

One Seattle neighborhood is fighting airplane noise

Eilis O'Neill, Marketplace | FEB 16, 2018



María Batayola. - Eilis O'Neill/ for Marketplace

María Batayola says the planes flying over Seattle's Beacon Hill neighborhood are so loud they wake her up in the middle of the night.

"I remember running to my son and saying, 'Is there a war?'" she recalls. "'Cause it feels like it's so low. Not only is it a stressor, it impacts your sleep."

Airplanes make a lot of noise. And some researchers say that can hurt

the health and productivity of the people who live near and under flight paths. That's why some people affected by airport noise are calling on the federal government to do more to solve the problem.

Jon Levy is a public health researcher at Boston University. He says that when planes disturb sleep, "that can increase stress levels, and we know that increased stress is a risk factor for having hypertension or high blood pressure."

And, Levy adds, airplane noise doesn't just harm health. It can also affect people at work and kids at school, making it "harder for them to learn and retain information."

"The only good news is the new 737s are quieter," says U.S. Democratic Congressman Adam Smith, of Washington state. His district includes Beacon Hill, and he's a founding member of a [House caucus](#) that focuses on aircraft noise. "But there's a lot more of them, and they're coming in at a lower altitude sooner, so a broader array of communities are impacted by it."¹

The Federal Aviation Administration does have rules already in place about airplane noise disturbing communities. It requires airports to calculate how much noise pollution flights might be causing.² Those calculations are used to decide which neighborhoods qualify for funding to soundproof houses, apartment buildings, and schools. But some question the accuracy of the calculations.

¹ aiR footnote: Smith is accurate in his assessment: FAA is deploying newer technologies and reducing aircraft separation standards, to increase 'runway throughput', thus jamming more flights into key hub airports each hour. Part of these changes is to allow flights to turn lower and closer to the runways, both while departing and arriving. 'NextGen' is a brand name, created by FAA and industry, being used to sell Congress on accelerating funding, while also greenwashing the intensified impacts. That funding enables FAA to expand their budget, while also sending billions to industry for services and procurements.

² aiR footnote: FAA's noise metric, DNL, is simply garbage, designed to enable industry over-expansion. Created in the early 1970s, it averages noise over an entire year, thus throwing out the significant impacts of repetitive flights. At places like Beacon Hill, residents must endure an audio 'Chinese water torture', one plane after another ... and, with NextGen, the repetitions are lower (thus louder) and even more flights per hour. On top of that, the NextGen-related deployments are driven by airline greed, wherein flights are concentrated at selected hub airports; these hubs then have an inordinate number of through-passengers, and far more flights than are actually needed to serve the local community. Airlines profit, while the health and quality of life for entire neighborhoods are destroyed

Under the FAA’s current rules, Seattle’s Beacon Hill isn’t eligible for that kind of money.

“The FAA needs to do more to help out communities impacted by airport noise,” Smith says. “They need to provide more money and more funds to help with mitigation than they currently do. So we’re working on legislation that will expand what the FAA can fund.”³

The FAA comes up for [reauthorization in March](#), and Smith is trying to put his proposal into that bill.⁴

Copied 2/16/2018 from: <https://www.marketplace.org/2018/02/16/business/one-seattle-neighborhood-fighting-airplane-noise>
(Highlights, footnotes and minor edits may have been added, but only for context, analysis & clarification)

³ aiR footnote: Arguably, this quote by Rep. Smith misses the mark. He is failing to see the need to simply compel FAA to impose reasonable limits on airline hub growth (at KSEA, as well as elsewhere). He is advocating for further empowerment of a federal agency that has proven to be totally indifferent to the impacts they are imposing, to benefit the airlines they serve. More appropriately, Smith and others should be changing the rules FAA applies: reinstate local control, remove incentives for airline hub over-scheduling, have EPA manage noise and air pollution impacts, etc.

⁴ aiR footnote: FAA is a federal agency out of control, fully captured by industry players such as airlines and airport authorities. Industry money owns nearly everyone in today’s Congress; as such, the odds of meaningful corrective legislation being adopted are extremely low. That said, the impacts are nonetheless so severe that we must see real change – real FAA reform – happen ASAP. We need elected officials to change the aviation rules/laws, so that local control is restored, re-empowering residents at places like Beacon Hill. Adam Smith can help make these changes, but to do so, he will also have to start demanding local control to emplace restrictions, such as limits on flights per hour, night-time curfews, and discarding the broken DNL metric.