



## **DMMC In Depth**

# **O'Hare and Midway Aircraft Noise**

## **Fly Quiet and the Runway Rotation Plan**

A *DMMC In Depth* is a guide that informs mayors and managers about a priority issue in a summarized fashion. Like a DMMC White Paper, it is meant to help members better understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision.

### **O'Hare, Midway, and the Fly Quiet Program**

The Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA) administers all aspects of Chicago's O'Hare International Airport (O'Hare) and Midway International Airport (Midway). In 1996, the City of Chicago invited suburban mayors to begin discussing aircraft noise issues and the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission (ONCC) was formed through an intergovernmental agreement (IGA). The IGA authorizes ONCC to implement O'Hare noise relief projects, oversee an impartial noise monitoring system, and advise the city of Chicago on O'Hare-related noise issues. There are currently 56 members on ONCC, including 41 municipalities, Cook County, and 16 school districts. The Midway Noise Compatibility Commission (MNCC) was also formed in 1996 and its membership has grown to include Chicago wards surrounding Midway, suburban municipalities, and Cook County. The ONCC and MNCC work closely with the CDA in consultation with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

In 1997, the City of Chicago announced that airlines operating at O'Hare and Midway had agreed to use "designated noise abatement flight procedures in accordance with the Fly Quiet Program." According to the CDA's website, the Fly Quiet Program is a voluntary program that encourages pilots and air traffic controllers to use certain designated nighttime runways and flight tracks developed by the CDA and ONCC or MNCC, depending on the airport, which is intended to reduce nighttime aircraft noise in neighborhoods surrounding the airports by directing aircraft over less-populated areas. In addition to preferential runway use, the Fly Quiet Program also includes arrival and departure flight procedures and ground run-up procedures. It should be noted that the Fly Quiet Program is completely voluntary; ultimately, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and pilot-in-command of each aircraft have sole jurisdiction and responsibility for flight paths.

In 2005, the FAA published an Environmental Impact Study and issued a Record of Decision for the modernization of O'Hare. In the Record of Decision, the FAA stated it will give consideration to suggestions for changes in the Fly Quiet Program that are developed by the ONCC and requested of the FAA by the City of Chicago.

### **Fly Quiet Runway Rotation Plan**

In June of 2016, the FAA approved a six-month test period of a nighttime weekly runway rotation plan for O'Hare which was developed by the CDA in conjunction with the ONCC and Suburban O'Hare Commission (SOC) aviation experts. SOC is a group of 11 local governments representing over 1 million people. SOC has been in existence since the early 1980s and has worked on numerous intergovernmental programs to benefit the region.

According to the ONCC website, the Fly Quiet Runway Rotation Plan seeks to achieve a more balanced distribution of noise exposure for Chicago and suburban communities. As per the plan, the designated nighttime arrival and departure runways at O'Hare will rotate week to week, with adjustments made depending on weather and other factors. The plan includes 10 specified runway configurations consisting of one arrival and one departure runway or one mixed use runway (used for both arrivals and departures) and makes greater use of the diagonal runways. Each new week is intended to begin on Sunday evening at 10:00 p.m. or later, when demand allows for one arrival and one departure runway. The plan is expected to affect approximately 80 arrivals and departures daily between 10:30 p.m. and 5:30 a.m. Storms, construction projects, high demand, and required safety inspections may prompt air traffic controllers and airport officials to at times divert planes from the designated runways.

The test period for the Fly Quiet Runway Rotation Plan began on July 6, 2016 and is scheduled to run through the week of December 18, 2016. At the end of the test period, Fly Quiet procedures are supposed to revert back to the original plan. Currently, comments and data are being collected and reviewed by the ONCC and CDA to determine if the Fly Quiet Runway Rotation Plan should be implemented permanently. The Tribune reports that even if the plan is adopted, it will have to change once the diagonal runway referred to as Runway 15/33 is decommissioned in late 2018 as planned. The airport is also expected to add another east-west runway, Runway 9C/27C, in 2020.

The CDA, ONCC, and SOC are seeking feedback from residents in order to assess whether the Fly Quiet Runway Rotation Plan is providing the intended benefits. A 17-question survey, as well as additional information and the plan's runway rotation schedule, can be found at: <http://www.airportprojects.net/flyquiettest/>.

## Community Concerns

Some municipalities have expressed concerns that the Fly Quiet Runway Rotation Plan will bring more air traffic and noise over their communities. The DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference has received reports from several southern DuPage County communities that commercial aircraft seem to be flying over the area more frequently and at times at lower altitudes, including during daytime hours. At this point in time, it is unclear whether this is related to the Fly Quiet Runway Rotation Plan which is currently being tested at O'Hare. In addition to the survey mentioned above, residents have several means by which to submit a concern or complaint about aircraft events and noise for both O'Hare and Midway. To report a complaint, residents may:

- Call 1-800-914-8537 (for suburban communities); or
- Complete and submit an aircraft noise complaint form on Chicago's 311 system at [https://servicerequest.cityofchicago.org/web\\_intake\\_chic/](https://servicerequest.cityofchicago.org/web_intake_chic/).

Residents may also watch the movement of flights departing from and arriving to O'Hare and Midway via the CDA's flight tracking program [WebTrak](#).

Founded in 1962, the [DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference](#) (DMMC) is a council of 33 municipal governments representing over 1,000,000 people. A coalition of cities and villages, the Conference works to voice municipal concerns on local, regional, state, and national issues. It also serves its members and the region by fostering intergovernmental cooperation. The Conference is a not-for-profit organization supported by membership dues and grants.