

# Elkridge skies seeing more BWI traffic

Construction, routing system affect flight pattern

By AMANDA YEAGER  
ayeager@tribune.com

Seated on a bench in her Elkridge backyard, Barbara Deckert can see low-flying planes as they take off and make their descent toward the runway at nearby Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport.

In the 31 years she's lived on Claire Drive, just a few turns off of Route 1, the planes have rarely bothered her. In fact, when Deckert and her husband were deciding whether to buy the house, "we actually drove out here and parked in front of it, because we were worried" about the noise, she said.

But since early September, Deckert has noticed an increase in the number of planes flying overhead. They've been waking her up at night, she says, and disrupting her enjoyment of the garden where she likes to sit when the weather is nice.

She isn't alone: the office of County Councilman Jon Weinstein, a Democrat who represents Elkridge, as well as Ellicott City and Hanover, has received some two dozen constituent complaints about noise from the airport in the past month.

According to BWI officials, more planes are flying over Elkridge due to construction on one of the airport's two main commercial runways.

Runway 10-28 was shut down on Aug. 30, and will be closed until late fall so it can be repaved and installed with new navigational equipment. In the meantime, the airport's approximately 650 daily passenger flights will have to take off and land using just one runway.

The construction is the last in a series of projects launched in 2010 as part of a \$350 million airfield initiative that has included runway pavement reconstruction, grading, lighting improvements, taxiway upgrades and installation of new navigational aids, according to the airport. The project incorporates federally mandated runway safety improvements, which require airports to pave surface around runways as a safety margin for arriving and departing planes.

BWI spokesman Jonathan Dean said the airport anticipates aircraft noise "should return to historic levels" when the runway is reopened.

In the meantime, Deckert has been hearing planes over her house about every



STAFF PHOTO BY AMANDA YEAGER

Barbara Deckert, an Elkridge resident, says airplane traffic above her house has become more frequent since BWI closed one of its runways for construction.

five minutes during peak hours in the morning and early evening. The flights seem to start with some frequency around 5:15 a.m. and continue until 12:30 a.m., though she has been awoken before by an occasional plane flying low at 2 a.m.

During peak hours, "it's kind of like being in a thunderstorm all the time," she said. "You can't sleep through it."

On a recent September day, between 4 and 5 p.m., more than 10 planes flew by as Deckert sat and spoke in her manicured backyard, with its rose bush, willow tree and wind chimes that sang every so often, rustled by the breeze. Several times she raised her voice as a jet engine roared overhead, its noise overpowering her words.

A few times, she said, a plane has flown so low that she could see the faces of passengers through the windows.

Another recent change at the airport might account for a longer term shift in air traffic patterns, according to Weinstein. In the spring, air traffic controllers began using a new system, NextGen, which is being rolled out at airports across the

nation by the Federal Aviation Administration.

NextGen is designed to optimize flight routes for smoother takeoffs and landings as well as reduced fuel use. However, Weinstein said, the system may be routing more planes over Elkridge and Hanover at lower altitudes. He said BWI officials attended a community meeting in June, and again last week, to answer questions about the NextGen system and construction at the airport.

Weinstein is taking the issue to Washington, starting with a scheduled Wednesday meeting with Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger and Rep. John Sarbanes.

"My goal is to have BWI recommend a change to the flight patterns and for that recommendation to be forwarded or supported by a federal delegation, and for that change to take place as quickly as possible," he said. The slow pace of federal bureaucracy means residents might not see any flight pattern changes until next summer at the earliest, if at all, he added.

Meanwhile, Deckert said she hopes BWI officials will take nearby residents

into account next time a major construction project is planned.

"When I found out that they're only using one terminal, I realized obviously this time around there's nothing that probably can be done" about the disruption, she said. "But next time, certainly, I think they need to do better."

Deckert wants to see future construction projects scheduled during summer or winter months, when weather is less pleasant and windows are closed.

According to Dean, construction was scheduled for the fall because summer is peak travel season for the airlines.

"In terms of weather," he added, "in the summer months in particular, the concern is thunderstorms that could impact the schedule of work, and in the winter, certain airfield construction can't be done, in terms of temperatures."

"I ought to have the right to keep my windows open in the six weeks every fall and the six weeks in the spring when the weather's nice," Deckert countered. "It's only six weeks, each season, that we get, and it's precious, it really is."