



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

September 5, 2014

The Honorable Mike Quigley
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Quigley:

Thank you for your June 19 letter, cosigned by your congressional colleagues, about the process the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) used to develop the O'Hare Modernization Program (OMP) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the evaluation of the 65 Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) standards. I appreciate the opportunity to address your concerns.

The 3-year process to develop the EIS for OMP was one of the most comprehensive environmental analyses we have ever conducted. We held public hearings in locations that accommodated the expected high turnout and provided access to the largest number of impacted communities. Following completion of the EIS, the FAA approved the city of Chicago's implementation of the OMP. This FAA approval withstood a rigorous legal challenge in the U.S. Court of Appeals that said FAA, "appears to have acted with great care in conducting its analyses for the EIS and ROD (Record of Decision)." The printed enclosure provides a written summary of our outreach efforts conducted as part of the EIS process, and the electronic enclosure provides details including copies of public notices, sign-in sheets, and other relevant information.

We believe that the perception of inaccuracy or incompleteness during the public hearing process is not supported by the facts. The June 19 Chicago Sun-Times article focused on one inaccurate data table from the 2005 Draft EIS document, which contained thousands of pages of information in six volumes. The incorrect data was never used in the EIS modeling and never appeared in the public meetings. The Final EIS contained a corrected version of the table. The FAA made that final document available for further scrutiny and comment before issuing a ROD. Furthermore, all of the primary displays and data presented during the public hearings on the EIS portrayed an accurate picture of the environmental impacts of the O'Hare Airport project. Information that was used during the public hearing process is also detailed on the enclosures.

The OMP is a multi-year reconfiguration of the existing airfield. Throughout the life of the project, the runway usage and air traffic patterns adjust both to accommodate construction and to increased airfield capacity when new runways are completed. The original EIS anticipated

these dynamics and accounted for them. As the city proposes changes relevant to the environmental concerns and as new information arises that may affect the quality of the environment in a manner or extent that may not have already been considered, the FAA typically evaluates the need for a supplemental EIS by preparing a written re-evaluation.

We plan to complete a written re-evaluation in 2015 to examine the runway construction schedule modifications provided by Chicago resulting from the 2011 settlement of a State court lawsuit between Chicago and the airlines. There will be an opportunity for the public to review and comment on this re-evaluation. We will ensure your office receives this updated material once complete.

Communities surrounding airports, especially airports as busy as O'Hare, are impacted by noise. Mitigation of airport noise is the primary responsibility of the city, as airport proprietor. The city, working with the FAA, the airlines, and the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission (ONCC), continues to mitigate noise impacts surrounding O'Hare. The FAA provides Federal funding and technical guidance. Working with the city of Chicago and the ONCC, we have provided approximately \$205 million in Airport Improvement Program grants and Passenger Facility Charge funding for school sound insulation and more than \$80 million for residential sound insulation to reduce the impacts of aircraft noise to communities adjacent to O'Hare. The FAA continues to participate with other Federal agencies, universities, and industry groups in research to reduce noise impacts.

As I mentioned in my December 24, 2013, letter, the results of the research we are conducting to evaluate annoyance reaction to aircraft noise in the current airport operating environment will be used to determine the appropriateness of continuing to use the DNL 65 decibels (dB) metric as the standard for residential land-use compatibility.

Since December 2013, the research has been progressing well. We recently published a Federal Register Request for Comments regarding the Neighborhood Environmental Survey. The comment period, which closed on August 11, provided the public an opportunity to comment on FAA's intention to request the Office of Management and Budget approval to undertake an information collection.

Work began on this survey through an Airport Cooperative Research Program (ACRP) project. That work is finished, and the final report is available on the Transportation Research Board's ACRP Web site at: http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/acrp/acrp_webdoc_017.pdf

The goal of the ACRP project was to develop the methodology and draft questionnaire for the national survey. The FAA drew upon the findings of the ACRP project in deciding how to conduct the national survey.

Given the necessary coordination and required Federal process for information collection, the timeline provided to you in December 2013 has shifted. We anticipate that the national survey and the analysis of survey results will be completed in the middle of 2016. The national survey is a major step in the FAA review. We are moving as quickly as possible within the constraints of the sequential nature of much of this work. The results of the study will then be used to determine whether changes to the FAA's use of the DNL 65 dB noise metric are warranted. The development and coordination of new proposed policy (including any potential

amendments of 14 C.F.R. Part 150 in accordance with 49 U.S.C. §47502) would take place after the completion of the national survey.

We work collaboratively with the city of Chicago and the ONCC to share ideas, help to solve problems, and address the needs of the O'Hare community. We will continue this collaboration and will give full consideration to any proposed operational changes that the city wishes to explore, consistent with our roles and responsibilities under Federal aviation noise abatement policy.

The modernization of O'Hare International Airport is needed to meet Chicago's short- and long-term aviation demands in a manner that provides the greatest degree of safety and efficiency for the airport and the public. Through its analysis of the OMP, the FAA took great care to look carefully at potential environmental impacts to ensure that all appropriate mitigation alternatives were considered and that reasonable steps were taken to mitigate significant impacts as a condition of project approval. While we acknowledge that noise impacts cannot be completely eliminated, the FAA has provided Federal funding to support robust residential and school sound insulation efforts to minimize those impacts.

We have sent an identical response to each of the cosigners of your letter.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me or Roderick D. Hall, Assistant Administrator for Government and Industry Affairs, at (202) 267-3277.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael P. Huerta", with a circled number "1" to the right of the signature.

Michael P. Huerta
Administrator

2 Enclosures