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Committee on Financial Services
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Committee on Ethics



Congress of the United States House of Representatives

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CITY CLERK'S OFFICE
SOMERVILLE, MA

2014 OCT 14 A 11:58

Board of Aldermen
City Hall
Somerville, MA 02143

Dear Members of the Board:

This letter is in response to your communication about airplane noise over Somerville.

As you know, I have lived at the top of Winter Hill for almost 35 years. Like many people's homes, mine is under the flights paths of Runway 15/33 at Logan Airport. Recently, at the Assembly Square Orange Line ribbon cutting, Alderman Rossetti sought me out to express her concerns about air traffic noise. A few days later I also received a communication from the Board of Alderman on the issue. Since that time, I have been talking with Massport and the FAA, and gathering statistics and other information in order to discuss the issue thoughtfully and thoroughly. Below is some background on the issue, statistics, commentary, and the course of action I am pursuing.

Background – Factors Not Likely Impacting Somerville

- Table #1 (attached) shows that the total year-to-date (January-August) flights at Logan Airport are almost exactly average compared to the prior eight years. Therefore, concerns about increased noise are not likely related to the overall number of flights overhead.
- Almost all planes are now either equipped with noise abatement equipment (so-called “hush kits”) or are new enough to be subject to stricter limits on noise generation. Furthermore, each year, the number of newer and quieter planes increases. Therefore, concerns about increased noise are not likely related to the equipment overhead.
- Within the last few years, the FAA has instituted an improved system to guide planes landing and departing Logan – called RNAV. This new system guides planes along a narrower horizontal corridor than before. The result has been that some people living under these narrower air corridors have suffered, but those who live further from the middle of those corridors have benefitted. Statistically, there are more people who have benefitted than have suffered. The negative impact is much greater living under an arrival corridor – arrivals must be lined up with the runway for a long distance, departures can be fanned out to spread the pain. Somerville is not directly under a flight path (close, but not direct) and only 10% of flights over Somerville are arrivals – the other 90% are departures. Therefore, any significant concerns about increased noise are not likely to be directly related to the new RNAV safety system.

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Background – Factors Seemingly Impacting Somerville

- The runway that impacts Somerville is called 15/33. Many of the arrivals that land on Runway 15 and many of the departures from Runway 33 fly over or near Somerville.
- The most important factors in deciding which runway to use are wind direction and weather conditions. When the wind blows out of the northwest, most planes take off into the northwest using Runway 33. When the wind blows out of the southeast, most planes land into the southeast using Runway 15.
- As stated above, arrivals cannot be fanned very much because the plane must be lined up with the runway for a long distance. Departures can be fanned once they reach a certain height and that has been done for a very long time for planes taking off over South Boston – they take a hard left to head out over the harbor.
- Thus far, the FAA has been unwilling to consider enacting a comprehensive plan to “fan” departures from other Logan runways for the express purpose of “spreading the pain fairly”.
- In New England, outdoor construction is limited to the warmer months – the same months many of us open our windows and enjoy our backyards.

Statistics

- As stated, the runways that impact Somerville are arrivals onto runway 15 and departures from runway 33.
- The total number of flights per year related to those runways:
 - 2007 = 31,155
 - 2008 = 26,266
 - 2009 = 23,609
 - 2010 = 26,811
 - 2011 = 13,470
 - 2012 = 12,822
 - 2013 = 20,020
 - Average per year for the period of 2007 – 2013 = 22,022
 - The average excluding the abnormally low years of 2011 and 2012 = 25,572
- For 2014, Massport only has figures through August. For that 7 month Year-to-Date period only, the total number of flights related to those runways:
 - 2007 = 22,232
 - 2008 = 17,117
 - 2009 = 15,471
 - 2010 = 16,014
 - 2011 = 10,052
 - 2012 = 8,582
 - 2013 = 12,471
 - 2014 = 16,786
 - Average Year-to-Date for the period of 2007 – 2014 = 14,841
 - The average excluding the abnormally low years of 2011 and 2012 = 16,682



- Taking a look only at the months most of us are outside and open our windows and when major construction projects occur, May through August, the total number of flights related to those runways:
 - 2007 = 6,826
 - 2008 = 4,755
 - 2009 = 5,285
 - 2010 = 7,036
 - 2011 = 1,155
 - 2012 = 678
 - 2013 = 3,801
 - 2014 = 7,306
 - Average summer for the period of 2007 – 2014 = 4,605
 - The average excluding the abnormally low years of 2011 and 2012 = 5,835

COMMENTARY

- During the period of 2007-2013, Logan averaged 294,933 arrivals and departures per year. Of that total, an average of 22,022 flew over Somerville – only 7%.
- The use of these runways was well below average for 2011 and 2012. Massport informs us that this lower use was due to construction that **closed Runway 15/33 for the summer construction season**. In fact, there were zero flights impacting Somerville for the months of July and August in both 2011 and 2012 – that was directly due to construction – the runway was closed.
- If you discount the two most heavily impacted years of construction, use of Runway 15/33 in 2014 so far this year is almost exactly average – 16,786 as compared to the average of 16,682.
- In addition, in 2014, Massport informs us that Runways 4L/22R and 4R/22L have been impacted by construction from June to August – thus requiring more use of Runway 15/33 than would have otherwise occurred.
- So **construction that is hurting Somerville this summer helped the city from 2011 and 2012.**
- Finally, I assume we have all noticed the summer in Boston this year has been much cooler than usual. This weather relates directly to wind direction - there have been more days with wind coming from the Northwest than usual (thus the cooler air from Canada). When the wind blows out of the northwest, planes depart from Runway 33 – the runway that takes the plane over Somerville. And remember, 90% of all planes over Somerville are departures.
- **SUMMARY** –
 - The cooler-than-usual summer and related wind patterns have required more planes than usual to use the runway that impacts Somerville.
 - Construction in recent prior years prevented use of the runways that impact Somerville most, so the return to more normal levels may seem more drastic.
 - This year, construction on other runways has forced more planes to use the runway that impacts Somerville during the summer months.

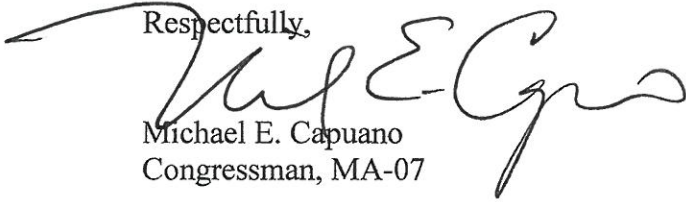


Action being Taken

- My office is monitoring ongoing statistics to determine if the end of the summer weather pattern and the end of construction on other runways will reduce the number of flights over Somerville back to customary levels.
- For years, my office has been pushing the FAA to implement intentional fanning along all flight paths in order to “spread the pain”. Now that the new RNAV system is working and tested, we have renewed our efforts and will continue to push.
- My office is working with Massport to broaden and improve the future notification about construction work that impacts various communities.
- An ability to be more precise at every point along a flight path is a critical part of the new RNAV system. This precision should enable the FAA to institute and enforce restrictions, such as altitude at a given point on the flight path. We will be working with the FAA to adopt and enforce such restrictions.
- The FAA, Massport, and the Community Advisory Committee (of which the City of Somerville is an active member and represented by well-known community activist Wig Zamore) are undertaking a runway use study with the goal of reducing the persistent use of runways, subject to weather and runway availability. My office will be monitoring this important effort as well.
- The FAA and Massport will soon be conducting tests to measure the impact, safety, congestion, and other aspects of various runway use configurations and flight patterns. My office will be monitoring these tests and their outcome in order to work with the FAA and Massport to minimize the impact of Logan on as many people as possible.

Thank you for bringing this issue to my attention. Virtually every neighborhood I represent suffers from airplane noise – but we also benefit from proximity to the airport. We cannot stop airplane noise but we can work to “spread the pain” and to do all we can to reduce the pain for everyone impacted.

Respectfully,


Michael E. Capuano
Congressman, MA-07

cc:

Amy Corbett, Regional Administrator, FAA
Tom Glynn, CEO, Massport



TABLE #1
All Jet Arrivals and Departures
All Runways

January thru August

Year	Total	cf AVE
2014	199,195	-29
2013	196,069	-3,155
2012	196,637	-2,587
2011	202,945	3,721
2010	193,244	-5,980
2009	185,027	-14,197
2008	204,975	5,751
2007	212,975	13,751
2006	201,923	2,699
2006-13 Ave	199,224	

