

December 5, 2017



Ms. Barbara Hall
Paperwork Reduction Act Compliance Lead
Performance, Policy, and Records Management Branch, ASP-110
Federal Aviation Administration
10101 Hillwood Parkway
Fort Worth, TX 76177

Re: FAA Aircraft Noise Complaint and Inquiry System (FAA Noise Portal)

Dear Ms. Hall:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) proposed aircraft noise complaint and inquiry system. We are pleased to see the FAA propose a more active response to noise complaints and inquiries, and we want to ensure that this system is as responsive, transparent and productive as possible.

The Port of Seattle is a special purpose government representing the people of King County, Washington. Among our responsibilities is oversight and management of Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (Sea-Tac), which has grown quickly to the ninth busiest passenger airport in the country. **As we grow, we are committed to ensuring that Sea-Tac benefits our region and neighbors, which includes being responsive to community concerns about aircraft impact; that is why the Port's Noise Program is one of the most comprehensive in the country, and why we have invested over \$400 million in noise mitigation programs over the past thirty years.** In particular, the airport has both a noise hotline and an online comment form, and we also provide an online flight tracking tool for the public to use, called PublicVue, which also allows users to submit comments utilizing a username and password.

The Port is acutely aware, however, that many of the airplane noise issues we respond to are not directly in our control – from the location of flight paths to individual homes' eligibility for noise insulation programs – and that is why we wholeheartedly welcome the FAA taking a more direct and systematic approach to collecting and responding to these community concerns. Your agency is the appropriate respondent to many of these inquiries, and the creation of a noise portal will go far to address long-standing frustration from local residents about their inability to communicate directly with FAA staff on these issues.

Given our experience operating an aircraft noise complaint and inquiry system, we offer the following three additional comments for your consideration as you finalize and implement your new portal:

- 1) Responsiveness:** One of the most important performance metrics for the success of your noise portal will be responsiveness – both ensuring that every comment received gets answered, and also setting a reasonable maximum turn-around time for that outreach. The Port's commitment has long been that one of our employees will personally respond to public comments that arrive through our noise portals. Whether individuals are reaching out with basic questions or to express deep frustration, everyone needs and deserves a timely response. For the FAA, this will often require more than just a form letter or the sharing of canned information, but instead a nuanced and personal response from a real person. Of course, to achieve such responsiveness requires the appropriate level of staffing and dedicated hours, and so ensuring that a realistic level of resources is dedicated to this new program will be essential. It would be a shame to create new expectations from the

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community about the FAA listening to noise concerns only to generate new levels of frustration by failing to deliver in a timely and substantive manner.

- 2) **Solution-Oriented Answers:** As with almost any customer service effort, we know that it is not enough to tell people that “we’re sorry but there’s nothing we can do.” As an airport located near some of the most famous customer-focused brands in the world (from Nordstrom to Amazon.com), we have learned that people want real answers to their questions and want to feel like their concerns are being addressed. In our program, Port staff spend significant time helping residents understand the causes of airplane noise near their homes, as well as what programs may be available to address their concerns. While the actual avenues for redress are limited, it is essential that the FAA put significant thought up-front into the kind of productive responses it will offer to people related to the various kinds of calls you might receive.

- 3) **Transparency:** While local residents may direct their noise inquiries to through the FAA portal, they will likely also maintain their expectations of responsiveness from their local airports. Therefore, the best practice should be for the FAA to share information with the relevant airport in a convenient and systematic way. This clear communication about noise complaints could take place via an online system that would be visible to both local residents and airports – bringing transparency to the number, nature and timing of such inquiries; in the best case scenario, it might also include what the FAA’s response entailed, and any potential follow up or next steps. Alternatively, the FAA should design a regular reporting mechanism to share this information directly with relevant airports, including any necessary outreach by the airport to the individual.

Thank you again for the chance to comment, and please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like additional information. We look forward to continuing to work with on this issue and others.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Soike".

Dave Soike

Interim Executive Director

CC:

US Senator Patty Murray

US Senator Maria Cantwell

US Representative Rick Larsen

US Representative Adam Smith

US Representative Pramila Jayapal

FAA Regional Administrator Dave Suomi