

Senate Bill 184

University of Maryland, Baltimore-Study on the Health Effects of Air Traffic Noise

Liz Walsh

Howard County Councilmember

Support

Good afternoon. My name is Liz Walsh. I am a member of the Howard County Council and represent a part of the county that has been hard hit by plane noise from the NextGen highway in the sky. I am here today in support of SB 184, a bill to fund a much-needed study of the health impacts of air traffic noise post NextGen implementation. We are grateful to Dr. Lam for recognizing this issue and its consequences on the tens of thousands of people who live under this sky highway.

The members of the Howard County Council hear from constituents frequently about this issue; they are truly suffering from excessive noise exposure, everyday, 24/7. The newly concentrated flight path put into place over portions of Howard, Anne Arundel and Baltimore Counties goes directly over schools, parks, lakes and trails, wildlife areas, shopping, and affordable housing, as well as the most densely populated areas of Howard County. This is a serious widespread issue that must be addressed by our elected leaders.

In response to these concerns, the Howard County Council has passed both a bill and a resolution about this issue. Three years ago, the Council unanimously passed a bill authorizing the Office of Law to pursue legal action against the FAA for its failure to follow the federal rules prior to implementation of Next Gen; one year ago, an entirely new Council unanimously passed a resolution confirming our support of the County's legal actions. In addition, the County Council has appointed a Council member, Deb Jung, to directly represent the Council on the BWI Metroplex Roundtable. Excessive, frequent plane noise is an equal opportunity annoyance to everyone who is unfortunate enough to live under this sky highway, wreaking havoc on Republicans and Democrats alike. This is truly a nonpartisan issue.

Not only have local and state officials been addressing this issue, members of Congress just sent a letter to the FAA expressing their displeasure with NextGen and their concern about health and pollution concerns. Below is an excerpt from that correspondence:

The FAA claims that other operational benefits such as increased safety have also been achieved, but, according to the report, this claim remains unsubstantiated because the "FAA has not established a process to measure or track these additional operational benefits because it states these benefits are difficult to quantify." It is also important to note that the FAA has yet to quantify the harm to health and property that the NextGen program has created for residents and wildlife living beneath concentrated flight paths.

We are concerned that the NextGen program has failed to meet the bare minimum standards for success. Currently, the FAA continues to introduce and implement concentrated flight procedures with Performance Based Navigation throughout the country. The FAA boasts profits for airlines, shipping companies, and other industry stakeholders^[1], but the burden of noise, health risks, and declining property values falls on the backs of hard-working Americans. We urge the FAA to fast-track the development of new flight paths in all Metroplexes and at other airports with NextGen procedures that will significantly disperse air traffic and raise aircraft altitudes.

Researchers in the area of noise exposure have recognized the broad medical consequences of excessive noise for many years. High levels of exposure to aircraft noise have been linked to the development of serious physical and mental health conditions, including cardiovascular diseases and anxiety.¹

As one researcher noted,

WHO estimated that in high-income western European countries (population about 340 million people), at least 1 million healthy life-years (disability-adjusted life-years) are lost every year because of environmental noise ([figure 2](#)).²

Airplane noise is uniquely disruptive; it can be heavily tilted towards low frequencies and may not be appropriately assessed by regulations based on the A-weighting (Decibels). Moreover, low frequencies persist for longer distances and the amount of sound transmitted inside buildings is higher at low frequencies.

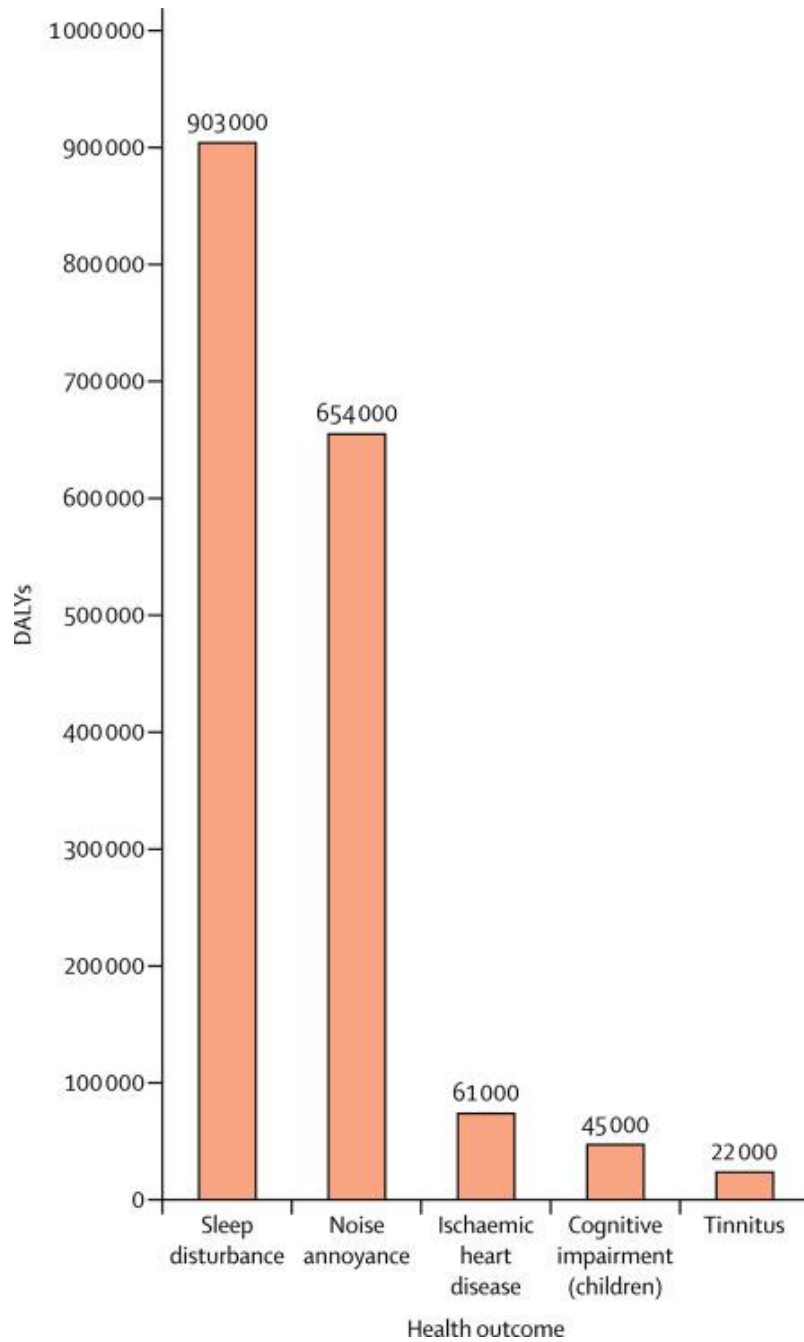
It is clear that airplane noise has negative consequences on human health. This bill will help us understand the myriad of impacts of NextGen, providing the State with the information it needs to address this issue.

¹ *“The Trade-off between Optimizing Flight Patterns and Human Health: A Case Study of Aircraft Noise in Queens, NY US”*

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, Zafar Zafari, Boshen Jiao, Brian Will, Shukai Li and Peter Alexander Muennig

² *Auditory and Non-Auditory Effects Of Noise On Health*

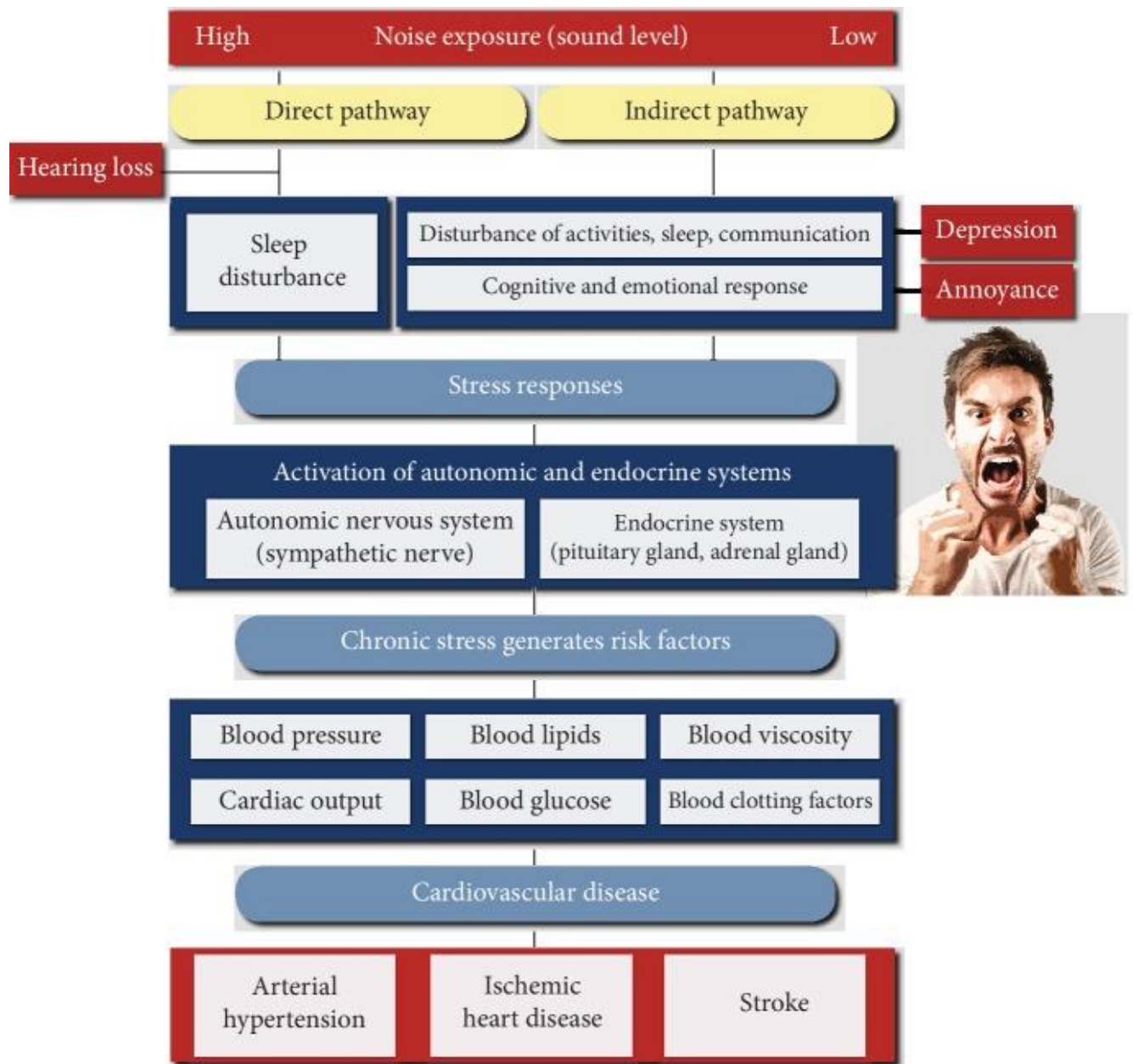
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Auditory and Non-Auditory Effects Of Noise On Health

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Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510
December 20, 2019

Hon. Stephen M. Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20591-0004

Dear Administrator Dickson:

We are writing on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Americans who continue to suffer the effects of the FAA's NextGen program.

As you know, since its introduction of Metroplexes in 2010, the FAA has concentrated flight paths over neighborhoods, schools, and national monuments in order to make the airspace more efficient. This heavy air traffic produces constant noise and particulate matter that has yet to be deemed safe by the FAA or any other government agency. The noise created by the frequency of flights – in some areas beginning before 6:00 a.m. and continuing every few minutes until midnight or later – has had a devastating impact on residents' quality of life. The FAA has yet to make any significant changes to the disruptive flight paths. In fact, communities, cities and states around the country, including in and around the District of Columbia, Phoenix, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Denver, New York, and the State of Maryland, have taken legal action as a result of the FAA's failure to adequately address community concerns.

A report by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General dated August 27, 2019 entitled *FAA Has Made Progress in Implementing Its Metroplex Program, but Benefits for Airspace Users Have Fallen Short of Expectations* raises serious questions about the efficacy of the FAA's NextGen program. Among these concerns are limited estimates of annual benefits, inaccurate information published by the FAA about the advantages of Performance Based Navigation, and inadequate documented evidence to measure progress.

According to the section of the report entitled "Metroplex Benefits to Airspace Users Have Fallen Well Short of Predictions, and There Is No Consensus on Actual Benefits Achieved," the FAA estimates that NextGen implementation has saved airlines only \$31.1 million annually, which is roughly half of its initial minimum estimate. Of the seven completed Metroplex locations, only one achieved fuel savings benefit expectations. Even more concerning, the FAA published conflicting information about these savings on its website. For example --

"[The] FAA has posted the benefits estimate of \$2.0 million from the design team for Northern California rather than the negative \$7.7 million benefits, even though this is a completed site. . . . Unclearly or inaccurately reporting Metroplex benefits limits Congress and the Department's ability to assess the progress of the program for purposes of providing and allocating funds, and industry stakeholders may not be able to rely on FAA reported benefits to effectively plan for the investments required to equip aircraft operating in the NAS [National Airspace System]."

The FAA claims that other operational benefits such as increased safety have also been achieved, but, according to the report, this claim remains unsubstantiated because the "FAA has not established a process to measure or track these additional operational benefits because it states these benefits are difficult to quantify." It is also important to note that the FAA has yet to quantify the harm to health and property that the NextGen program has created for residents and wildlife living beneath concentrated flight paths.

We are concerned that the NextGen program has failed to meet the bare minimum standards for success. Currently, the FAA continues to introduce and implement concentrated flight procedures with Performance Based Navigation throughout the country. The FAA boasts profits for airlines, shipping companies, and other industry stakeholders¹¹, but the burden of noise, health risks, and declining property values falls on the backs of hard-working Americans. We urge the FAA to fast-track the development of new flight paths in all Metroplexes and at other airports with NextGen procedures that will significantly disperse air traffic and raise aircraft altitudes.

We would appreciate your review of the enclosed report and a detailed timeline of your plan to implement procedures that will mitigate harm to the communities we represent. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator


Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

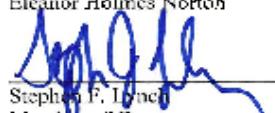

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Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress

¹¹Federal Aviation Administration, Fact Sheet – NextGen. (November 25, 2019).
https://www.faa.gov/news/fact_sheets/news_story.cfm?id=24434



Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress



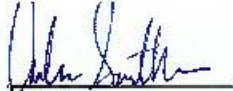
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