

Aircraft Noise Over Seattle

The Time To Act Is Now!

The Seattle Council on Airport Affairs

(SCAA) is calling for a moratorium on Sea-Tac expansion until the Port of Seattle develops a reasonable plan to bring current noise problems under control. SCAA has developed several realistic solutions to reduce air noise exposure for Seattle residents.

The pain of ever-increasing noise from Sea-Tac Airport and Boeing Field is affecting neighborhoods all over Seattle. Right now, the only plan elected Port Commissioners have is to just keep adding more and more flights without offering any effective noise reduction for residential communities. SCAA believes the noise problem has grown to unacceptable levels and, unless something is done, it will only get worse. The time to act is now.



- **Noise is harmful to children.** People who live and work under aircraft noise are being hurt by it, especially children. Jet plane noise has been proven to cause permanent high blood pressure in kids. Classroom noise, especially from jet planes, has been proven over and over to cause severe learning problems. Cornell University, in particular, has been studying this problem for years. The results are quite clear. Noise is bad for kids – at home, in the yard, at the park and at school.
- **Noise is bad for everyone.** It interferes with sleep, it aggravates high-blood pressure, it causes irritability and loss of productivity, and it is implicated in mental-health problems. Jet noise makes it hard to carry on normal conversations in some parts of Seattle.
- **Seattle residents care about noise.** They want peace and quiet in their homes, gardens, parks, schools, businesses, hospitals and religious buildings. Seattle residents have consistently rejected claims by the Port Commission that noise only adversely affects those neighborhoods within a mile or two of the airport. Substantial noise problems exist as far away as North Seattle. Boeing Field only compounds the problem.
- **A tolerable problem has grown intolerable.** The number of flights has risen more than 200% in the last 15 years. In the early 90's, a new flight plan moved jet noise from Seattle's industrial areas to mostly residential neighborhoods. Jet noise has become such a problem it's forcing people to move out of their own homes.

It's time the Port of Seattle demonstrated that noise from Sea-Tac operations will be significantly reduced, before proceeding with the expansion at Sea-Tac and building a third runway. The recent Sea-Tac Part 150 Noise Study failed to provide any promise of meaningful relief to Seattle residents. In fact, the current evidence clearly supports air noise getting worse, not better. Unfortunately, the Port Commissioners appear to have no plan to deal with the existing noise, let alone the future noise from the proposed third runway and other growth.

More On Sea-Tac's Expansion Plans →

What Else Is Wrong with Sea-Tac's Expansion?

In addition to increased noise, there are other serious problems with Sea-Tac's expansion plans. Local and regional elected officials need to know about these problems.

- **Costs out of control.** The third runway must be built on the side of a hill in an environmentally sensitive area. The last estimate (nearly two years ago) put the price at \$773 million – more than triple the original figure. The financing costs could add another \$1.2 billion or more. The Port has disclosed plans to spend more than \$6 billion on the runway, rebuilding terminals and other airport facilities. For comparison, consider the *entire* new Denver airport cost \$4.9 billion with *five* new runways. A significant portion of the Port's massive spending will likely come from higher Passenger Facility Charges and increased airline charges that Seattle residents will end up paying every time they fly.
- **A flawed approach.** What does the region gain for this huge outlay? The new runway will be too short for many planes to use on take-off. Given that, the Port plans to use the third runway only for arrivals. A less-than-ideal 2500 feet distance from the existing main runways results in traffic restrictions limiting the benefits. Planes landing on the third runway will have to cross the other two runways to reach the terminals. This may hamper the capacity of the existing runways and likely create additional passenger delays. In reality, Sea-Tac simply doesn't have the space to properly accommodate further growth.
- **Capacity issues.** Sea-Tac already averages about 1200 flight operations per day. While the Port says the proposed runway will not result in an increase in the number of flights (ref. EIS), a 2001 FAA report states the third runway and other factors will increase the operational capacity (number of flights) by 52%. Under the Port's plan, it's very likely noisy flights over Seattle will continue to increase well beyond the current levels.
- **Environmental concerns.** The new runway presents serious environmental impacts for salmon-bearing streams and wetlands that have yet to be satisfactorily addressed. The third runway will also expose new neighborhoods to new flight paths and added noise.
- **Increased safety risks.** The third runway creates more risks of collisions on the ground as planes must cross active runways in order to reach the terminal. A vertical cliff, 150 feet high, presents wind shear risks while leaving only a very small safety zone beyond the edge of the new runway. 20 million tons of fill would be held back by an 18 story retaining wall using unproven technology in an active seismic region. The risks and increased costs are significant enough to prompt several airlines to speak out against the third runway.
- **Promises not kept.** The Port has yet to accomplish many of the noise mitigation goals they promised at the outset of this project. Many of the guidelines established by the Puget Sound Regional Council, as conditions for the third runway, have not been met.
- **Times have changed.** Many things have changed since the third runway was originally proposed. The costs have greatly multiplied, new environmental and safety concerns have been uncovered, the region has experienced greater than expected growth and residents have grown increasingly frustrated with damaging aircraft noise.

It's time to take a second look at the Sea-Tac expansion plan and re-evaluate whether it still makes sense, before a lot of money is wasted. The Seattle Weekly wrote, "It looks like a near billion dollar boondoggle in the making" (www.seattleweekly.com/features/0039/news-downey.shtml). Many experts, politicians and even Port officials have acknowledged the need for a new all-weather airport to fully meet the region's growing needs. With major runway construction scheduled to begin soon, the time to act is now. Contact your local politicians and let them know your thoughts. Consider joining SCAA's efforts to reduce air noise over Seattle. There are more resources at www.airportnoise.org.