

Boston Logan Airport Noise Study

On November 12, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) will begin testing a potential noise reduction measure at Boston Logan International Airport. The test is part of the Boston Logan Airport Noise Study's third phase, which will evaluate whether changes in runway use at Boston Logan Airport can further reduce aircraft noise in the communities surrounding the airport.

The Logan Airport Community Advisory Committee (CAC), with the technical assistance of an independent consultant, designed the first test scenario and also will design any remaining test scenarios. The results will be used to develop a runway use program at Boston Logan International Airport. The Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport) supports this noise abatement effort and asked the FAA to conduct the testing.

The first test is designed to evaluate whether FAA air traffic controllers can switch the runway configuration at the airport overnight, so the direction of arriving and departing flights on a given morning is different than it was the previous night. The measure is designed to address a frequent complaint that residents in nearby communities wake up with the same noise they were hearing when they went to bed.

The test calls for the FAA to determine how frequently air traffic controllers can switch the runway configuration they are using between 8:30 p.m. and midnight to a new runway configuration for the period between 6 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. the following morning. The test is expected to run for at least three months, but will not exceed six months. Massport developed the list of runway use recommendations for testing. Those include six runway configurations, with four next-day change options for each configuration, as well as an order of preference for changing runways.

Ultimately, the FAA, Massport and the CAC may use the results of the first test and any additional planned tests to develop a runway use program that is consistent with FAA safety and operational requirements. Together with the noise relief measures already in place from Phase 1 and 2 of the noise study, the runway use program could lead to a quieter environment in the neighborhoods around the airport.

The FAA's ability to change runways during the test period is dependent on wind, weather, volume, runway availability, and other operational factors. No procedures, flight paths or altitudes will change, but the frequency of procedures or the use of flight paths may vary. With the assistance of project consultants, Massport will conduct a noise analysis at the end of each test.

A link to additional details on the first test and the outline of the runway use plan is available on the homepage of the Boston Logan Airport Noise Study website: <http://bostonoverflightnoisestudy.com>.

Background

When the FAA issued the 2002 Environmental Record of Decision for the Boston Logan Airside Improvements Planning Project, the agency required the Boston Logan Airport Noise Study as part of the project mitigation. The Record of Decision required the FAA, Massport and the CAC to work together to develop a noise study scope that included enhancing existing noise abatement measures and developing new measures that could apply to aircraft overflights.

Phase 1 identified safe and efficient noise abatement measures that would not adversely affect other communities within the noise study area and that could be implemented before the study's completion.

That effort produced several modified arrival and departure flight procedures that raised aircraft altitudes over communities or maximized the use of over-water flight routes when conditions permitted. These measures notably reduced noise levels over land. Phase 1 was completed in November 2010. All the procedures are described in the FAA's October 2007 Categorical Exclusion/Record of Decision: http://www.bostonoverflightnoisestudy.com/docs/BONS_Phase1_Catex_ROD_full_document.pdf

Phase 2 identified and implemented other potential measures to reduce noise impacts to communities surrounding Boston Logan Airport. The FAA evaluated dozens of potential noise abatement measures for ground operations, arrivals, departures and local aircraft traffic over a three-year period and implemented two ground measures. Those measures established an area for engine run-ups and a location for holding aircraft that are delayed before departure. Several other measures included encouraging airlines to use a single engine while taxiing, and establishing and maintaining communications with helicopters and propeller aircraft to maintain altitudes of 2,000 feet over downtown Boston. The final results of the three-year evaluation are in the Level 3 Screening Report http://www.bostonoverflightnoisestudy.com/phase2_documents.aspx December 2012.