

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 19, 2014

Mr. Michael Huerta
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Huerta:

We write to express our disappointment with the Federal Aviation Administration's handling of public hearings in 2005 in advance of the approval of the O'Hare Modernization Program (OMP) and call attention to the significant changes in OMP's implementation that have taken place in the decade since the FAA's original environmental impact study (EIS). It is our understanding that the FAA may not have violated any rules in organizing these public hearings or implementing the OMP. However, the FAA's failure to focus on areas most impacted by the OMP in their public hearings and the inaccuracy and incompleteness of the information provided given the changes that have taken place since then is disappointing and calls into question the integrity of the environmental impact study process. As such, we write to request a full explanation of the FAA's outreach to affected areas in advance of the OMP's approval and strongly urge the FAA to undertake a new environmental impact study (EIS), accompanied by a new round of public hearings that will afford vigorous citizen input. Impacted citizens deserve a chance to participate and comment upon the changes that have so profoundly affected their lives.


Since October 2013, our offices have received countless complaints on the impact the new runway and attending flight pattern changes at O'Hare have had on everyday life. The O'Hare Modernization Program has disturbed many of our constituents' daily lives, negatively impacting their schedules, leisure activities, and even home values in areas overwhelmed with noise pollution. In the ten years since the original EIS, significant changes to the implementation of the OMP underscore the necessity for a new assessment. Runways have opened out of sequence; new rules governing converging runways have pushed even more air traffic on the east-west configuration; and our neighborhoods have been flooded with unexpected noise.

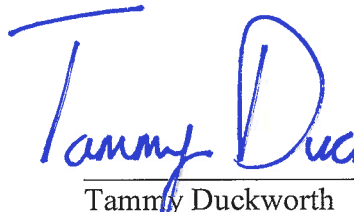
It's also clear that the FAA's execution of public hearings in advance of the OMP's approval—part of the agency's environmental impact study—ran contrary to their required purpose. The hearings should have provided an open and easily accessible forum for those residents most affected by the shift in flight paths to learn about and comment on the plan's impact. Instead, the FAA's public hearings back in 2005 were held in areas largely unaffected by increased noise. Moreover, constituents were never informed in any meaningful way how many additional flights—and how much more noise—they would be asked to endure once these changes took effect. Given these factors, residents deserve the assurance that the environmental assumptions—now a decade old—are still valid. A new environmental impact study is more than appropriate.

In addition to the new EIS, we urge your agency to move quickly to address key issues that affect the health and well-being of our constituents. First, we believe the FAA's ongoing 65DNL assessment needs to be expedited. Telling constituents, who hope to qualify someday for sound insulation, that the study is not near completion after five years offers them cold comfort when jet noise is blanketing their communities. Additionally, we believe the FAA—in conjunction with City of Chicago and the airlines—needs to devise a course of action that will bring relief to our residents. Whether such a plan involves changes to the airspace, keeping all runways open indefinitely, asking airlines to make some operational accommodations, or likely a combination of all three, we need to start work now. Our constituents should not have to wait until the airport expansion is completed in 2020 to decide if they can endure the increase in noise pollution. We want your guarantee to explore whatever practicable changes are necessary to protect our neighborhoods, while keeping O'Hare safe and efficient.

Our offices stand ready to assist you in this important task. Meanwhile, we invite you out to our districts to see the problem firsthand. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,


Mike Quigley
Member of Congress


Tammy Duckworth
Member of Congress


Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress