Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 12, 2014

Michael P. Huerta
Administrator
U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Huerta:

As Members of Congress who represent thousands of constituents negatively affected by airplane noise, we write to express our disappointment in the lack of progress on the part of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to address growing noise pollution in our districts and the negative effects noise pollution has on the health, well-being, and property values of our constituents. Rather than addressing this issue piecemeal in fragmented areas of the nation, we believe it is time for the FAA to tackle this issue on a national level by changing the standard by which it determines acceptable noise pollution. The current 65 decibel Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) metric is outdated and disconnected from the real impact that air traffic noise is having on our constituents and should be lowered to a more reasonable standard of 55 decibel DNL.

Although we represent different airports with unique regulations and operating procedures, we are united in our call for lowering the current 65 DNL metric. We believe the 65 DNL, which has been in place since the late 1970s, is no longer a reliable measure of the true impact of aircraft noise. Since the 65 DNL was instituted by the FAA in its Aviation Noise Abatement Policy of 1976, airplane traffic has increased dramatically and will continue to do so over the next two decades. The FAA's own Aerospace Forecast projects that revenue passenger miles—the standard for measuring commercial air traffic volume—will nearly double over the next twenty years. Similarly, the number of operations at FAA and contract towers is expected to increase by more than 45 percent from current levels.

It is not just our communities that question the FAA's use of the 65 DNL. Support for a lower DNL standard, specifically 55 DNL, originates from a 1974 report from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that was the beginning of a long line of studies – and a recent flurry of complaints – that support the need to lower the FAA's DNL standard. The FAA's use of 65 DNL may be based upon severe and immediate health impacts, but it is essential the FAA consider quality of life, long-term health impacts, home values and overall economic impact. As such, we urge the FAA to expedite its ongoing four-year-long review of the 65 DNL metric and institute overdue and much needed changes. Telling constituents that the FAA's study is not near completion after five years offers them cold comfort when jet noise is blanketing their communities.

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We also urge the FAA to utilize Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen) technologies to minimize airplane noise. NextGen technologies offer incredible benefits when used correctly, including increased safety and efficiency in air travel for the airline industry and its passengers. However, it appears that the FAA has not fully considered the consequences of NextGen's implementation on airplane noise levels. It is imperative that the FAA properly balance emission and noise concerns. This includes variations of daily flight routes, continuous descent approaches, and rapid ascents. We have seen success using continuous descent in some areas and hope you will institute a national policy to improve the NextGen implementation, with an emphasis on reaching 55 DNL nationally.

We understand that air travel is a key component of the U.S. economy, and we appreciate that commercial aircraft are quieter than ever. However, each day many of our constituents are subjected to unreasonable levels of airplane noise. Economic growth—and efficient, safe air travel—should not be incompatible with vibrant, livable neighborhoods. By lowering its DNL standard, the FAA will greatly improve the lives of our constituents. We stand ready to assist you in achieving this goal, and ask you to inform us how we can help you in this task.

We look forward to your response and thank you in advance for working to achieve this important goal.

Sincerely,

STEVE ISRAEL
Member of Congress

MIKE QUIGLEY
Member of Congress

GRACE MENG
Member of Congress

MICHAEL E. CAPUANO
Member of Congress

JUDY CHU
Member of Congress

KATHERINE CLARK
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