

# Open Letter to the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, the U.S. House Subcommittee on Aviation, and the Congressional Quiet Skies Caucus



From:

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March 2, 2021

To:

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Rick Larson  
U.S. House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure  
Chair, Subcommittee: Aviation  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Co-Chair, Congressional Quiet Skies Caucus and senior member of the Aviation subcommittee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

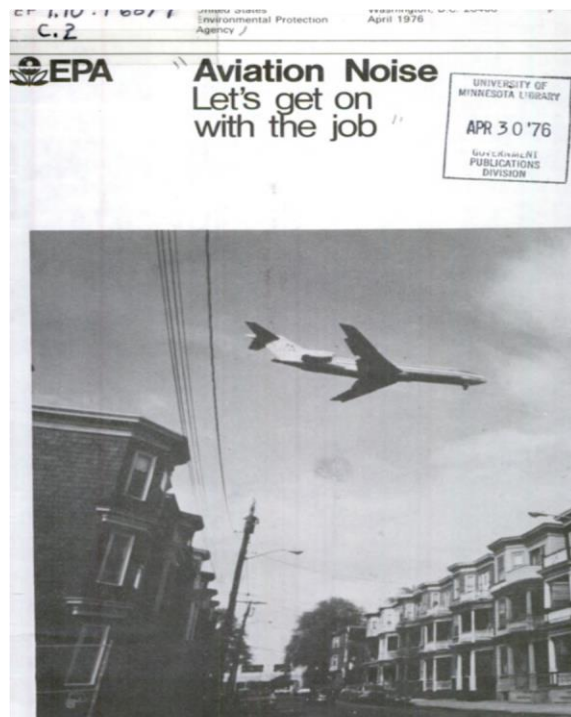
The Honorable Tom Suozzi  
Vice Co-Chair, Congressional Quiet Skies Caucus  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Buttigieg, Members of the Aviation subcommittee and Members of the Congressional Quiet Skies Caucus:

In 1976, EPA Administrator, Russell Train, delivered a speech, entitled "[Aviation Noise: Let's Get on with the Job](#)," noting that aviation noise was recognized as a national problem around 1940 and emphasizing the need for a safe, quiet, healthy air transport system. In 2021, the problem persists and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) continues to drag its feet.

Quiet Communities, Inc. (QCi) is a national 501c3 organization dedicated to helping communities reduce health and environmental harm from noise and pollution. QCi, Citizens for Quiet Skies, and citizens groups across the nation call for action *now* to reduce aviation noise and pollution that harm all Americans.

Decades of scientific evidence show that aviation noise causes annoyance, stress, and sleep disruption and adversely affects [cardiovascular health](#), mental health, learning, productivity, and quality of life ([Münzel, 2018](#); [Basner 2017](#)). These outcomes impose substantial economic costs to our Nation, for health care ([Correia, 2013](#)), lost productivity, and remedial learning. The relationship between noise and cardiovascular disease is well understood, involving elevations in stress hormones, blood pressure, heart rate, and other risk factors that raise the risks of stroke, ischemic heart disease, myocardial infarction, metabolic disturbances, and mortality ([Münzel,2020](#); [Hahad, 2019](#); [Münzel, 2018](#); [Basner, 2014](#)). low



*We really know what needs to be done. We have simply lacked the will to do it. Let's get on with the job.*  
Russell Train, EPA Administrator, 1976

frequency aviation noise is particularly hazardous ([Alves, 2020](#)). The FAA has acknowledged the detrimental effects of aviation noise on health and learning and spent hundreds of millions of dollars installing sound insulation in schools and residences. Although these measures are laudable, they are insufficient. Much more is needed. Research knowledge must constitute the core of American aviation policy to protect the health of the public ([Bronzaft, 2017](#)). We *do not* need more research to know that aviation noise is dangerous for human health and function. We *do* need to act now.

To date, attention has centered mainly on commercial aircraft and problems resulting from the NextGen program, affecting people living close to airports, under flight paths, as well as many miles away from airports. More attention needs to be paid to general aviation, new sources of pollution, and local accountability. Repetitive noisy flights -- including loitering and looping operations from flight training, skydiving, air tours, helicopters, cargo transportation, and recreational flying -- are stealing the peace from residential areas. [Annoyance levels](#) are high, subjecting citizens to harm ([Munzel, 2018](#)). Their impacts affect economically disadvantaged and isolated rural communities, as well as affluent communities. In the short term, effective regulations are needed. Over the longer term, fleets of noisy fossil fuel-powered craft must be replaced with craft powered with quiet, clean energy.

Citizens are denied a meaningful voice to mitigate these problems; there are no effective complaint processes, no mechanisms of redress, no programs for enforcement, and no real noise mitigation programs. Additionally, the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Act introduced two new kinds of aviation noise that, without careful regulation, will soon overrun communities across the Nation: vertiports hosting [eVOTL “air taxis”](#) and [drone deliveries](#).

We support legislation that will reduce excessive aviation noise and pollution. To that goal, we encourage the FAA to use alternative metrics, e.g., Number of aviation events over [a threshold dB], for assessing excessive aviation noise in areas affected by general aviation noise or noise from concentrated flight path procedures to and from commercial-service or cargo airports; and metrics that properly weight low frequency components. We also support dispersing flights where appropriate, and incentives to “Buy Quiet” by adopting quiet technology for both large and small aircraft.

We urge Congress to support recent bills addressing some of these concerns and introduce new legislation as necessary. These bills include, but are not limited to, the: 1) [Safe and Quiet Skies Act](#) (Rep. Case; [HR 4547](#), 2019, 2021) to impose safety requirements on commercial air tour flights, and for other purposes; and the [Improving Helicopter Safety Act](#) (Rep. Maloney; [HR 4880](#), 2019), a complementary bill to prohibit certain helicopter flights over major cities with high population densities; 2) [Fairness in Airspace Includes Residents Act](#) (Rep. Speier; [HR 5109](#), 2019) to add as co-equal and secondary priorities to safety, the efficient use of the airspace, the reduction of noise and health impacts in the community, and the reduction of other environmental impacts of aviation; 3) [Aircraft Noise Reduction Act](#) (Rep. Joe Neguse; [HR 5423](#), 2019 and 2017) to authorize owners or operators of general aviation airport sponsors to impose certain restrictions for the purpose of reducing noise; and 4) [HR 712](#) (Rep. Lynch, 2021) for a report on health impacts of air traffic noise and pollution.

America has the means and the technology to develop a safe, quiet, healthy air transportation system. This is essential to our Nation’s global competitiveness. We urge Congress to work with the FAA and stimulate innovation by enforcing the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 and to enact additional legislation that provides incentives for responsible behavior by manufacturers. For example, Boeing and General Electric must be held accountable for the tax subsidies they receive and be required to offer safer, quieter, non-polluting aircraft. Failure to reward or punish their behavior has allowed others, like EADS-Airbus, to lead an industry that was literally invented by Americans. The quieter, more efficient Airbus aircraft are stealing market share from American manufacturers. We need to accelerate the adoption of quieter, fuel efficient technology like US-based Pratt & Whitney’s [Geared Turbofan 1100](#), and encourage use of alternative energy where appropriate. Above all, airport sponsors must be granted explicit authority to adopt noise regulations, including limits on the number, type, and timing of operations, to protect the health and well-being of their communities and hold operators responsible.

We urge Congress to act now on EPA Administrator Russell Train’s 1976 statement, “It is time for all of us to come together, and to come to grips with the problem of aviation noise, and to build, at long last, an aviation system that is safe, healthy, and quieter.” Our Nation’s continued survival as a global leader depends on these changes to its leading export industry, changes that will also significantly improve health and quality of life for its citizens.

*We thank the following people for their assistance in preparing this letter: Daniel Fink, MD, David Sykes, MA, Tracy Williams; and others who provided well- informed suggestions.*

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