

Ronald Reagan National Airport (DCA) South of Airport (SoA) Noise Mitigation Project Community Engagement Report

Vianair utilizes a unique approach toward community involvement in resolving aircraft noise issues. When there are competing interests, which is very common, Vianair applies the NowGEN[®] Model for Noise Mitigation (NM)² Process.¹ The (NM)² Model is a process where key stakeholder groups identify, discuss, and prioritize the issues, goals, constraints, etc., enabling determination of the most cost-effective approaches with the highest likelihood of successful implementation. Once the priorities are established, Vianair utilizes a similar approach to problem resolution and procedure design as the former FAA Order 7100.41A, *Performance Based Navigation (PBN) Implementation Process*. Vianair's approach differs from others in that it incorporates direct community involvement in the procedure design process. The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) already had the framework in place with their longstanding and well-functioning Community Working Group (CWG). The next step was to develop consensus among all stakeholders represented on the CWG, using this proven approach.

This was a community centric project with community representatives involved in every phase of the project. Community representatives comprised the Design Team and the community at-large was engaged with residents from the three jurisdictions through public meetings, a community survey, the project website, and feedback from community members to provide feedback to the Design Team. Finally, community members also had opportunities to provide feedback and comments to their respective jurisdictions (city and county councils and boards) and through the MWAA CWG.

The Design Team

The Design Team was facilitated by Vianair and was solely responsible for the development of the notional flight procedures intended to mitigate aircraft noise in their respective communities. Vianair consultants functioned as facilitators for this group to ensure that FAA criteria and operational requirements were known to the team and complied with. Additionally, Vianair consultants guided the Design Team while formulating the Design Philosophy for this project.

The Design Team was made up of community members currently serving on the CWG as the South of Airport (SoA) Subcommittee (SC). The SoA SC is made up of two representatives from each jurisdiction, Alexandria, Fairfax County, and Prince George's County. These six individuals were guiding the design process throughout the project.

¹ The NowGEN[®] Model for Noise Mitigation (NM)² Process is a proprietary process of Vianair, LLC. Copyright © 2018, All Rights Reserved.

The Design Team had several sources of input from the community. There were Community Meetings where community members gave input to the project team, a community survey which provided input into the process and also resulted in the Design Team providing a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page on the project website so that community members could easily read and understand most aspects of the project. The project website contains information on meetings, the survey, FAQs, timelines, and an email address to give additional feedback to the project team.

The Design Philosophy

The Design Philosophy is the most important part of the process and where the community helps define what constitutes success. The Design Philosophy can consist of a number of guiding principles that point the team in the direction of a “successful outcome.” As an example, guiding principles may include:

- Prioritizing flight procedures that overfly compatible land uses, such as industrial complexes, interstates, or open areas with little or no residential neighborhoods;
- Avoidance of schools and/or churches;
- Equitable distribution of noise between certain populations, such as between counties, states, or neighborhoods;
- Use of historic flight paths;
- Use of flight track variability when practical

It is particularly important for the group to agree on the Design Philosophy up front to minimize special interests, or “NIMBYism.”² Once the Design Philosophy is finalized, the design process can begin with the common goal of achieving a successful implementation. Consensus on a given procedure must be in accordance with the Design Philosophy. Once achieved, the group can remain focused on the agreed upon criteria for determining what constitutes a successful design.

The Design Philosophy for this project was as follows:

1. Maximize overflight over the center of the river and “compatible” areas including industrial areas, major highways, etc.
2. Maximize altitude (use of Optimized Profile Descent to reduce noise over noise-sensitive areas)
 - Analyze and recommend use of Noise Abatement Departure Profile
3. Increase track variability (reduce concentration over noise-sensitive areas)
4. Avoid disproportionate impact on any single entity (county, town, etc.)
5. Minimize overflight of noise sensitive areas, schools, hospitals, churches, historical sites

² NIMBYism is a colloquialism used to express interest in one’s own circumstances without consideration of the entire process or issues that affect the broader community. NIMBY meaning – “Not In My Back Yard.”

Public Meetings

An initial Public Kick-off Meeting was held on May 17, 2023.

Additionally, each of the respective jurisdictions held board/council meetings in which the project was briefed, and public officials had the opportunity to receive feedback on the project from their constituents.³ This gave the elected officials the opportunity to evaluate the impact of the project on their respective communities. Ultimately, elected officials in each of the communities gave their approval for the recommendations of the project to move forward to the CWG for final review and approval, and if approved by the CWG, to move on to the FAA through MWAA.

The Project Website

The project website contains all project information to date. This was a vital tool in keeping the community informed concerning the progress of the project and the results of meetings and ultimately the recommendations being put forth to the FAA.

Once the Final Report is published, it will be on the website as well. All project information can be viewed at: www.vianair.com/soa

Community Survey

A Community Survey was conducted between 4/15/2024 – 8/31/2024. The results were made available on the project website on 9/2/2024.

The survey took basic information relating to how communities were affected by aircraft noise and to what degree. Time of day and the level of annoyance was assessed. The survey also asked about arrivals vs departures and about the types of aircraft that provided the most annoyance.

The community was asked to rank the priority of types of areas that should be given a high priority of reducing aircraft overflights. Overwhelmingly, the answer was residential communities.

The results of the survey are posted under the Community Engagement tab on the Project Website at: <https://www.vianair.com/soa/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/SOA-Community-Survey-Results-Summary-v090224.pdf>

³ Fairfax County Community Meeting: 5/14/2025; Board of Supervisors Land Use Policy Committee: 6/17/2025
Alexandria Community Meeting: May 22, 2025, City Council did not get a briefing but was sent the recommendations summary for their awareness. Letter was dated 5/8/25.
Prince Georges County Public Meeting: May 20, 2025

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The FAQs are available on the Project Website.

The CWG

The Community Working Group (CWG) is a long-standing committee of residents and industry stakeholders that are interested in the workings and impacts of the DCA airport.

This group receives the most current information available about airport operations from MWAA, the FAA, and Airlines. The community representatives on the CWG are then encouraged to ask questions and make recommendations to mitigate the impact of those operations on the surrounding communities. The CWG is a well-functioning group and has been effective over the years at addressing many airport noise issues and other impacts to the surrounding communities.

At the conclusion of the SoA project, the final recommendations of the study will be presented to the CWG for review. If the CWG concurs with the recommendations, they will be forwarded to the FAA through MWAA for action.

MWAA and the FAA

Once the CWG forwards the recommendations to MWAA, MWAA will function as a conduit to the FAA. Once the recommendations are received by the FAA, they will be distributed to various offices within the FAA to begin the process of evaluating them for safety, efficiency, and to determine if they are implementable. If the FAA determines that the recommendations are acceptable, it could take as much as four (4) years to implement the recommendations.