators over shaming noisy ones: congratulations far outnumber admonitions. So do complaints, which seem to elicit no response or action. Whether Fly Quiet’s private need-to-improve letter months or years later improves noisy operations isn’t tracked. Fly Quiet’s reports summarize partial measurements at one of seven monitoring stations, but no raw data are posted for any station. Previous reports quantified the 25 loudest events; the draft 2021 report reveals 206 but quantifies none, though it lists the dozen poorest operators.

Short-term noise could be reduced by:

- Creating a sound wall officially proposed in 2018
- Providing ground power so parked planes can plug in (like ships at modern ports) and turn off their noisy and polluting onboard generators
- Adopting more-orderly European-style pre-takeoff operations
- Petitioning the FAA for local noise regulation under the statutory process
- Better training General Aviation pilots to avoid noise-sensitive areas
- Potentially, new approach routes (not over downtown) being developed by the FAA for experienced pilots, and already available in many modern planes

Lasting help is on the way from aviation innovations documented in our Essay #5: superquiet, ultraclean electric and hydrogen aircraft should be serving Aspen before a new airside for bigger, heavier, fossil-fueled planes could be built.

To learn more, please read Essay #9 (QR code below; there is no Essay #8) in Aspen Fly Right’s public education series. All essays, and the advertisements they elaborate, are posted at www.aspenflyright.org. We appreciate your interest and welcome your support.

**Join Aspen Fly Right
for a
Community Discussion
on a Safer, Quieter,
Cleaner, Better Airport**

**Featuring Amory Lovins,
Jacquelyn Francis
(Chair of Airport Advisory Board)
and special guests**

Moderated by Michael Kinsley

**March 13, 2023
5:30 to 7:30 pm**

**Dunaway
Community Meeting Room
Pitkin County Library**

RSVP to info@AspenFlyRight.org



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**Exploring new solutions
for a safer, cleaner, quieter,
and better Aspen Airport.**