



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

December 23, 2014

Ms. Arlene J. Mulder
Chairman, O'Hare Noise Compatibility
Commission
P.O. Box 1126
Des Plaines, IL 60017

Dear Ms. Mulder:

Thank you for your October 31 letter asking for a response to two resolutions passed by the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission (ONCC) to complete the O'Hare Modernization Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Re-evaluation by January 15, 2015, and to conduct a Supplemental EIS. The FAA appreciates the opportunity to respond.

The O'Hare Modernization Program (OMP) is a multi-year reconfiguration of Chicago O'Hare International Airport existing airfield. The OMP addresses delay at O'Hare – ranked as one of our country's most delay-prone airports – through a comprehensive redesign of runways, taxiways, and other associated infrastructure. At various stages of construction, the runway usage and air traffic patterns are changed to accommodate construction and to increase airfield capacity as new runways are completed. In October 2013, the OMP commissioned the newest runway, Runway 10C-28C. This new runway enabled controllers to shift operations primarily to an east and west flow and safely increase arrival and departure rates during all weather conditions.

The 3-year process to develop the EIS for the program was one of the most comprehensive environmental analyses the FAA has ever conducted. The FAA approval of the EIS Record of Decision (ROD) withstood a rigorous legal challenge in the U.S. Court of Appeals, which said that the FAA "appears to have acted with great care in conducting its analyses for the EIS and ROD." The FAA believes that the EIS appropriately addressed future conditions and environmental impacts resulting from the modernization of O'Hare. Accordingly, the FAA does not believe there is justification to perform a Supplemental EIS at this time.

The FAA has begun to re-evaluate the EIS because of a change to the schedule for the construction of runways. The re-evaluation will state if the conclusions reached in the original EIS remain valid and if a Supplemental EIS is warranted. ONCC's request that FAA complete the re-evaluation by January 2015 is not feasible because of the time required to complete appropriate simulation modeling that is needed to accurately assess temporary conditions

resulting from the change to the schedule for construction of runways. The FAA remains committed to completing the re-evaluation prior to the commissioning of new Runway 10R/28L in October 2015. The re-evaluation will provide a conservative snapshot of anticipated noise when the new runway opens. In addition, the re-evaluation will provide a similar noise assessment for when the future new runway 9C/27C is commissioned.

The FAA values its relationship with the ONCC. We understand that communities surrounding airports, especially airports as busy as O'Hare, are impacted by noise. This is why the FAA, working with its partners, continues to fund mitigation of noise impacts in the areas surrounding O'Hare. The FAA works in cooperation with the airlines, the city of Chicago, and the ONCC and supports their efforts with funding and technical guidance. Working with the city of Chicago and the ONCC, the FAA has provided approximately \$300 million for school sound insulation, and more than \$87 million for residential sound insulation to reduce the impacts of aircraft noise to communities adjacent to O'Hare. The FAA continues to participate with other Federal agencies, universities and industry groups in research to reduce noise impacts and will continue to work with the city of Chicago and the ONCC to review any proposed changes to operations at O'Hare.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me or Roderick D. Hall, Assistant Administrator for Government and Industry Affairs, at (202) 267-3277.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael P. Huerta", with a circled number "1" to the right.

Michael P. Huerta
Administrator