

Land Use Planning Near Airports

Air transport is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and by 2010 will be responsible for 33 million jobs and an annual gross output of US\$1,800 billion. Despite these benefits, the only land air transport uses is the land occupied by the airport itself. Proper management of the environmental impact on this land is important if air transport is to protect its future development. Unfortunately, aircraft noise in the vicinity of airports is still a legitimate problem in those locations where adequate attention has not been given to land-use planning.

Industry Efforts to Reduce Noise

The air transport industry has steadily reduced aircraft noise by using quieter aircraft and changing operational procedures whilst promoting effective land use control near airports.

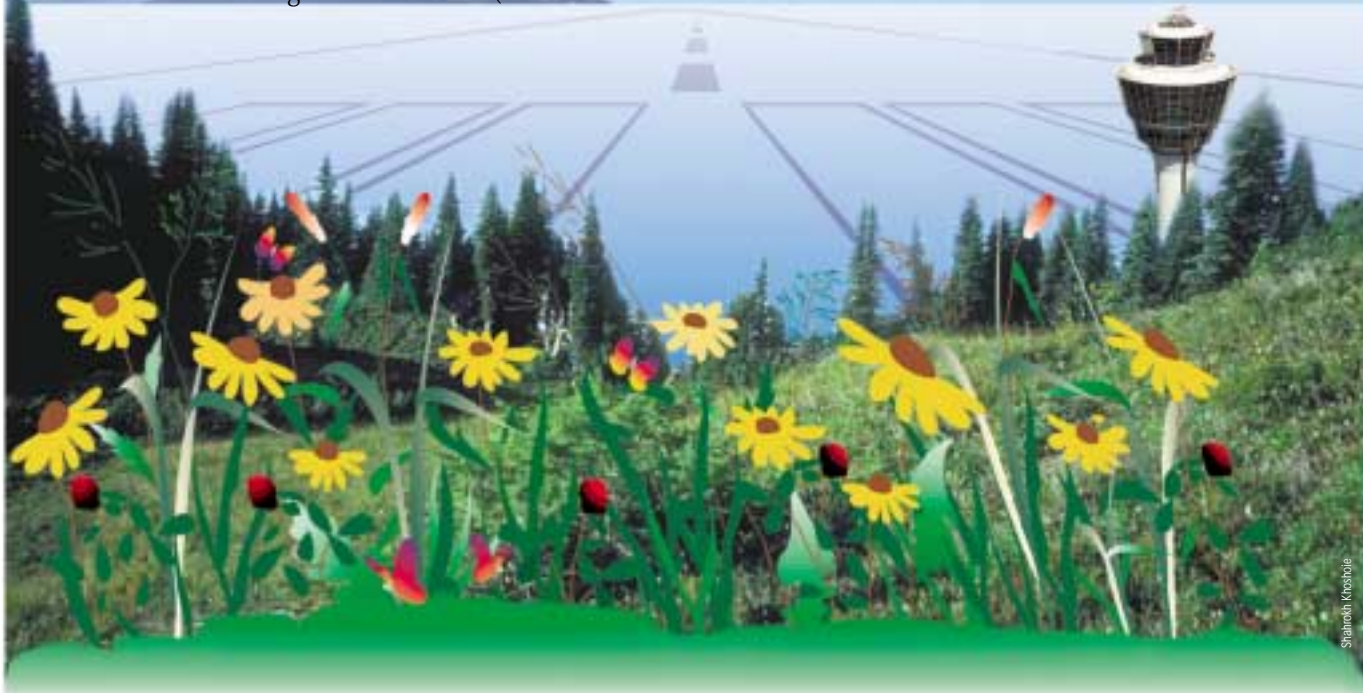
Airlines have invested in newer and quieter aircraft and there are now 11,000 of the quietest aircraft (referred to as Chapter 3*) in the world's fleets. On 1 January 2000, the remaining noisier aircraft (referred to as

Chapter 2) will be banned from operating in the USA and by 1 April 2002 they will cease operation in many other countries. Chapter 2 aircraft will either be upgraded to Chapter 3 standards or replaced by Chapter 3 aircraft. This progressive phase-in of quieter aircraft will lower overall noise levels near airports and reduce the number of people affected by such noise.

Airport authorities, airlines and manufacturers have also developed flight operational procedures which reduce noise levels, especially during the take-off and landing phases which most impact on communities.

Unfortunately, despite these efforts, technology is reaching its limits. Any additional reduction from aircraft modifications will be costly and slow in coming, and there are only so many improvements which can safely be made to aircraft operational procedures.

Schemes for provision of noise insulation and other community benefits are helping to make airports quieter neighbours. However, they are no substitute for proper zoning for residential accommodation.



Importance of Land Use Planning

Control of land use near airports is vital if the noise reductions already achieved are not to be offset by people moving closer to airports – and the noise. Future improvements will depend to a great extent on keeping noise-sensitive populations a certain distance away from airports and maintaining a quiet buffer zone which is kept free of residential, or other noise-sensitive development. This type of land use planning should be part of the airport master plan from the beginning to avoid problems in the future.

Need for Airport Involvement

Responsible land use planning also ensures room for airport capacity growth to meet future demand – growth that benefits the communities as well. Airports should be actively involved in land-use decisions near their facilities.

In the U. S., for example, whenever an airport develops a master plan, it must include land use provisions. This has reduced the type of environmental problems which plague other countries that are not so well prepared.

There are still many countries which do not have formal land use planning controls, or if they do, national, state and local governments are not working with airports when land use decisions are made. Some airports have no say in how surrounding land is used and can merely watch the buildings come up and wait for the noise complaints to come in. This sets the stage for opposition to future airport capacity expansion and hurts the very communities that are complaining.

Government Responsibility

The industry has done a great deal at great expense to reduce noise. It is time to share the burden of maintaining a safe, effective and efficient air transport system and not to simply point a finger at airports, airlines or manufacturers.

Government authorities must take responsibility for the proper use of land near airports.

Airport master plans should include land use provisions and airports must be consulted about land use decisions which could increase the number of people affected by noise and thus throw up barriers to future growth. Balanced land-use planning is necessary to ensure that the gains achieved by the reduction of noise at the source (i.e. aircraft) or through procedural changes are not offset by residents moving even closer to runways.

* “Chapter 3” refers to ICAO Annex 16 Volume I, noise certification which all jet transport aircraft in current production meet. Many older aircraft only meet the less stringent noise limits in Chapter 2 of this document.



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