

# Howard officials seek action on BWI noise complaints

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After more than a year of back and forth, Howard County officials said they are working with the Federal Aviation Administration to address residents' concerns about increased noise from Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport.

Residents said they are hearing increasing noise where it did not exist before, suggesting the noise is not an old issue expected near airports. In fact, noise complaints at BWI have more than doubled from 835 in 2014 to 1,849 last year.

The FAA plans to review possible plans for altitude changes and will jump-start a formal review with community input on the increased noise. The FAA plans to meet with the Maryland Aviation Administration and Howard County representatives in mid-September to determine how to address the issue.

The MAA and Howard County officials

— including members of County Executive Allan Kittleman's administration — believe NextGen, a new \$40 billion system to modernize the national air traffic control system that has riled communities across the country, is the source of the problem. Planes are flying and turning lower as a result of the changes, officials said.

But the FAA did not directly address whether or not the new system is responsible for the problem.

"There is a combination of factors that may have contributed to an increase in noise complaints including increased traffic volume and changes in fleet mix as well as changes in procedures," Arlene Salac, a spokeswoman for the FAA, wrote in a prepared statement.

Spurred by public outcry from residents in Columbia, Elkrige and Hanover, local officials pushed the FAA to immediately address "unacceptable" noise caused by NextGen. After limited correspondence, county officials demanded a meeting with the FAA, which was granted last week.

Councilman Jon Weinstein, a vocal proponent for addressing the issue, said he was cautiously optimistic about the FAA's commitment to improve communication between local and federal officials and start a community-input process to address noise.

"Their responsibility is the safety and efficiency of operations and airport. Quality of life is not their major concern," said Weinstein. "They understand there is crossover, but they make changes based on what they think will contribute to the safety and efficiency of the airport. We are helping them understanding that maintaining the quality of life should be a crucial part of their mission."

Weinstein said he and other elected officials requested that the FAA expedite its formal review process, which could take between a year and a half to two years.

County Council Chairman Calvin Ball, who also represents areas affected by the noise, said residents needed answers after limited communication from the federal

authorities.

"I'm hopeful they have heard our pleas for a return to the original flight plan while a true study can be conducted," said Ball after a meeting with the FAA last week.

Stephanie Bowie, a 33-year-old Hanover resident, said she was deeply concerned about how long it could take to resolve the issue.

"I love being near an airport for convenience, but we've talked about putting the house on the market. We bought it in 2002 and we've never had to deal with this kind of noise," said Bowie. "This is our family home. We wanted to grow into it."

Bowie, who regularly commutes by plane for work, stopped using BWI as her airport of choice.

"We're already behind the game in addressing this problem. The timeline needs to work faster."

The FAA will meet with local and state officials on Sept. 12 to finalize steps on how to address the issue.