

# REDUCING AIRPORT NOISE

BY DORN CRAWFORD

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# Forum

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The writer is a member of the Regional Airport Authority Board, for which he is overseeing the airport noise study. He was the first chair of the Airport Noise Study Group and currently heads its Navigation Committee. He is a member of the executive board of the Airport Neighbors' Alliance.

**T**HE Louisville airport noise study is approaching one of several critical decision points (choosing a recommended runway use), so it's getting added attention. Because it remains a completely open process, it's drawing new participants, even more than two years after its launch. Consequently, it's very important to clear up some key points that might otherwise distort this crucial community enterprise. Here are a dozen of the most common misperceptions:

**The study will result in 'new noise' over neighborhoods. The 'old noise' should stay where it is.**

This is the first study of noise exposure since the airport began operating its new parallel runways in 1996 and 1998. All the noise under this configuration is 'new'. The object of the study is to try and find the least intrusive way to manage it, for the benefit of as many residents as possible.

**The study is proposing "dumping" noise where it doesn't belong.**

The highest noise levels — no surprise — are within a few miles of the airport. A main objective of the study is to direct that highest noise to non-residential areas as much as possible. A corridor extending for about four miles northwest of the airport that historically has been predominantly used for industry, and therefore has few residents, provides Louisville's one opportunity to do that. Preferred use of that corridor could mean *four times* fewer households in the "incompatible" noise exposure category than other alternatives — a really remarkable achievement.

**More planes will be right overhead.**

The farther from the airport planes are, the higher they are. Using the northwest offset corridor, beyond four miles, *approaching* aircraft should be more than 1,100 feet up. By the river, 2,000 feet up. *Departing* aircraft climb at roughly twice this pace, so they may be at 4,000 feet by the time they

reach the river. These aircraft can be heard, to be sure — but the contribution they make to the overall noise environment at these ranges is about the same as existing urban ambient noise, or less. By comparison, planes approach the other runway over dense neighborhoods down to about 350 feet, giving about twice the perceived level of noise.

**Planes will be flying all over West Louisville.**

That's what's happening now. The study package has measures to require planes to stay much closer to assigned paths, and follow those paths much longer before turning toward their destinations. Approaches would be managed the same way. This means most of West Louisville, along with the rest of town, would actually get fewer overflights than it does now.

**This is an East-West thing.**

North of the airport, this is a Central Louisville and Southern Indiana, thing. The "east" and "west" runways are less than a mile apart. All the flight paths we're talking about hit the river between the Sherman-Minton and Clark bridges. No cornfields.

**The noise exposure projected for this proposal will turn out to be just as wrong as the last one.**

We certainly learned from that experience. One of this study's first concrete results was to establish an airport noise office, with tracking and monitoring equipment, and the ear of airport management. The study group will still be watching, too. If it's not going right, we'll know about it this time, before the next noise study, and be able to take corrective action.

**Once this step is decided, the study's over.**

There's still a lot to do, in areas like (1) addressing concerns that runway use doesn't affect; (2) developing mitigation plans for places that are still too noisy; (3) assessing costs; and (4) setting responsibilities and steps for implementation. Nothing's final until it's all done. But it will only get done by moving forward, one step at a time.

**My concerns won't be heard.**

The study group, whose membership is still wide open, has been the decisive element in every major step so far, and expects to continue through the rest of the study. Concerns continue to be treated at every phase. In the end, consensus de-

pends on the members' sense that every practicable problem-solving step has been taken in compiling the whole package. That's the commitment.

**This program would just add to a long list of existing neighborhood problems we can't get help on.**

People affected by airport noise become part of a strong and well-organized constituency, committed to seeking relief from airport-related problems of urban community life. Overseeing, collecting information, communicating and advocating are ways of making sure the call for help is clear — and compelling.

**The study group is just a bunch of anti-noise activists.**

This is a unique effort, involving all the stakeholders in key planning, decision-making and implementing. The group brings together airport neighbors, air carriers, air traffic controllers, airport management, the business community, local governments and civic organizations. It's open to all who want a voice and are willing to contribute.

**Once the study is over, the report will go on the shelf, and nothing else will happen.**

A core study task this time around is developing an effective implementation plan. The airport noise office is already in place as a lead implementing element. The study group itself will evolve into an oversight body to keep watch, react to problems, and prepare for the next study update. This is designed to be a 'living' program.

**The Greater Louisville community can't take decisive action on its own.**

This is the back-to-business-as-usual perspective of back-stage planners and power brokers. It generates a powerful interest in weakening the effectiveness of the community-based noise study effort Louisville is attempting.

The central goal, instead, is to demonstrate that real people can discuss real issues and come up with real solutions. With no political baggage, the study group has the benefit of being able simply to speak, listen, learn and decide. This is what makes this process as important as the product. A failure of consensus action serves the *status quo*. No reason to do that.

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