

Volume 1, Number 1: July 2002

Policy, Not Just Technology, Key to Reducing Airport Noise

Falling traffic after Sept. 11 made things quieter, but not for long, symposium experts say.

The presentations at the 17th annual Airport Noise Symposium were colored by the downturn in the aviation industry and the economy as a whole following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and the push for new, stricter security measures at the nation's airports.

The symposium, which ran from Feb. 25-27 in San Diego, is sponsored by the UC Berkeley Institute of Transportation Studies Technology Transfer Program. It drew some 300 attendees, a slight drop from last year's record crowd. Two tutorials, Noise 101 and, new this year, Noise 102, preceded the main program. Also new this year was the tutorial, Air Quality 101, and an Intersession on global trends, which preceded the Feb.28-March 1 Airport Air Quality Symposium, which is in its third year. (For a complete program, go to [this location](#) on the TechTransfer Web site.)

Titled "Dreams of Flight," in an evocation of Renaissance artist and scientist Leonardo da Vinci, the Airport Noise Symposium covered topics that included:

- the short- and long-term changes in airport noise levels as a result of the Sept. 11 attacks;
- the social, psychological and economic aspects of airport noise;
- barriers and incentives to phasing out older, noisier models from the aircraft fleet;
- promising new technologies for making planes quieter;
- mitigation efforts, including sound insulation programs and landscaping around airports;
- the role of smaller airports and private planes in reducing airport noise;
- changes in airport and flight operations such as limiting night flights and restricting landing and takeoff paths; and
- land use policies that could reduce the public's exposure to airport noise.

Participants included experts from government, industry and academia, citizen activists, elected officials and representatives of local, state and federal agencies.

Using Policy and Technology Wisely

In his opening remarks, ITS Director Martin Wachs noted two potentially conflicting trends in transportation that affected aviation and airport planning.

"In many regions, the largest public works projects, if not the airports themselves, are new highways that lead to airports, or rail lines or warehouses." And these projects are often crucial to spurring a region's economic growth.

The other trend is "sustainability," which carries with it the idea of "communities that are more healthful and enjoyable for our children than they are today. Airports are always a threat to sustainability and will continue to be so."



[What It's Like to Fly "Quiet"](#)

[How to Muffle a Plane](#)

Other Stories in This Issue

[Is Bush's FreedomCAR Hot Air?](#)

[Zeroing in on Irvine](#)

[New Report on Parking Cash-Out Law](#)

[UCLA Gets Taken for a Ride-Gladly](#)

[Gordon Newell Memorialized at TRB](#)

[ITS at TRB 2002](#)

Click [here](#) to download a PDF (250 K) of this article.

Click [here](#) to download a PDF (1.7 MB) of the entire issue (excluding the TRB presentation abstracts).

"There has been an incredible advance in technology, yet faltering progress in making policy."

—ITS Director Martin Wachs

Wachs noted the impressive number of new tools to measure, understand and control noise, as shown in the many displays in the exhibition hall. "There has been an incredible advance in technology, yet faltering progress in making policy. We have to put our heads together to use that technology well and be wise."

The first session began with a warning by moderator Peter Kirsch, a land use and environmental lawyer with [Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld](#) that the slowdown in air traffic after Sept. 11 was only temporary and that more airport capacity was needed.

"Last year, there were serious concerns about the aviation system reaching gridlock," he said. The FAA took several steps to speed construction of more runways and increase capacity on existing ones, but that is not enough, he said. Kirsch cited a December 2001 report by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) that called for "bolder, more controversial measures—such as new airports and administrative and market-based approaches." The full report can be found [here](#).

"Many airports are having capacity problems already," Richard Marchi, of the industry group [Airports Council International-North America](#), said in his address. Problems would be even more evident by the summer of 2002, he predicted. New runways are the main solution, he said, but to be effective, they should be considered and granted approval in order of most pressing need. The 10 airports that have new runway projects approved or underway account for only 30 percent of the delays, he said. Another 10 airports that are the cause of 60 percent of the delays have no new runways planned.

Peter Stumpp, of Simat, Helliesen & Eichner, Inc. ([SH&E](#)), said that scheduled carriers' dramatic reduction in night flights and the major carriers' decision to park older, noisier hushkitted aircraft lowered airport noise significantly. About 40 percent of hushkitted planes stopped flying after Sept. 11. "By and large they will be gone from the U.S. fleet," he said. When the economy recovers, more night flights will resume, especially for the heavy cargo business, where goods tend to travel at night.

The Growing Danger of Encroachment

In his lunchtime address, Howard Aylesworth, Director of Airspace Systems and Aircraft Noise and Emissions for the [Aerospace Industries Association](#), an international trade group, warned against "squandering" noise reductions achieved through technology that created quieter jets over the past 10 years. States and localities must develop and enforce land use policies that strictly limit residential development around airports and keep it from encroaching on the newly quieter areas, he said.

Communities need to control how land around airports is used while still enjoying the benefits of aviation.

Aylesworth cited a 2000 GAO report that said that 10 of the country's 50 busiest airports, which together account for 70 percent of air traffic, considered encroachment a "serious" problem. But more research is needed. "We don't have the data about how extensive encroachment is. As a result, we don't know what we need to do to solve it," he said. Additional study would give communities data to support efforts to prevent inappropriate land use near airports. "That way, communities can know what they can build while still enjoying benefits of aviation," he said.

ITS REVIEW ONLINE FRONT PAGE ►

ITS PUBLICATIONS ►

"We're not going to do it by engine technology alone. The way we did it so far is to go from low-bypass engines to high-bypass engines," a dramatic change in the way aircraft engines operate that reduced noise significantly. "We're not going to have that in the next 10 years. That era is gone," he said. Future technological improvements would be incremental at best.

(A paper on which his presentation is based is available [here](#) in PDF format.)

In the question-and-answer period, a member of the audience noted that airports are reluctant to side against a proposed project out of the fear of being sued, especially if the development falls outside the high-noise area where much building is forbidden, but still close enough to pose a problem from disgruntled residents in the future. Politically, the questioner noted, proposals for residential development near existing residential areas are more popular among residents who prefer housing over light-industrial uses, which are less likely to generate complaints about airport noise. In one case involving a tract of land near a major international airport, which the questioner did not name, the city was sued by a developer after turning down his proposal. Its decision was ultimately upheld. Nevertheless, "as important as it is to resist encroachment, it's very difficult," the questioner said.

Aylesworth responded, "I'm not against people living next to an airport; I'm against people who complain when it's noisy."



ITS Review Online, Volume 1, Number 1: July 2002

A reprise of links included in this article:

The complete [program](#) for the Airport Noise and Air Quality Symposiums on the TechTransfer Web site.

The complete [list of presentations](#) from the Airport Noise and Air Quality Symposiums available for downloading from the TechTransfer Web site.

Land use and environmental law firm [Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld](#).

The December 2001 GAO report, [National Airspace System: Long-Term Capacity Planning Needed Despite Recent Reduction in Delays](#).

[Airports Council International-North America](#).

[The Aerospace Industries Association](#).

"Environmental Protection: Mandate for Change," copyright 2001, *Issues in Aviation Law and Policy*, the paper that is the basis for Howard Aylesworth's presentation, is available [here](#) in PDF format.

"Continuing Work in Aircraft Noise Reduction" can be found [here](#).

A PDF of Ed Daley's presentation on how pilots approach aircraft noise can be found [here](#).

Click [here](#) to download a PDF (250 K) of this article.

Click [here](#) to download a PDF (1.7 MB) of the entire issue (excluding the TRB presentation abstracts).



[*Go to ITS Publications*](#)

[*ITS Review Online Front Page*](#)

[*Go to Top of Page*](#)