

Governor and Mayor's O'Hare Expansion Plan Built on Lies

CHICAGO—The Alliance of Residents Concerning O'Hare (AReCO) calls upon the residents of Illinois to hold Governor Ryan, Mayor Daley and the misguided business leaders liable for their extremely reckless plans to massively expand flights at O'Hare Airport. They must be held accountable for their failure to protect the millions of people in the Chicago area whose health, safety, and welfare are seriously harmed by the cancer-causing and otherwise toxic air pollution, noise, water, and other ground-level pollution from airport and aircraft operations at O'Hare.^{i ii}

The O'Hare expansion plan is built on at least five major lies: 1) the Governor's cynical attempt to pass off the O'Hare expansion plan as harmless by claiming he will "cap" flights at 1.1 million, or more recently, at 1.2 million flights per year; 2) the Governor's claim that he has the legal authority to "cap" flights; 3) that to massively increase flights at O'Hare would be "safe"; 4) that the O'Hare expansion plan will "fix" delays; and 5) that the purpose of spending billions of dollars to build new and to modify runways at O'Hare, each of which could accommodate hundreds of thousands of additional flights each year, is to add only 50,000 - 150,000 more flights per year.

Ryan, in addition to breaking his campaign promise that he is "...against any new runway, modification of an existing runway or adding any more flights at O'Hare Airport"ⁱⁱⁱ, lied about the current number of flights each year at O'Hare. Prior to September 11th, O'Hare was already handling 2,800 to 2,900 flights a day, which is very close to his 1.1 million per year alleged "cap" level. The Governor also lied about being able to "cap" flights: no level of government in the U.S. currently has any real legal authority to "cap" the number of flights at any airport because of the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978, and Congress just removed the last remaining legal authority over the numbers of flights at O'Hare, the "High Density Rule," in order to increase flights.^{iv}

The Governor's name for the O'Hare expansion plan, "Safe Airports for the Economy," is also a lie. The current level of over 1.7 million flights annually saturating O'Hare's Class "B" Airspace (within a 25 mile radius of O'Hare) causes a very high level of congestion in the airspace, and the proposed increase to more than 2.5 million flights would be unacceptably dangerous to human life both in the air and on the ground.^v Four of Illinois' busiest airports, Midway, O'Hare, DuPage, and Palwaukee, plus several smaller general aviation airports, are located within the same class "B" Airspace, and they are also projected to increase operations. It is now almost commonplace to witness evasive action between aircraft in the area. AReCO's investigation has revealed that no studies have been done to determine whether the density of O'Hare's Airspace should be additionally regulated for safety by setting density limits. To increase the number of planes in O'Hare's Airspace would be an accident waiting to happen.

Expanding airports does not “fix” flight delays. The air transport industry manufactured the delays themselves prior to September 11 to market airport expansion, through over-scheduling, removal of the high-density rule, and other schemes. If there were delays today, they could be fixed through re-instituting the high-density rule, demand-management practices, stopping the airlines’ over-scheduling, and other management methods. Further, one source, Patricia Friend, President of the Association of Flight Attendants International, stated that prior to September 11, the industry was in an “over-capacity situation” -- that is, because of poor management decisions, the airlines expanded beyond what the passenger demand was. Clearly, there was no need for airport expansion then, nor is there need for it now. September 11 and the multi-billion dollar taxpayer bailout which the industry demanded afterward proved that the industry was and is not financially stable enough to fund any airport expansions. Now, because of the airlines’ severe financial mismanagement, and Ryan and Daley’s and a couple of other cities’ refusal to put their expansion plans on hold, the only reasonable conclusion is that the taxpayers will wind up paying to fund these airport expansions for use by these private corporations.

The true purpose of spending billions of dollars to build new and to modify runways at O’Hare, each of which could accommodate hundreds of thousands of additional flights each year, can not possibly be to add only 50,000 - 200,000 more flights per year as Ryan claims, but is to allow for a massive increase of flights – possibly more than twice the amount of flights we have now. Right now, Chicago is the most polluted urban area in the United States.^{vi} The noise and toxic pollution from such an additional, massive number of flights would make Chicago and the region close to unlivable.

In addition to the significant and very disturbing impacts that aircraft have on our upper atmosphere, the Governor is well aware that the real issue is the very serious public health problems caused by aircraft and airport operations, mainly from hazardous and toxic air emissions, which include known human carcinogens, as well as the safety and security problems that continued airport expansion could only make worse. Perhaps millions in the Chicago area already suffer harm from airport and aircraft air toxic pollution. The aviation industry’s pollutants are largely unregulated, and its vast, adverse public health and environmental impacts include: harm to our children’s health, learning, and development, increased cancers, respiratory disease and asthma, brain tumors, and scores of other diseases from the staggering amounts and various types of toxic and carcinogenic air, ground-level, and water pollution emitted by airports and aircraft around major population centers.^{vii}

Further, Governor Ryan, Mayor Daley, and the Federal Aviation Administration (“FAA”) grossly undercount the number of people whose health and quality of life is harmed by airport and aircraft noise from O’Hare operations and from other airports nationwide -- 500,000 -- by using an unscientific measurement to describe severe noise. Even using the air industry’s unscientific, quantitative evidence demonstrates that well over 600,000 people are adversely affected by the noise from O’Hare’s operations^{viii}.

“It’s all about politics and money, not safety, health, security and potential loss of life. Because the Governor and Mayor are aware of this, they and some callous, expansionist business leaders need to be held accountable for any and all harm caused by their extremely reckless O’Hare expansion plans,” stated Jack Saporito, Executive Director of the Alliance of Residents Concerning O’Hare.

The horrible tragedies of September 11 present a unique opportunity to bring balance and modernization to our whole transportation system. Instead of continuing to throw good money after bad into the air transportation system, which proved to be so highly fragile by the September 11th aftermath, the public policy makers should now put into place a balanced transportation system which includes a world-class, high-speed rail system. There are better alternatives to manage and expand Chicago’s transportation system than to continually expand airports: re-instate the high-density rule, develop intermodal high-speed rail transport, build new airports removed from urban populations, extend demand-management strategies, and develop innovative options such as business video-conferencing. To really stimulate our economy, Washington, Illinois and Chicago should now undertake a major public works transportation project – build a real high-speed rail system that would not only balance our transportation system but would turn our economy around from recession into one that thrives again.
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EDITOR’S NOTE: The Alliance of Residents Concerning O’Hare (AReCO) is a not-for-profit organization of individuals and families, living in 41 communities including the city of Chicago that are affected by O’Hare Airport operations. www.areco.org

CONTACT: Jack Saporito, **(847) 506-0670**

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ City of Park Ridge, et. al. “Preliminary study and analysis of toxic air pollutant emissions from O’Hare International Airport and the resulting health risks created by these toxic emissions in surrounding residential communities.” August 2000. The “O’Hare Airport Toxic Air Study” shows unacceptable cancer risks from O’Hare Airport air emissions, which affect 98 communities in about a 32-mile radius of the airport, including Chicago proper. (Study does not include flight tracks).

ⁱⁱ Travel Agent Magazine: In the News. Aug. 9, 1999. p. 99. 70% of the population in the U.S. lives within 20 miles of a major airport.

ⁱⁱⁱ Governor Ryan’s letter. www.areco.org

^{iv} See, for example, FAA Record of Decision, Chicago Terminal Airspace Project, Nov. 2, 2001, p. 33: “The FAA has no vehicle in place whereby they can cap the number of flights at O’Hare.”

^v Alliance of Residents Concerning O’Hare/ US-Citizens Aviation Watch Association Testimony to Governor Ryan. Sept. 4, 2001.

^{vi} Weinhold, Robert S. *Rating Guide to Environmentally Healthy Metro Areas*. Animas Press. Durango, CO. 1997.

^{vii} See: www.areco.org , “Health”, *Did you ever wonder what blows out of a jet airplane? Also, What symptoms can occur with prolonged exposure to these chemicals?*

STUDY CITATIONS:

^{viii} McCulley, Frick and Gilman Inc. Air Quality Survey Final Result January 1995, pp.26,27,36.

² EPA. Toxics Emissions from Aircraft Engines. Air RISC Information Support Center. July 22, 1993, p.13.

³ McCartney, M. Airplane Emissions Department of Environmental Health Sciences. 21 April 1986, p.99.

⁴ VIGYAN Inc. USEPA Estimation and Evaluation of Cancer Risks Attributed to Air Pollution in Southwest Chicago Final Summary Report. Region 5 Air and Radiation Division. April, 1993.

⁵ Lewis, R.A. Hazardous Chemical Desk Reference. 2nd Edition. 1991. Van Nostrand Reinhold.

⁶ Puget Sound Air Pollution Control Agency. 1993 Air Quality Data Summary. p.62.

^{viii} 600,000 airport affected-citizens represent only a limited amount of communities that monitor noise in the Chicagoland area. It is estimated that over 1.6 million people are located in the 65 DNL of Chicago's O'Hare Airport. The FAA claims that they have substantially reduced the airport noise problem to "only 500,000 people" who are "significantly impacted," mostly near the very largest airports in Chicago, New York, and New Jersey.