

Our say: Noise seems far down on FAA's priority list

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[BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport](#) is the country's 23rd busiest in terms of passenger traffic and is a dynamo for local and state economies.¹ We're sure county residents are fine with this. But some of them are now wishing they weren't being reminded of it quite as noisily and relentlessly.

The Anne Arundel County Council is likely to join the procession of elected officials who have asked the [Federal Aviation Administration](#) to reconsider its Next Generation Air Transportation System, or NextGen. The new air traffic approach-control setup has greatly boosted airplane noise in some neighborhoods in Anne Arundel and Howard counties.



An airliner goes over the Quarterfield Crossing Shopping Center in Severn as it makes its approach to BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport. (Matthew Cole / Capital Gazette)

The council's Resolution 31-17, which has a majority of members as co-sponsors and will be up for consideration in September, calls on the FAA to "revisit the NextGen flight pattern and, whenever possible, revert to the former flight paths as soon as practicable."

The council should pass the resolution, but no one should get their hopes up. There have already been a formidable number of such requests, from this state and other states across the country. By this point the stack in the FAA's in-box must be high enough to endanger low-flying aircraft.

Last year the Maryland Aviation Administration, which runs BWI, asked the federal agency to revert to the old air traffic patterns until it can modify NextGen to reduce noise.² In April, nine members of the state congressional delegation called the new flight patterns "unacceptable and unsustainable." In early May, Gov. Larry Hogan urged the FAA to go beyond "minor modifications" of NextGen.

But before we berate the FAA for stubbornness and arrogance, consider its point of view. What NextGen means to the agency is telegraphed by the name. The FAA has sunk \$35 billion and years of effort into the program, which is supposed to reduce flight delays and fulfill a congressional mandate³ to cut carbon emissions and fuel consumption — all by taking the overdue step of using GPS technology⁴ in air-traffic control.

¹ **aiR footnote:** this 'economic dynamo' concept is pushed by FAA and industry, but is largely a myth. The reality, the economic benefits of hubbing at a major U.S. airport accrue primarily to the airlines and their shareholders. When a hub expands operations, it does so at a cost to dozens of other airports where schedules are reduced or eliminated diminishing those local economies. The massive lands used for airports typically go off the tax rolls, and huge acreages sit idle, instead of being used for agriculture, industry, or other commerce.

² **aiR footnote:** FAA has effectively blown off this request. TOTALLY. Even ignoring the formal pleas from a Congressional delegation and a Governor. This is a classic example of how out-of-control and unaccountable FAA is today.

³ **aiR footnote:** let's be very clear about this – that so-called Congressional mandate is not Congress's idea, but the lobby (serving the airlines) that feeds complicated legal text to Congress for passage, each cycle. And, FAA is fully in cahoots with that main lobbyist (Airlines for America) and industry to sucker Congress into passing these ideas, every cycle.

⁴ **aiR footnote:** this point is somewhat erroneous, in that GPS use in ATC is **NOT** overdue; it has been going on for decades now. Not surprising that this misstatement is published in this OpEd though, since FAA, industry, and

Then there's the Trump administration's talk of assigning air-traffic control to a private nonprofit. That hardly makes FAA officials likelier to consider an all-out retreat. Adjusting NextGen, perhaps, if necessary — but canceling it, no. They've bet the farm on it.

The new system relies on rigid control of airplane routes. So for some residents — who used to experience noise sporadically, if at all — there's now a virtual highway in the sky not far over their heads. And the traffic on it never stops.⁵

We're no more air traffic control experts than the angry and half-deafened residents, but we suspect NextGen could at least be modified to reduce the noise problems. We also think the FAA will have to be forced into substantial changes.⁶ We have a dismal suspicion the controversy could end up in court, and could drag on there for years.

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political hacks like Shuster keep making this misstatement. We all know that, in politics, a lie repeated enough becomes a fact; people are gullible, inclined to trust authorities (who increasingly deserve no trust); we are, in our culture, conditioned to think we are 'bad' if we see or speak up about a failure by agencies or elected bodies.

⁵ **aiR footnote:** this is the best point in the article, and very factual. One aspect of NextGen that FAA and industry are careful to not talk about is that it replaces manual flying by pilots and manual controlling by ATC with rigidly proceduralized routes/speeds/altitudes, all to be accomplished via automation. In the not-so-long run, in fact, NextGen will substantially reduce both labor roles to just 'monitoring' the automation; in time, the labor costs of both ATC and flight crews will be reduced as many career-jobs are eliminated.

⁶ **aiR footnote:** FAA absolutely could use NextGen constructively, but it looks like we need Congress to force FAA to start doing its total job: not just enabling air commerce, but doing so with an appropriate balance, that protects health, safety and quality of life for impacted residents below.