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COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

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October 24, 2019

Hon. Stephen Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Dickson,

I write with concerns about the “Prohibited Area 56 National Security Project” that the FAA and the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) presented to the DCA Community Noise Working Group (CWG) this past spring. I understand that the proposal would alter Runway 19 approach and departure procedures at Washington National Airport (DCA) in order to reduce incursions into restricted airspace. However, I remain concerned about the process – specifically, the failure to give meaningful consideration to community interests – involved in a decision that will further concentrate the airplane noise in Arlington, Virginia.

The FAA knows very well that the CWG would have reactions to any changes in flight paths surrounding DCA and deserves an opportunity to engage – the very reason the group was created. Further, the FAA should know that the absence of an environmental review—and lack of community engagement regarding the noise impact of proposed changes—circumvents the normal process and would not be well-received by the CWG and the rest of the community impacted.

Your staff stated during the May CWG presentation that the FAA was notified by USSS about restricted airspace incursions and was asked to take action in August 2018, and that following this notice, the FAA invited commercial airlines to provide input on how to address the incursions in December 2018. In stark contrast, the CWG was not notified of the decision until the FAA’s presentation on May 23, 2019 regarding the plan to move a waypoint on RNAV departures from the middle of the Potomac River into Virginia, and only then was given an opportunity to respond.

Further, the FAA announced at the May CWG meeting that a new RNAV (GPS) approach procedure would be implemented on August 15, 2019, and that no consideration would be given to impact on affected communities, nor would there be opportunities to address these changes. Considering that the procedure in question has been proposed to the CWG in the past and was repeatedly rejected because it would further concentrate air traffic over neighborhoods and schools in Maryland, Virginia, and DC, this announcement was particularly astounding.

The regional delegation has since learned that the FAA is carrying out this plan by using a categorical exclusion to overlay an RNAV (GPS) procedure on top of the existing Runway 19 approach procedure in order to bypass regulations outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act. Additionally, at the May CWG meeting, members of the CWG noted that it appears the FAA is using the USSS's directive to make changes that would circumvent the CWG and current court proceedings as well. Numerous CWG members noted their frustration that although the FAA has long heard its concerns and ideas for community improvement, the FAA is making swift changes on behalf of the USSS but not using this also as an opportunity to make the flight path changes that the CWG has been recommending for years.

In the FAA's May presentation to the CWG, there was minimal information detailing the incursions prompting the "Prohibited Area 56 National Security Project" changes, so accordingly, I am requesting detailed information from 2010-2018 regarding incursions into the restricted airspace:

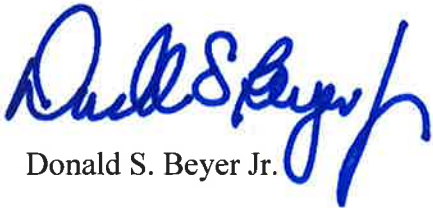
1. How many incursions into restricted airspace have occurred on arrivals?
2. How many incursions have occurred on departures?
3. Of the total number of approach incursions, did any incursions result in an aborted landing, a missed approach, and/or a go-around?
4. What was the FAA's determination of the cause of each incursion?

I look forward to your prompt responses, as the January 2020 deadline quickly approaches for the proposed RNAV (GPS) procedure.

I join my Maryland colleagues in urging the FAA to halt implementation of the proposed changes to DCA flight procedures (both approach and departure changes) until it can demonstrate a need for these changes, as well as considering the concerns of the affected communities per standard environmental review process.

I look forward to working with you on addressing the pervasive airplane noise in our communities, in addition to other issues pertaining to Washington National Airport.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Donald S. Beyer Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Donald S. Beyer Jr.