



WHITE PAPER -- November 2011

### **“New” Noise in South Minneapolis Neighborhoods**

MSP issues are circling back after the MSP FAA Tower modified departure procedures in early 2011, leading to more runway clearances based on flight destinations. Just as SMAAC predicted, the hub expansion is stressing or exceeding MSP safety and noise abatement resources. Neighborhoods not considered "DNL noisy" from overflights are being hit as much or more as the thousands of homes "mitigated" by past sound insulation programs. The Metropolitan Airport s Commission (MAC) staff denied both the overflights and the stress, and elected officials at Federal, State, and local levels, biased by industry propoganda and past misunderstandings, found it difficult to disagree at first.

Following the near-mid-air collision in September 2010, the FAA Tower eventually made two changes: first, no departures using R30R were allowed to turn left<sup>1</sup> near MSP; and second, more taxiway and ramp congestion was tolerated in order to clear flights by destination. Now most north and east destination flights use the north parallel runway (R30R), and departing overflights increased in the areas north of R30R. MAC staff analyses of flight paths did not take into account the actual noise made by the power settings needed for turning and climbing or that warmer weather reduced climb rates. Instead, MAC staff claim that *sound insulation programs already legally mitigate most impacted homes* and that the complaints result *solely from more seasonal outdoor activities* rather than significant operational changes.

During the Quarterly Public Noise Input meeting with MAC staff , October 16, 2011, over 200<sup>2</sup> hundred citizens showed up – about 100 times as many as usual – protesting more frequent overflights immediately north of the airport . The flights result from early lift-offs and turns using the *north parallel runway* (R30R) in “westerly flow.” The Commissioners aren't much interested in *noise abatement*<sup>3</sup> and it was unusual that Chair Boivin and a couple of Commissioners were there.

The MSP Noise Oversight Committee (NOC) met November 16, 2011 and allowed several citizens, including SMAAC President Jim Spensley, to respond to the overflights and the two related NOC agenda items. An “analysis” of the overflights presented by MAC Noise and Environment Manager, Chad Leqve, at the October 16 meeting was reprised. Mr. Leqve’s analysis of overflights was based on a comparing two years<sup>4</sup>.

Spensley again criticized the analysis as not applicable to the questions asked. “Departures<sup>5</sup> on the north parallel were identified as an increasing<sup>6</sup> problem,” he noted. Arrivals on R30R are near one-fifth of all MSP arrivals; departures, one-half. FAA Tower Manager Carl Rydeen disagreed with Leqve’s assumption that FAA had increased overflights in the impacted neighborhoods in South Minneapolis for safety reasons. He said **“It can't be (the no-crossing enforcement) alone that is doing what people are experiencing.”** It reflects poorly on the MAC that *the experiences of these citizens who faithfully and accurately reported more, lower, and louder overflights* are discounted by the noise staff.

The Commission asked for changes in departure profiles originally (2003), without modifying the contour map, claiming that noise would be less in the 64-60 DNL areas along the runway headings. At the time, a few overflights per day may have turned over unmitigated areas north of R30R, but not many, because few aircraft in use at the time could safely lift off in less than 8,000 feet or climb considerably faster without also traveling further down the runway heading; daily operations at MSP were low just after 9/11.

<sup>1</sup> Technically, it was decided to *not allow exceptions to an operations standard* that flight paths are not to cross in MSP airspace.

<sup>2</sup> A news reporter counted over 200 attending, not counting staff and commissioners, consistent with counts from photographs of the two assembly rooms. An attendance of 137 is still about 15 times the total number of citizens attending the prior three quarterly meetings taken together! As Mr. Leqve said: "Quite a few more than usual." One can imagine that the *exact number* 137 was intended as a criticism of the news report.

<sup>3</sup> Opinion. An excuse or a partial remedy for noise, *mitigation*, is the prime policy at MSP. Noise *abatement* at MSP is limited by high rates and infrequent compliance with “voluntary” noise or noise-exposure procedures. SMAAC believes lower rates are more, not less efficient, considering the airfield limitations and the passengers capacity needed.

<sup>4</sup> Overflights in a defined area were counted from tracking data for the year before September 16, 2010 and compared to the tracks counted for a year afterward.

<sup>5</sup> Reducing annual overflights to operations per day understates the number of departures on days in westerly flow. There are essentially no arrivals over the area in easterly or westerly flow, or from departures in easterly flow.

<sup>6</sup> The citizens reported more flights every month, and the flights were more noticed and more obtrusive as spring progressed to summer.

Following the Northwest Airlines bankruptcy (2005), some older jet and turboprop airliners were replaced by more than one smaller "regional jet" aircraft, and these previously not available regional jets had the ability to take-off a mile further back along R30R and turn off the airport property sooner. SMAAC noted a trend of turns further east<sup>7</sup> after 2005 which continued further east each year thereafter. The turns became routine during peak hours for those flights heading to airports north to east of MSP, and an estimated 27- 28 per day passed over north of R30R, and over DNL contours, generally flying lower.

As operating rates (operations per runway-hour) increased -- as a result of still-continuing flight rescheduling and more use of regional jets after the Delta/Northwest merger (2008) -- the turns helped *clear R30R for an arrival immediately behind each peak-hour departure. With more aircraft able to turn earlier, overflights reached 50 to 55 daily in the areas north of R30R, with near minimum separations maintained by synchronization of arrivals and departures on approach. This is quite plainly not as safe as lower rates, and both more turning departures and extended hub hours should have been considered hazardous.*

**SMAAC's position: Runway use rates at MSP should be limited to 40 operations per hour or less per runway to increase air and ground safety margins, to decrease noise exposure, and to reduce MSP operating costs.**

This rate would suffice for 1,600 mostly-daylight operations per day, exceeding the 1,400 to 1,600 (520,000 to 620,000 annually) found by the Legislature and established as the economic growth need for the year 2020. If the local use is 50% of passenger capacity, the average flight capacity needed would be 100 to 110 seats per flight, about the same as in 1998 when the MSP expansion was approved by the Federal government. Operations with this hourly rate limit would demonstrably more cost efficient. MAC, FAA and the other federal agencies, and the airlines budget for peak-hour capacity but the revenue from airline operations and passengers is proportional to flights and boardings per year.

As airlines and controllers more often arrange for departure runways by destination, overflights of South Minneapolis during R30R departure have increased to perhaps 190 per day in westerly flow, or slightly less than half of average daily departures overall. This is because westerly flow is faster and because of prevailing winds. At the same time, the passenger capacity per flight has trended down. The State government, the MAC, and the FAA all approved the Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Record of Decision (FEIS/ROD) fixing the annual passenger capacity in the year 2020.

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**Conclusions:** The Noise staff, the Noise Oversight Committee, the Commission, and the MSP FAA Tower each obstruct implementation of reduced runway use rates and fail to balance safety, capacity, and the impacts of operations on the environment and public health.

The MAC Noise Staff answers complaints individually and reports little more than a summary up the line. The Staff advises citizens that noise abatement options are legally, functionally, and financially very limited.

The Noise Oversight Committee is composed of half community representatives, selected by municipalities, and half airport users, selected by the MAC. NOC's delay-or-deadlock bylaws and procedures will not allow any fast or significant actions. Controversial topics are only discussed if specifically referred by the Commission and a report date specified.

The MAC and the FAA Tower operate independently, and the MAC limits itself to informing the public of operational changes. The FAA allowed noise-reducing operational rules under the CFR14 Part 150 Noise Compatibility Plan, but seldom discusses airport operations or safety publicly, and apparently did not notify the MAC of the no-crossing enforcement when instituted.

A large hub concentrates flight schedules overmuch when using smaller aircraft or transporting more connecting passengers. In SMAAC's view, current passenger-use results from limited seat supply and airport congestion, both add travel expense (high fares and fees) for local travelers, and airport congestion increases airport costs, reduces safety, and limits opportunities for noise abatement. The alternative view is that high peak rates are needed in spite of less current demand, Federal budget cuts, and increased noise mitigation costs.

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<sup>7</sup> As observed from Chicago Avenue and E. 51st Street.