

Testimony of Congressman Joseph Crowley
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Aviation
Hearing - Aviation and the Environment: "Noise"
Wednesday, October 24, 2007

Chairman Costello, Ranking Member Petri, members of the Subcommittee – thank you for conducting this hearing. In my district, airport noise is a daily burden shouldered by my constituents and I appreciate your attentiveness to this issue.

As you know, I represent Queens and the Bronx, New York, and we are home to LaGuardia Airport - one of the nation's busiest airports, in the busiest and most congested airspace in the country.

If you looked at a map of the area, you would probably focus on the fact that LaGuardia Airport is surrounded by Flushing Bay on one side and the Grand Central Parkway on the other. It is, however, also in the middle of several densely populated communities, including Woodside, Astoria, East Elmhurst, and Jackson Heights, Queens.

While the Airport is a central part of our community – helping to support New York's economy by shuttling visitors and business people in and out of the region – its presence does negatively impact the day-to-day life for tens of thousands of my constituents.

In particular, the air pollution resulting from the road traffic and airplanes at LaGuardia is a severe problem, as is the noise pollution caused by the airport and its related facilities.

That is why, working with the Environmental Protection Agency and New York University, I commissioned a study to determine the effects of airport and airport-related noise on my constituents in Queens.

The results of this report concluded that some residents living near LaGuardia were exposed to noise levels nearly four times greater – with some levels exceeding the 65 DNL threshold set by the Federal Aviation Administration – than those experienced by residents not living within close proximity to an airport.

Twenty-four hour time histories also found that residents living within the footprint of LaGuardia were exposed to noise levels in excess of the levels New York City code stipulates for sleeping areas from the hours of 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. And, more than 55% of the people living within the flight path were reportedly bothered by aircraft noise.

Similarly, homes surrounding John F. Kennedy Airport were subjected to comparable levels of noise as those around LaGuardia, and I would expect they would be comparable to any homes and communities surrounding our nation's major airports.

These findings are particularly noteworthy because noise is not just an annoyance or inconvenience. It is hazardous to one's health and well-being and diminishes an individual's quality of life.

The World Health Organization found that airport noise has been linked to cardiovascular disease. And, the Federal Interagency Committee on Aviation Noise in its September 2000 report concluded that: "Research on the effects of aircraft noise on children's learning suggests that aircraft noise can interfere with learning in the following areas: reading, motivation, language and speech acquisition, and memory. The strongest findings to date are in the area of reading, where more than 20 studies have shown that children in noise impact zones are negatively affected by aircraft."

The FAA has recognized the need to mitigate airport noise and has created a voluntary process whereby airport authorities may undertake a Part 150 study to determine the extent of airport noise on a community, and then as a follow-up, establish a plan for remediation of that noise, which could include residential soundproofing.

Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence that airport noise can severely impact the health and well-being of individuals, particularly our children, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey has never undertaken or even attempted to conduct a Part 150 study or noise mitigation efforts for the homes in the neighborhoods surrounding LaGuardia, or its other airports – JFK, Newark, Teterboro and Stewart Airports.

In fact, in the *Vision 100 – Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act*, this Committee directed, at my request, that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey begin a Part 150 study and residential soundproofing. The Committee's bipartisan language stated:

Although the FAA determined that aircraft noise pollution was the strongest and most widespread concern raised by the public at its twenty-eight public scoping meetings in five states in 2001, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey has not undertaken action to mitigating residential complaints in the neighborhoods surrounding its airports. Therefore, it is the hope of the Conference Committee that the PANYNJ will work in good faith with the New York and New Jersey Congressional delegations to address these issues, including undertaking a part 150 study to qualify for Federal residential soundproofing dollars or to begin undertaking residential soundproofing in the most affected areas in the footprint with particular focus on the neighborhoods surrounding LaGuardia Airport.

Unfortunately, the Port Authority ignored the explicit direction of this Committee and still has not taken any action to soundproof residences in my area, which is why I am here today.

It is my hope this public forum and the further engagement of this Committee will encourage the Port Authority to finally pursue the necessary course of action.

As this Committee knows, only 17 of the top 50 busiest airports have not submitted a Part 150 study, and three of these 17 airports – LaGuardia, JFK and Newark - are operated by one entity, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

In fact, other large airports have successfully conducted Part 150 studies and soundproofed homes. Of particular note is Los Angeles International Airport. LAX completed its study and is soundproofing the homes in its footprint.

It has been a major success story, with the major concern being the length of time to fully implement and mitigate all homes for noise.

If LAX can undertake this project, why can't the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey?

I have worked diligently with this Committee's leadership, both under former Chairman Don Young, and now under you, Chairman Costello and full Committee Chairman Oberstar, on the issue of airport noise. I've appreciated your past efforts and support.

I hope you will agree that the time has come for soundproofing and other noise mitigation efforts to get underway at the homes surrounding LaGuardia Airport and the other four airports under the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's control.

And, if today's hearing does not compel the Port Authority to act, I am going to ask that the FAA Reauthorization plan, which is working its way through the chambers - including the Ways and Means Committee on which I sit - include language strengthening the laws regarding soundproofing of homes and places of worship and mandating soundproofing and other forms of noise abatement for the people living in the footprints of our nation's largest or busiest airports.

Airport and airport-related noise is a real issue of concern to many of our constituents, both those living around an airport like my constituents, or those in the flight path like Congresswoman McCarthy's.

I sincerely appreciate and thank Chairman Oberstar and Subcommittee Chairman Costello for holding this hearing, for inviting me to testify, and for inviting the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to testify. I look forward to continuing to work with you on this matter.