

Board of Supervisors Briefing by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) on
Dulles International Airport
March 26, 2019
Meeting Summary

Meeting Materials are Posted Online: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/board-supervisors-briefing-metropolitan-washington-airports-authority-mwaa-march-26-2019>

Attending:

Michael Cooper, Manager, State and Local Government Affairs, MWAA
Gregg Wollard, Manager, Planning, MWAA
Carl Schultz, Airline Business Development Director
Michael Jeck, Noise Office

Board of Supervisors

Sharon Bulova, Chairman
Penelope Gross, Mason District, Vice Chairman
John Cook, Braddock District
John Foust, Dranesville District
Pat Herrity, Springfield District
Jeff McKay, Lee District
Catherine Hudgins, Hunter Mill District
Kathy Smith, Sully District
Linda Smyth, Providence District
Dan Storck, Mount Vernon District

Meeting was called to order at 10:05am

Chairman Bulova opened the meeting, noting it was the first time the Board had received such a briefing from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority.

Chairman Bulova described the purpose of the meeting – to hear about growth at the Airport and to changes coming related to the noise contours and NextGen. Sup. Smith talked about the pending Comprehensive Plan Amendment (known as Land Unit J, part of the larger Dulles Suburban Center Area) which is adjacent to Dulles Airport. She clarified the change in the Plan is to allow the Board to consider land use applications that include residential in the 60dnl (day-night average sound level) noise contours south of Dulles Airport and it does not change the County's policy when it comes to noise.

Mr. Cooper said the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors has shown great foresight when it comes to planning around the Airport. He said these presentations are about long term – 20-30-40 year – growth of the Airport and impacts to Fairfax County. As Dulles grows, decisions on land uses that support Dulles will continue.

Mr. Schultz delivered a presentation on growth of Dulles International Airport (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/sites/boardofsupervisors/files/assets/meeting-materials/2019/march26-mwaa-dulles-airline-business-development-presentation.pdf>) His team's goal is growing the Airport to its maximum potential.

Sup. Herrity asked about the expansion of the tram within the Airport.

Mr. Wollard said the project is not budgeted. Mr. Cooper said the "aerotrain" was originally going to be a loop, is now a "J," matching terminal location. Ultimately as new southerly terminals are built the aerotrain will be extended. Airport is still in negotiations on new United terminal.

Sup. Cook said he appreciated the briefing but wished the discussion included more economic development issues around the Airport. He asked what if anything is MWAA doing, or what's MWAA's position, on second Potomac River crossing? Has MWAA studied whether that increases passengers since it connects to Montgomery County? He asked to please also talk about competition between the three regional airports, particularly around cargo, and how it can affect the economy of Virginia.

Mr. Cooper – on Potomac crossing, ultimately up to states and localities. CEO of MWAA travels American Legion Bridge daily and is aware of constraints. He defers to experts such as Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance. Referred to a Post opinion piece in support of second bridge. Described need for states to be aligned in support for second bridge to happen. Connectivity is important to Dulles to succeed. Room for all three airports to grow and flourish and compete.

Sup. Cook asked about potential growth at Dulles – how much is dependent upon regional growth, transportation connections – does it affect growth at Dulles with or without second crossing? I-81 growth?

Mr. Cooper said Dulles growth is tied to the success of the region, but MWAA is committed to double number of passengers to 40 million without any significant capital improvements. Growth is not wholly dependent on connectivity like second crossing, but that connectivity is helpful. MWAA must and is planning for growth now.

Mr. Schultz said a member of team solely dedicated to cargo growth. Timely cargo (like medicine) is an area MWAA sees a lot of potential.

Mr. Herrity referred to the Post opinion piece on the second crossing shows the people support it, but the political support is not there. Bridge can be toll funded. BWI also gets opened to Northern Virginia with the second crossing and both airports (BWI and Dulles) will benefit.

Sup. Gross asked whether there is warehouse capacity for cargo growth. On passenger experience, customs experience is very negative. What improvements are on the horizon?

Mr. Cooper said the federal government does control that aspect, but senior Airport leadership works very closely with federal partners to improve passenger experience. New technologies that allow for more predictive passenger data (number of passengers coming at certain times of day, e.g.) are helping, but staffing by federal agencies is out of the Airport's control.

Sup. Gross reiterated that kind of experience plays heavily into public perception of the Airport.

Sup. Smith asked what will it take to increase cargo and timeframe for doing so.

Mr. Schultz said MWAA is in constant contact with providers at all levels of the cargo business. Ideally, 1-2 cargo operators would have a significant operation at the Airport, rather than a small presence by many operators. Bringing down costs to land at Airport is one way MWAA attracts cargo operators.

Chairman Bulova asked about the connection between the future Silver Line station and the airport as well as status of Phase II.

Ms. Hanley said Phase II is progressing and is in the testing phase, and the connection between the Airport and the future station is now open.

Mr. Cooper described the location of the future station.

Mr. Cooper delivered his presentation on the aircraft noise contour update (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/sites/boardofsupervisors/files/assets/meeting-materials/2019/march26-mwaa-aircraft-noise-contour-map-update.pdf>)

Mr. Cooper described the contours, the difference between the 60 and 65dnl. The human ear does not discern less than 3 decibels. People do not complain about airport noise because they live within a corridor, but because they hear noise.

Sup. Smith clarified the lines were from the 1992 Plan based on full build out of the Airport, which has not happened.

Mr. Cooper said the full build out is 900,000 operations per year, the Airport is now at around 280,000/year. MWAA wants to protect for full build out and not current operations. Median of Dulles Toll Road was held for 50 years in order to have rail. Similar long term planning should be applied to contours and land use around the Airport.

Mr. Cooper described the impact of NextGen – more precise arrival patterns in the northflow arrivals over the Dulles Suburban Center Area.

Mr. Foust asked about the focus on arrivals and whether noise differs between arrivals and departures.

Mr. Cooper said departures are more diffuse than arrivals and the noise is therefore more intense.

Mr. Cooper described why there was a new noise study: as part of NextGen, FAA announced triple simultaneous arrivals and departures at airports including Dulles.

Chairman Bulova asked about the impact of NextGen at National Airport.

Mr. Cooper said there will not be triple arrivals and departures since there is only one long runway. NextGen is being rolled out incrementally, based on not just the space but the need for instrumentation in each aircraft and training for personnel. National Airport is ahead of Dulles in NextGen adoption.

Ms. Hanley said airports are in various states of NextGen adoption across the country. Noise complaints from National are going to Sup. Storck and Sup. Foust.

Sup. Storck noted that NextGen rollout has not involved the community. There was a system that worked well for dealing with noise but the concentration of flight patterns has had a huge impact. Ms. Hanley talked about the regional noise task force because there is a recognition that moving the flight pattern puts it on another neighborhood.

Sup. Storck said southflow from National has the river as a mitigation tool.

Mr. Cooper described the purview of the airports versus the FAA, and commended Sup. Storck's staff in their work on the issue.

Sup. Cook clarified the impact of concentration of flight patterns resulting from NextGen. Is MWAA confident the flight patterns described in the presentation will not become more diffuse over time?

Mr. Cooper said that map reflects arrivals on a given typical northflow day, but that there is a lot more activity not reflected. These are not meant to be seen as highways.

Mr. Cooper said 5th runway at Airport may never get built because that is a market decision. However, MWAA will continue to plan as if it will because of the reasons mentioned before.

Mr. Cooper described the small difference in noise in current generation (4) over the previous generation aircraft and the time it takes airlines to purchase new fleets.

Mr. Cooper said the Board could define in the Comprehensive Plan where the contours are, and that any new homes in those areas should consider mitigation and notice. In Loudoun, nothing is built in the 65dnl and some is built in the 60dnl. It does allow some between 60 and 65 with noise mitigation and notice requirements and a navigation easement. Fairfax planned very well and MWAA is asking to continue this level of planning. Fairfax County could adopt the new contours without affecting current approved development.

Mr. Cooper says MWAA recognizes the sensitive nature of the situation the Board is in with interest in developing the areas close to the airport and in particular the Land Unit J Comprehensive Plan Amendment.

Sup. Smith expressed concern that MWAA was given this special meeting to make their case regarding Land Unit J without staff or the community having the same opportunity either before the Board of Supervisors or the Planning Commission. The community expects the land use process to follow a certain path and this deviates from that.

Chairman Bulova said the Planning Commission and the Board will have the opportunity to hear everyone on this case. Dulles Airport is an asset for the County and the Board should have a good understanding of the new noise contours.

Sup. Smith disagrees with the current presentation on Land Unit J (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/sites/boardofsupervisors/files/assets/meeting-materials/2019/march26-mwaa-westfields-land-unit-j.pdf>), particularly given the previous presentation was also on the contours.

Sup. Hudgins agree with Sup. Smith and believes it is more equitable for the specific presentation on Land Unit J be reserved for the formal public hearing process.

Ms. Hanley asked whether there are specific slides on Land Unit J that could be used.

Sup. McKay said there did not appear to be anything in this presentation that was not already covered in the previous presentation.

Mr. Cooper said slide 3 would suffice as it shows the existing contours and the new contours (ultimate build contours). He described the deepening of the 65dnl contour and lengthening of the 60dnl.

Ms. Hanley suggested discussion regarding specific slides in this presentation – titled “typical mixed flow overflights and location of noise complaints; air traffic patterns – current,” could be useful.

Mr. Cooper discussed the first slide mentioned by Ms. Hanley.

Sup. McKay asked for clarification on the number of complaints.

Mr. Cooper said there are 1500-2000 complaints per year, but that there are a small number of people who provide a large number of complaints. MWAA’s annual report notes that situation. Right now, complaint levels are manageable.

Mr. McKay asked in this presentation, what period of time?

Mr. Jeck clarified it was 2 years.

Chairman Bulova reiterated this meeting is about the noise contours and not the Land Unit J Comprehensive Plan Amendment.

Sup. Gross pointed out similarities between this presentation and one from a few years ago regarding flight patterns. How many annual flights?

Mr. Wollard said 280,000 roughly, which is an arrival plus departure.

Sup. Gross asked who is the point of contact for further questions?

Mr. Cooper said he is the point of contact.

Sup. Gross said she supports Sup. Smith’s view that the Board should not be considering the Land Unit J case in this setting.

Mr. Cooper said today’s presentation was given to the Planning Commission but some slides have been refined or expanded.

Mr. Cooper encouraged the Board members and staff to visit the airports.

Sup. Foust said it is true the Airport is critical to the future of the economy of the region. It’s unfortunate the Land Unit J case brought this to us as it should be more regular information sharing. Fairfax County needs an advocate – FAA does not seem to be concerned with us. MWAA and the Board have a mutual interest, and MWAA should be proactive in dealing with the FAA.

Mr. Cooper agreed, and said with airplane noise MWAA is receiving the complaints but can’t do anything about where the planes fly. So MWAA convened the noise task force and put them at the table with the FAA decision makers who decide patterns and with the airlines who decide on schedule and aircraft type. It’s a regional issue, but task force is working through that. Mr. Cooper reiterated that the complaints are always tied to land use. Dulles is able to effectively manage noise complaints.

Sup. Foust asked whether two Loudoun Metro stations are in the contours.

Mr. Cooper said they are in a special tax district, and one is further out. Neither are in the 65dnl, the 606 station is in the 60dnl, the other is in a one-mile buffer zone where notice is required.

Sup. Foust said addressing tolls is needed and understand a task force will work on that – very encouraging as it’s causing cut through traffic.

Sup. Storck said access to the airport is very important to the region. His concerns are – MWAA’s responsiveness to complaints. It needs more attention – people are telling him their complaints are not being addressed or responded to. Someone on the noise task force is working with FAA data to show where issues are. The community recognizes FAA’s role but MWAA needs to help by being a leader. More modelling and more data from MWAA and FAA would be helpful.

Mr. Cooper said MWAA will make sure responsiveness issue will be addressed. MWAA takes noise complaints very seriously even though they do not have authority to address them. MWAA wants to be a collaborative partner. MWAA does have limited authority – can’t control height, patterns, noise, etc..

Sup. Cook said MWAA clearly delivered a message today regarding future growth plans, but not enough context. One slide showed no growth in last 10 years. MWAA did not give any information supporting whether the ultimate buildout can be achieved and actually how long it will take to achieve it. Are there any markers to measure this? He asked for more information from MWAA later on this. He also said he’d like a better understanding of how Loudoun deals with the Airport.

Mr. Cooper indicated both can be provided to Board.

Sup. Smith agreed about need to talk about timing for ultimate build out. She talked about ease of access to Airport from Sully District. She relayed a story about NextDoor users pushing back against a user complaining. No one wants to create a problem, but we need to be comprehensive in how we approach development in Sully District around the Airport.

Sup. Herrity said the Board should meet with MWAA more often given the importance, should understand what Loudoun does, and have a renewed focus on the second Potomac crossing.

Sup. Smyth said there is a lot of transportation noise in Fairfax County – Transform 66 in Providence District. Metro trains are louder than they used to be. We need to look at noise more comprehensively. People can’t complain about I-66 as there isn’t anyone to complain to. While road and aircraft noise are not the same, people still have concerns. Need to be proactive in finding noise mitigation solutions.

Ms. Hanley talked about need to retrofit to help mitigate noise.

Chairman Bulova thanked MWAA participants, said she hopes more regular conversations will occur, and mentioned similar bilateral dialogues with other institutional partners.

Meeting concluded at 12:13pm