

## LONG ISLAND

### Feds' plan to handle airport noise goes back to square one

*"It's not a win-win. You're shifting the noise around," said Curtis Holsclaw of the FAA.*



*A jet lifts off from a runway at LaGuardia Airport on Feb. 27, 2014. Photo Credit: Craig Ruttle*

By **William Murphy**

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Buffeted by continuing noise complaints from people across the country who live near airports, federal officials said they might revert to using flight paths that spread arriving and departing flights across a broader area of the sky.

The change could provide much-needed relief locally for frustrated residents of Long Island, Brooklyn and Queens, who bear the brunt of the noise from operations at Kennedy International and LaGuardia airports. However, reaching a decision on the flight paths could take many more years, officials said, and would put planes back over areas that might have experienced less noise in recent years.

Either way, there won't be less noise — only a more equitable distribution of it, according to the Federal Aviation Administration, which is responsible for the nation's airspace.

“A decision has to be made on who gets the noise and when do they get it,” Curtis Holsclaw, acting head of the FAA Office of Environment and Energy, said at a recent community meeting in Queens.

“It's not a win-win. You're shifting the noise around,” he told about 75 people during the meeting in Queens Borough Hall, about 3 miles from LaGuardia and Kennedy.

In an effort to improve the efficiency of the aviation industry, federal officials began changing procedures about seven years ago that allowed planes to chart routes by GPS instead of ground-based radar towers.

That allowed more precise flight paths, with savings in time and fuel, but also funneled airplanes into narrow corridors as they landed or took off.

The result: Fewer people who live around major airports were affected by noise from overhead planes.

However, the neighborhoods under the new corridors were bombarded with more and more flights and a seemingly nonstop line of landings and takeoffs over Long Island, Brooklyn and Queens.

Holsclaw said the agency now is studying how it might spread out the flights over neighborhoods around airports.

The narrow corridors have come into use as the FAA implements NextGen, the next generation of computers and software for the nation's air traffic, and a related tool, Performance Based Navigation.

"The impact of precision aircraft navigation over the last few years has been accompanied by increased airport community concerns regarding noise," the FAA said.

One solution, the FAA presentation at the Queens meeting said, was to "Reintroduce systematic dispersion."

The agency later said in a statement that, "The FAA is evaluating operational options such as route changes, adjustments to thrust and speed settings for landings and takeoffs, modifications to climb and descent profiles, and flight track dispersion. The agency wants to determine if these types of operational changes could help reduce noise."

NextGen was officially launched in 2007 and scheduled for completion in 2025. However, a report from the FAA inspector general last year said it was over-budget and behind schedule.

Holsclaw gave no timetable for reaching a decision on spreading out flights over a wider area as in the past. However, he said making the decision could take many years because of the scientific and medical studies planned or in the works on the effects of aircraft noise on people.

"You're talking about 50 years!" an unidentified man in the audience shouted, voicing his frustration that officials could take years, possibly decades, to decide on dispersion of flights.

The man's comment reflected a widespread concern that the promises of lesser noise carry the caveat that further study is required.

Lawrence Hoppenhauer, 67, of Malverne, attended the Queens meeting and another on Nov. 27 at Hempstead Town Hall, where local officials discussed airport noise.

He said he was heartened that the FAA was studying a variety of areas that might lead to less noise, but, "the downside of these studies is they are a long way off, multiple years out."

Hoppenhauer spoke at a meeting of the Town-Village Aircraft Safety & Noise Abatement Committee, formally created within the Town of Hempstead on July 1, 1966, to “mitigate the scourge of aircraft noise.”

The Queens meeting was like many in recent years involving the FAA, which controls airspace, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates Kennedy and LaGuardia.

At the various meeting about airport noise, the FAA or the Port Authority usually make a presentation heavy on technical language, which has prompted audience members to demand plainer language and better answers.

Len Schaier, president of the Port Washington-based group [quietskies.net](http://quietskies.net), asked at the Queens meeting why the FAA could not use the more restrictive noise levels set by European governments.

Holsclaw said the FAA has an obligation to conduct its own studies before making recommendations.

“I was surprised at the answer,” Schaier said after the meeting. “It didn’t seem to take advantage of what’s going on in the rest of the world.”

The audience had been attentive during Holsclaw’s long presentation on the FAA’s plans for airport noise. During the question-and-answer session, however, there were grumblings as some of his answers failed to satisfy the audience.

Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-Glen Cove) opened the meeting by telling the audience that he and other members of the Congressional Quiet Skies Caucus had seen the same presentation by the FAA in July and he was impressed.

“The FAA seemed to show genuine concern,” he said.

However, as audience dissatisfaction increased about an hour into the Queens meeting, Suozzi stood, saying he felt as if FAA engineers were speaking one language and the audience members another.

“People want to feel we can see some results here . . . see some results in their life,” said Suozzi, who represents a district that runs from Huntington across northern Nassau and into northern Queens.

Suozzi, in a recent statement, said the FAA “has outlined steps they’ve promised to take to try and alleviate noise levels, including looking into better flight dispersal, and I will keep tabs to make sure they’re living up to their commitments.”

The audience was split between members of the public and appointed members of the New York Community Aviation Roundtable, an advisory group of community residents that provides input on airport noise.

Roundtable members, sitting in the front of the room, were allowed to ask questions first, and as the meeting dragged into a second hour, a member of the public in the rear shouted: “Hey! We’re here too.”

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