U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., SW.
Washington, DC 20591

April 14, 2020

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman, Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter transmits the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) report to Congress on an evaluation of alternative noise metrics as directed by Senate Appropriations Report 116-109 (pg. 42) for fiscal year 2019 and the requirements of Section 188, "Study regarding day-night average sound levels", of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 (the Act) (Pub. L. 115-254).

Section 188 of the Act directed the FAA to submit a report evaluating alternative noise metrics to the current average day-night level standard to the appropriate Congressional committees. While not directed by the Act to include as a report, the information contained in the document also fulfills the FAA's response to Section 173.

We look forward to continued collaboration with your staff and would be happy to schedule time to brief you further if desired.

We have sent identical letters to Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Ranking Member Graves.

Sincerely,

Steve Dickson
Steve Dickson
Administrator

U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
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Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., SW.
Washington, DC 20591

April 14, 2020

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
Chairman, Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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800 Independence Ave., SW.
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April 14, 2020

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell:

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800 Independence Ave., SW.
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April 14, 2020

The Honorable Sam Graves
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Graves:

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Sincerely,

Steve Dickson
Administrator

Federal Aviation Administration

Report to Congress

FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-254) Section 188 and Sec 173

April 14, 2020

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Since its inception, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has worked to better understand, quantify, and address noise concerns from aircraft. As part of this effort, various noise metrics have been developed over several decades of research to inform federal policies. As will be discussed in this report, no single metric can cover all situations due to the dynamic acoustical and operational characteristics of aviation noise. The appropriate use of noise modeling and noise measurement will also be reviewed and the context in which each are applicable are discussed.

Congress directed an evaluation of alternative metrics in Senate Appropriations Report 116-109 (pg. 42) for fiscal year 2019 and the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-254) requested the FAA to provide this report in response to **Sec. 188:** ***Study regarding day-night average sound levels. Within 1 year the Administrator shall evaluate alternative metrics to current average day-night level standard, such as use of actual noise sampling to address community airplane noise concerns.***

While not directed to include in a report, the information contained in this document also fulfills the FAA's response to **Sec. 173:** ***Alternative airplane noise metric evaluation. Within 1 year complete the ongoing evaluation of alternative metrics to the current Day Night Level (DNL) 65 standard.***

2. Purpose of Noise Metrics for Environmental Regulation and Policy

This section introduces the topic of noise and the FAA's use of noise metrics for environmental regulation and policy. "Noise" is defined as unwanted sound. The term "noise metric" refers to a type of noise measurement or noise descriptor. Sound itself is a complex phenomenon, which varies in level over time as well as frequency content.[1] Therefore, many noise metrics exist in order to capture and include the various aspects of sound; no single noise metric can cover all situations. The FAA uses noise metrics for two primary purposes:

1. To assess community noise exposure through requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other related noise programs like 14 CFR Part 150.
2. To assess aircraft certification through 14 CFR Part 36.

The noise metrics used for each of these purposes are different as they address different characteristics of noise as will be described below.

2.1 Community Noise Exposure

Community responses to noise vary from person to person, even if noise levels do not change. However, changes in noise exposure affect individual and community responses, and substantial increases in man-made noise can have a negative impact. Consequently, it is

[1] Frequency content refers to the timbre of a sound, often comprised of a collection of pitches, or frequencies.

important to understand which characteristics of noise cause a negative response and how exposure to noise with those characteristics affects people's lives.

In order to reflect human response to sound equitably across communities, a meaningful metric or set of metrics should:

- Have a highly reliable relationship between noise exposure and people's response to noise.
- Consistently be applied uniformly in communities surrounding airports.
- Account for noise level, duration, and time of occurrence.

The Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) incorporates all of these elements and is the metric FAA uses to inform environmental decision making for noise.

As stated in the previous section, "noise" is unwanted sound in a community. However, individual expectations regarding noise may vary based on different factors, including whether the community is in a quiet rural area or a bustling downtown city. For example, a new, potentially intrusive noise may generally be more noticeable in a quiet rural area compared to an urban environment, even though the overall noise levels can be higher in an urban environment. Thus, the ambient (or background) sound level affects how people perceive new noise sources. "Ambient" sound is defined as the existing acoustic environment to which a potential intrusive sound is being compared. Figure 1[2] shows typical existing ambient sound levels (i.e., Day-Night Average Sound Level [DNL]; see Section 3 for a discussion of DNL) ranging from a "small town residential area" to a "downtown city."

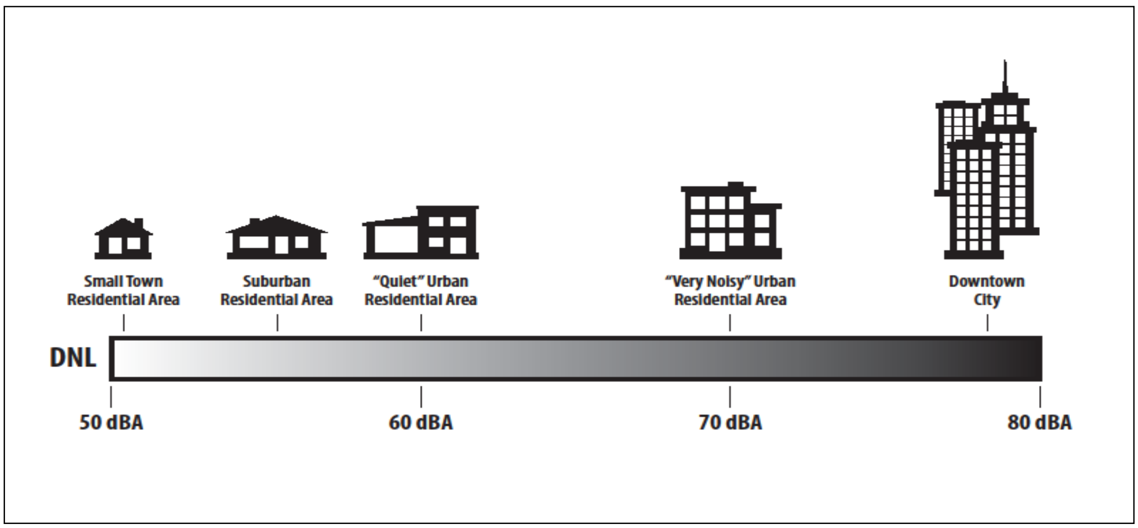

Figure 1. Typical Day-Night Average Sound Levels

Common community noise sources include sources inside and outside of buildings. For example, a person indoors can experience the noise from vacuum cleaners, air conditioners, televisions, etc. Example sources of outdoor noise entering a house include lawn mowers, vehicular traffic, railroads, and aircraft. A new, potentially intrusive noise source can range from acceptable to unacceptable depending on a number of factors, including the following:

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[2] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 1974. Information on Levels of Environmental Noise Requisite to Protect Public Health and Welfare with an Adequate Margin of Safety.

- Magnitude of the noise level relative to ambient sound levels.
- Character of the noise.
- Number, time of day, and elapsed time of noise events.

For these reasons, a metric responsive to cumulative noise exposure over the full range of aircraft operational conditions is most appropriate to assess community noise exposure.

2.2 Aircraft Certification

The purpose of the noise certification process is to ensure that the latest available safe and airworthy noise reduction technology is incorporated into new aircraft designs, thereby minimizing aircraft noise levels experienced by communities.

The Federal Aviation Administration applies noise certification standards to regulate the maximum noise level that an individual civil aircraft can emit. The United States aircraft noise standards are defined in the Code of Federal Regulations Title 14 Part 36 – Noise Standards: Aircraft Type and Airworthiness Certification (14 CFR Part 36). Rigorous noise measurement procedures are used in the aircraft certification process. For aircraft certification, single aircraft event metrics are most appropriate for finding compliance. In the case of U.S. large airplane and helicopter regulations, the increased designation by "stage" for such applicable standards are an indication of noise stringency increases that lower the maximum allowable noise levels.

As noise reduction technology matures, the FAA works with the international community to determine if a new stringent noise standard is appropriate. If so, the international community, through the International Civil Aviation Organization's Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection, embarks on a comprehensive analysis to determine a new noise standard.

The FAA publishes certificated noise levels in the advisory circular, "Noise Levels for U.S Certificated and Foreign Aircraft." This advisory circular provides noise level data for aircraft certificated under 14 CFR Part 36 and categorizes aircraft into their appropriate "stages." Any aircraft that is certified for airworthiness in the U.S. must comply with noise standard requirements to receive a type certificate.

3. Noise Metrics Acoustic Background and History

3.1 Background on Acoustical Frequency Weighting

Many metrics used to predict or describe noise effects corresponding to the human response to noise rely on A-weighting to express the spectral (frequency) content of noise as a single-valued number. First identified in the 1933 Fletcher-Munson curves,[3] the A-weighting network intentionally focuses on frequencies in the mid-range and is less influenced by both low and high frequency sounds. A-weighted noise levels correspond better to human response to noise[4] than do other weightings.

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[3] Fletcher, H. and W.A. Munson. 1933. Loudness, Its Definition, Measurement and Calculation. Journal of the Acoustical Society of America. Volume V. October.
[4] Federal Railroad Administration. 2012. High-Speed Ground Transportation Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment. U.S. Department of Transportation. Office of Railroad Policy and Development. DOT/FRA/ORD-12/15. September.

The A-weighting network was originally developed for sounds of relatively low level. Additional B- and C-weighting networks were developed for application to sounds of increasing absolute level. The B-weighting network had little use in noise analyses, however, and was eventually dropped from the sound level meter standard. Figure 2[5] shows the frequency response characteristics of A- and C-weighting.

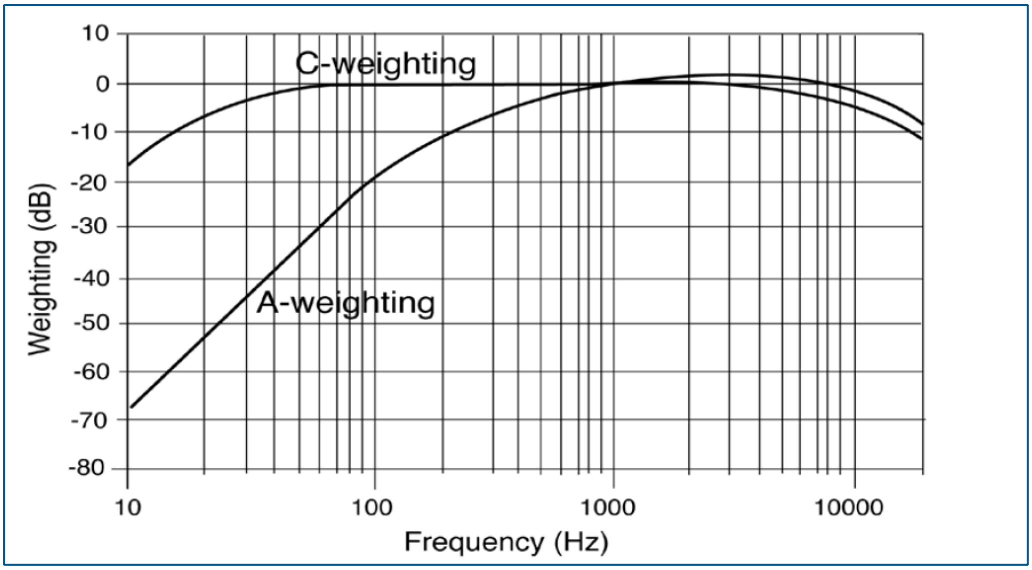

Figure 2. Frequency Response Characteristics of A- and C-Weighting.

The rationale for favoring A-weighted noise metrics can be traced to the very first community noise survey,[6] and for the convenience of manufacturing analog sound level meters. Modern digital sound level meters can easily measure sound with various weightings and/or at individual frequencies.

In some cases, no weighting is used, which is referred to as a “linear” decibel value, and simply denoted dB.

C-weighting (dBC) is currently used for certain applications, such as loud, impulsive noise or noise sources with substantial low frequency content (e.g., sonic booms, commercial space launches, or artillery ranges). C-weighting has essentially little to no weighting between 31.5 hertz (Hz) and 8 kilohertz (kHz), and thus is similar to a “linear” decibel (dB) value.

Measurement of sound includes both frequency and temporal characteristics. Various frequency weightings, such as A-weighting as previously discussed, allow sound measurements with different frequency or spectral content to be represented by a single number.

The time varying nature of sound levels can be characterized by cumulative and single event metrics. Maximum sound level over a given time interval (L_{max}) can be measured as well, but depending on how much levels vary, the L_{max} may not be representative of longer-duration measurements.

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[5] ANSI S1.4 -1983 “Specification of Sound Level Meters.”

[6] Fletcher, H., A.H. Beyer, and A.B. Duel. 1930. “Noise Measurement,” in City Noise, Report of the Noise Abatement Commission, Department of Health, City of New York.

3.2 History of Modern Noise Metrics

The framework of modern noise metrics (including DNL) can be traced back to the Composite Noise Rating (CNR) of the 1950s.[7,8,9] The CNR began in a form where aircraft noise spectra[10] were compared to reference spectra at various levels. The CNR included adjustments for time of day, ambient conditions, and other factors. By the 1960s, the CNR had evolved into the Noise Exposure Forecast (NEF)[11] which accounted for multiple noise events. These early noise metrics were later replaced due to the acknowledgement of the need to account for noise level, duration, the number of noise events, and time of day.

The effort to develop a noise metric to evaluate noise in the vicinity of an airport began in California in 1969 with the adoption of Public Utilities Code Section 21669:

> *The department [of Aeronautics] shall adopt noise standards governing the operations of aircraft and aircraft engines for airports operating under a valid permit issued by the department to an extent not prohibited by federal law. The standard shall be based upon the level of noise acceptable to a reasonable person residing in the vicinity of the airport.*

In 1970, the California Aeronautics Board adopted the community noise equivalent level (CNEL) as the measurement of an airport's "noise footprint."[12]

In 1972, Congress passed the Noise Pollution and Abatement Act (commonly referred to as the Noise Control Act), which directed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to coordinate the programs of all federal agencies relating to noise research and noise control and to publish information on the levels of environmental noise necessary to protect the public health and welfare with an adequate margin of safety;[13] however, the authority to manage aviation noise was retained by the FAA. In 1974, EPA, in its "Levels"[14] document, recommended DNL (also expressed as L_{dn}) as the best metric to describe the effects of environmental noise in a simple, uniform and appropriate way. DNL replaced or supplemented earlier noise metrics, including CNEL, for federal purposes.

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[7] Rosenblith, W.A., K.N. Stevens, and the staff of Bolt, Beranek, and Newman. 1953. Handbook of Acoustic Noise Control, Vol. 2, Noise and Man. USAF Report WADC TR-52-204.

[8] Stevens, K.N., W.A. Rosenblith, and R.H. Bolt. 1953. Neighborhood Reaction to Noise: A Survey and Correlation of Case Histories (A). *J. Acoust. Soc. Am.* Vol 25(833).

[9] Stevens, K.N., and A.C. Pietrasanta. 1957. Procedures for Estimating Noise Exposure and Resulting Community Reactions from Air Base Operations. USAF Report WADC TN 57-10.

[10] "Spectra" refers to a frequency spectrum which typically includes the magnitude of individual frequencies from 31.5 hertz to 20 kilohertz. Hertz is equivalent to cycles/second.

[11] Bishop, D., and M.A. Simpson. 1970. Noise Exposure Forecast Contours for 1967, 1970 and 1975 Operations at Selected Airports. DOT/FAA Office of Noise Abatement, FA68WA-1900. September. BBN Report No. 1863.

[12] CNEL is still in use in California; FAA recognizes it as an alternative metric and has allowed California airports to present annual noise exposure in terms of CNEL, rather than DNL, for consistency with state protocols.

[13] Congress discontinued funding for the EPA Noise Office in 1981.

[14] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Noise Abatement and Control, *Information on Levels of Environmental Noise Requisite to Protect Public Health and Welfare with an Adequate Margin of Safety* (Mar. 1974).

In 1979, Congress passed the Aviation Safety and Noise Abatement Act (ASNA), which required the FAA to establish:

(a) A single system of measuring noise, for which there is a highly reliable relationship between projected noise exposure and surveyed reactions of people to noise, to be uniformly applied in measuring noise at airports and the areas surrounding such airports; and

(b) A single system for determining the exposure of individuals to noise which results from the operations of an airport and which includes, but is not limited to, noise intensity, duration, and time of occurrence.[15]

Taking into consideration existing information on noise metrics, in 1981, in accordance with ASNA, the FAA adopted DNL as its standard metric. The FAA uses the DNL metric for purposes of determining an individual's cumulative noise exposure and for land use compatibility under 14 CFR part 150. The FAA also uses DNL for assessing the significance of predicted noise impacts under NEPA.

4. Noise Metrics Overview

This section provides background on the range of noise metrics most commonly used for evaluations of transportation noise or for other related purposes. Sections 5 and 6 will then introduce where these metrics are in active use by the FAA or other agencies for regulatory purposes.

4.1 Cumulative Metrics

Cumulative noise metrics consider both the sound level and the duration, and are useful in quantifying long-term community noise exposure. Depending on the situation, different length of time periods, such as hourly, daily or annual can be considered by cumulative metrics.

The following are examples of cumulative noise metrics.

Level Equivalent (L_{eq})

The Level Equivalent (L_{eq}) is the equivalent continuous sound level in decibels, equivalent to the total sound energy measured over a stated period of time. L_{eq} is essentially the average sound level during the measurement interval and takes into account the cumulative effect of multiple noise events.

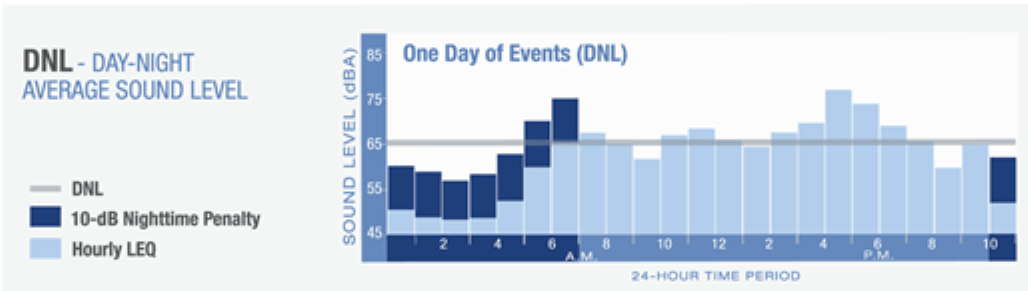
Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL)

The DNL noise metric captures all the acoustic energy within a 24-hour period, adding a 10 dB penalty between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. to account for people's increased sensitivity to noise at night. Night-time ambient sound levels are often approximately 10 dB lower than daytime sound levels, so the 10 dB adjustment can also be thought of as

[15] 49 U.S.C. § 47502(1)(A)(B), (2), (3).

compensating for this drop-in sound level. DNL is usually expressed in terms of A-weighted sound levels, but other frequency weightings can be used, such as C-weighting (i.e., CDNL).

DNL represents an average day of hourly weighted Leq noise levels as shown in the schematic below.



DNL is also most often considered commutatively over an Average Annual Day and provides a consolidated summary of the annual noise exposure. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) comments[16] on the appropriateness of the annual average DNL with respect to long-term community noise exposure: "Ordinarily, land-uses are long-term, continuing nature, and the yearly day-night average sound level is appropriate for these land uses. For other land uses, compatibility is to be assessed by the average sound level during the time interval of interest for the land use involved."

Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL)

The Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) metric, used in California[17], is similar to the DNL metric, but in addition to the 10 dBA nighttime penalty, it also adds a 4.77 dBA penalty for sound levels occurring during the evening hours (7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.).

4.2 Single Event Metrics

Single event metrics focus attention on the noise attributes of individual noise events such as an aircraft flyover.

Sound Exposure Level (SEL)

The SEL metric captures all the acoustic energy of a noise event and normalizes it as if the event occurred in one second. The SEL takes into account both sound level and duration, and therefore allows direct comparison between two different noise events with different durations and/or sound level. The SEL (in conjunction with number of daytime and nighttime noise events) also can be used to calculate DNL.

Maximum Sound Level (L_{max})

Maximum sound level (L_{max}) is the maximum sound level measured within a desired measurement interval.

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[16] "Sound Level Descriptors for Determination of Compatible Land Use" (ANSI S12.40-1990).
[17] CNEL may be used in lieu of DNL for assessment of FAA actions in California.

4.3 Operational-Acoustic Metrics

"Operational-Acoustic" refers to metrics such as Number-above (NA), Time-above (TA), and Time-audible. These types of metrics include non-acoustic information, such as number of aircraft or time elapsed exceeding a certain noise level threshold. This type of metric is a linear measure (as opposed to logarithmic), which in some situations can aid in providing supplemental noise information to the public. Contours (isopleths) of these of Operational-Acoustic metrics can be superimposed on maps showing noise level contours from acoustic metrics, such as DNL.

Number-above (NA)

The NA metric combines single event noise level information with aircraft movement data. NA contours commonly show the number of aircraft above a given noise level threshold over a specified time period (e.g., 70 dBA and 24 hours).

Time-above (TA)

The TA noise metric measures the total time, or percentage of time, that the A-weighted aircraft noise level exceeds an indicated level. TA correlates linearly with the number of flight operations and is also sensitive to changes in fleet mix.

Time-audible

The Time-audible metric quantifies the duration at which noise from a transient noise source occurs at a noise level greater than the existing ambient noise level. The noise source must also be detectable by a human observer with normal hearing, who is actively listening.

This metric is highly dependent upon an accurate representation of ambient sound levels, both temporally and geo-spatially. For example, a listener's particular location and time at that location would need accurate and reliable ambient sound level data for comparison with accurate aircraft noise levels. For these reasons, the Time-audible metric can be difficult to represent accurately in areas with dynamic or variable ambient noise levels.

For typical vehicle noise levels, this metric is most applicable for projects within or involving noise sensitive areas at very low and constant ambient noise levels, such as national parks. Low and constant ambient noise levels are desired because this metric is most sensitive where the source noise is distinguishable from the ambient noise.

4.4 Low Acoustic Frequency Noise Metrics

Pounds Per Square Foot (PSF): A direct measure of the peak overpressure from an acoustical event. Most often considered for high intensity noise events where structural concerns are relevant.

C-weighted SEL (CSEL) and C-Weighted DNL (CDNL): Analogous to SEL and DNL, but incorporates a C-weighting to be more responsive to lower acoustic frequency noise. CSEL is the recommended[18] metric for evaluating human response to sonic booms.

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[18] National Research Council. 1981. Assessment of Community Response to High-Energy Impulsive Noises. Report of CHABA Working Group 84, W. J. Galloway, Chairman.

5. Noise Metrics in use by FAA

As introduced in section 3.2, the DNL noise metric was adopted by FAA to meet the requirements established by ASNA and codified in 14 CFR Part 150. DNL is also used by the FAA in making determinations for Federal Actions it assesses under NEPA as specified under FAA Order 1050.1F. The DNL metric is an example of a cumulative A-weighted[19] noise metric and represents the exposure level over a complete 24-hour period. DNL accounts for the noise level of each individual aircraft event, the number of times those events occur, and the time of day/night in which they occur. DNL includes a 10 decibel[20] (dB) noise penalty added to noise events occurring from 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. to reflect the increased human sensitivity to noise and lower ambient sound levels at night. To ensure that all of the variable operational conditions over the course of a year are considered, FAA considers the Average Annual Day when calculating DNL[21]. Average Annual Day DNL is used to assess noise from all fixed wing and rotorcraft aircraft in both the vicinity of airports and in the extended airspace.

In addition to regulation of aircraft operations, the FAA's Office of Commercial Space Transportation issues licenses to operate non-federal launch sites and to operate launch vehicles. Commercial space launch vehicles typically produce two different types of noise: launch noise (from rocket engines) and sonic booms (generated during supersonic flight). Launch noise can be assessed using several different noise metrics. The DNL metric has been used for commercial space projects for public disclosure and because the FAA uses the DNL metric when determining significance under NEPA, but its suitability is uncertain primarily because of the relatively small number of noise events (i.e., launches per year). CSEL and CDNL may also be considered in some cases for commercial space noise evaluations.

While DNL is used for all FAA noise-based decision-making purposes, the FAA encourages the use of other supplemental metrics as a communication tool to highlight unique situations where applicable. Section 8 will discuss the use of noise metrics for supplemental purposes.

6. Noise Metrics in use by U.S. and State Government (outside FAA)

Federal and state agencies other than the FAA employ similar noise metrics to evaluate a project's noise impacts. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Surface Transportation Board (STB), and U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) also employ the DNL metric to determine Land Use Policy according to Federal Land Use Policy guidelines. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) primarily uses the L_{eq} metric while the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) use both L_{eq} and DNL metrics. Daytime L_{eq} metrics are typically used for activities with little or no nighttime activity, while DNL is used to account for daytime and nighttime activity.

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[19] A-weighted metrics weight the acoustic frequency of noise to approximate that of human hearing.
[20] The decibel (dB) is a logarithmic relationship of sound pressure levels, which is designed to collapse a large range of pressure values into a more manageable range. A 10-dB increase is perceived as a doubling of loudness, while a 3-dB increase is perceived as just noticeable to most people.
[21] Average Annual Day DNL may also be noted as Yearly DNL or YDNL

It is important to draw a distinction between a particular noise metric and any accompanying noise threshold values (in decibels) used to inform project or policy determinations. Determinations of threshold values depend on multiple technical and policy considerations that, while related to the choice of noise metric, require separate consideration.

The following examples illustrate how different agencies and departments apply various noise metrics.

6.1 Level Equivalent (L_{eq}) Metric

FHWA uses the loudest one-hour L_{eq}[22] to assess impacts associated with highway noise. FHWA's impact criteria for residential receptors has been 67 dBA (L_{eq}) (or 70 dBA L_{10}) at exterior use areas since 1976. In many cases, highway noise levels peaking in the range of 66 dBA (L_{eq}) often are in the range of 65 DNL if measured over a 24-hour period.

FHWA employs both "absolute" and "relative" noise impact criteria. "Absolute" refers to the 67 dBA (L_{eq}) threshold for noise-sensitive outdoor use areas, including those of residences. "Relative" noise criteria refer to a potential increase in noise level due to a highway project. FHWA allows individual states to determine their own "relative" noise criteria which can vary between 5 and 15 dBA above ambient sound levels, defined as a "substantial increase." Impacts can occur under one, the other, or both; at which point the highway agency must consider abatement for those impacts.

6.2 DNL and L_{eq} Metrics

Originating from FTA guidance[23], The FTA and FRA[24] essentially use the same noise metrics and procedures, including consideration of existing ambient noise levels and project noise levels for environmental noise impact analysis as shown in Figure 3.

For FTA, these procedures include how to calculate light rail transit noise levels for various trains using consistent configurations and distances from the rail line. Transit bus projects also often include highway elements and may require FHWA noise procedures to be used, in conjunction with FTA noise procedures. The FTA noise manual provides guidance on choosing the correct procedures for such multi-modal projects.

For FRA, existing and project noise levels are expressed in terms of dBA, delineated by times of use. Specifically, the manual requires: "L_{dn} is used for land use where nighttime sensitivity is a

[22] Federal Highway Administration. 23 CFR Part 772: Procedures for Abatement of Highway Traffic Noise and Construction Noise -- Final rule. Federal Register Vol. 75, No. 133, 1 July 2010.
[23] Federal Transit Administration. 2018. Transit Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment. FTA Report No. 0123. September.
[24] FRA follows FTA guidance for assessments of rail vehicles operating below 90mph. For rail vehicles operating above 90mph further guidance is provided in: Federal Railroad Administration. 2012. High-Speed Ground Transportation Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment. U.S. Department of Transportation. Office of Railroad Policy and Development. DOT/FRA/ORD-12/15. September.

factor; L_{eq} during the hour of maximum transit noise exposure is used for land use involving only daytime activities."

Figure 3 is applicable to both L_{eq} and DNL. Figure 3 shows that the "allowable project noise level" decreases with decreasing existing ambient noise levels. It is interesting to note that a project noise level of DNL 65 dBA covers a wide range of typical ambient noise level conditions as an impact threshold.

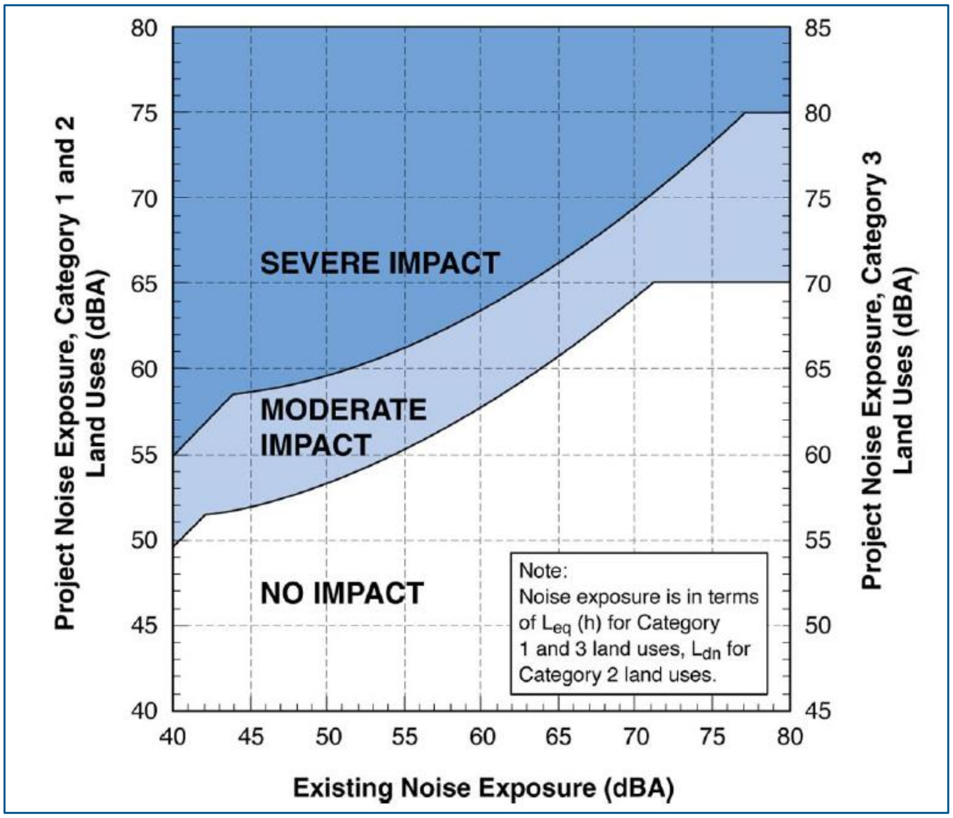

Figure 3. Federal Railroad Administration Noise Metrics/Criteria

6.3 30-Day Average DNL Metric

As an example of long-term versus mid- and short-term noise exposure, the FTA uses a 30-Day Average DNL for certain construction projects warranting a detailed construction noise analysis[25]. Construction projects usually have noise metrics and thresholds which consider the temporary nature of construction projects.

[25] Specific procedures for assessing construction noise impacts are provided in 2018 FTA Report No. 0123

6.4 DNL Metric

Based on Federal land use guidelines[26] and similar to the way in which FAA assesses compatible land use[27], HUD[28] considers an environmental noise level of less than DNL 65 dB as acceptable, a noise level between DNL 65 and 75 dBA normally unacceptable, and a noise level above DNL 75 dB unacceptable. HUD also employs a building interior standard of DNL 45 dB. HUD noise analysis considers the effects of highways, railroads, airports, and military installations for all of its property related expenditures, including loans, planning assistance, and support of new construction. Common use of Federal land use guidelines, including the DNL noise metric, provides HUD with a consistent defensible method for considering aircraft noise in its decision making. Where aircraft noise is a consideration, use of a noise metric other than that considered by FAA, would add complexity and could negatively impact the process for granting home loans and property development.

The DOD primarily uses the DNL metric for environmental noise analysis with caveats: "Although local conditions regarding the need for housing may require residential use in these zones, residential use is discouraged in DNL 65-69 dBA and strongly discouraged in DNL 70-74 dBA. The absence of viable alternative development options should be determined, and an evaluation should be conducted locally prior to local approvals indicating that a demonstrated community need for the residential use would not be met if development were prohibited in these zones."[29] Existing residential development is considered as pre-existing, incompatible land use.

The DOD promotes long-term compatible land use in the vicinity of military installations via the Air Installations Compatibility Use Zones (AICUZ) program. DOD employs detailed land use compatibility recommendations based on Standard Land Use Coding Manual (SLUCM) land use codes and DNL or CNEL noise areas on and around air installations.

AICUZ studies use the A-weighted DNL noise descriptor except in California, where the CNEL descriptor is used. Supplemental noise metrics may also be used to augment the DNL or CNEL analysis as noted by the Federal Interagency Committee on Urban Noise (FICUN). Since land use compatibility guidelines are based on yearly average noise levels, aircraft noise contours should be developed based on average annual day operations.

As a minimum, contours for DNL 65, 70, 75, 80, and 85 dBA are plotted on maps for Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps air installations as part of AICUZ studies. The Army applies Operational Noise Management Program DNL designations of 60–65, 65–75, and greater than 75 dBA at its air installations. Contours below DNL 65 dB are not required but may be provided if local conditions warrant discussion of lower aircraft noise levels, such as in rural and desert areas, or where significant noise complaints have been received from areas outside DNL 65 contours.

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[26] Federal Interagency Committee on Urban Noise. 1980. Guidelines for Considering Noise In Land Use Planning and Control. June.

[27] 14 CFR Part 150.

[28] 24 CFR Part 51.

[29] Department of Defense Instruction 4165.57 (August 31, 2018).

Supplemental noise metrics may be used to augment DNL and CNEL noise analyses to provide additional information to describe the noise environment in the vicinity of air installations.

The STB regulates and decides disputes involving railroad rates, railroad mergers or line sales, and certain other transportation matters. The STB environmental review regulations for noise analysis[30] have the following criteria:

- An increase in noise exposure as measured by a DNL of 3 dBA or more.
- An increase to a noise level of DNL 65 dBA or greater.

If the estimated noise level increase at a location exceeds either of these criteria, STB estimates the number of affected receptors (e.g., schools, libraries, residences, retirement communities, nursing homes) and quantifies the noise increase. The two components (3 dBA increase, DNL 65 dBA) of the STB criteria are implemented separately to determine an upper bound of the area of potential noise impact. However, noise research indicates that both criteria components must be met to cause an adverse noise impact.[31,32] That is, noise levels would have to be greater than or equal to DNL 65 dBA and increase by 3 dBA or more for an adverse noise impact to occur.

6.5 Comparable International Noise Metrics (LAeq 16h, Lden)

Airports in the United Kingdom use similar cumulative noise metrics as used in the United States, such as the LAeq,16hr and L_{den} metrics.

6.5.1 LAeq,16hr

This noise metric is the A-weighted equivalent continuous noise level, assessed over an average daytime / evening period (7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.) in the summer months. This metric was selected as a result of the United Kingdom Aircraft Noise Index Study[33] social survey which measured human response to aircraft noise expressed by a sample of people living at different places around five English and one Scottish airport. This study found that a ten-decibel nighttime noise penalty was not warranted for these particular airport communities.

6.5.2 L_{den}

In 2002, the European Commission published Directive 2002/49/EC, establishing a common environmental noise indicator for the European Union.[34] The L_{den} is the A-weighted equivalent continuous noise level, evaluated over an annual average 24-hour period, with a 10-dB penalty added to the levels at night (11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) and a 5 dB penalty added to the levels in the evening (7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.) to reflect people's increased sensitivity to noise during these periods.

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[30] 49 CFR 1105.7e(6).
[31] Coate, D. 1999. Annoyance Due to Locomotive Warning Horns. Transportation Research Board, Transportation Noise and Vibration Subcommittee A1FO4. San Diego, CA. August 1-4.
[32] Surface Transportation Board. 1998. Draft Environmental Assessment for Canadian National and Illinois Central Acquisition, Finance Docket No. 33556.
[33] Survey of noise attitudes 2014: Aircraft CAP 1506, 2017
[34] Survey of noise attitudes 2014: Aircraft CAP 1506, 2017

7. Role of Noise Measurements vs. Noise Modeling

Aircraft noise measurements and noise models have different attributes and roles.

Noise measurements are used for the aircraft certification process, as described in Section 2.2. Noise measurements are also an integral part of the data required for noise modeling; where carefully controlled measured aircraft (source) noise levels by aircraft type and model form the basis of the noise information utilized by aviation noise models. In contrast to these carefully controlled noise measurements, noise measurement data collected in dynamic "real world" situations from noise monitors in the vicinity of an airport can include various sources of error (as will be discussed later in this section).

Noise modeling refers to the use of computational models to generate noise results at single locations, or over a grid of locations. Modeled noise contours at various noise levels, usually in units of decibels, can also be plotted to show regions of equal noise exposure. Noise measurements provide the aircraft source noise data for the various aircraft types and are used by the FAA Aviation Environmental Design Tool (AEDT)[35] for its noise calculations. These data are also validated against noise certification data to ensure accuracy. The FAA uses AEDT to dynamically model aircraft performance in space and time to predict fuel burn, air emissions, and noise levels. This type of modeling allows the input of detailed airport runway configurations, aircraft fleet mix and operations, flight corridors, and a detailed layout of land use and communities adjacent to the airport. Noise modeling allows the overlay of noise contours or single location noise values on detailed land use and community mapping. Noise modeling is used to assess a wide variety of proposed federal actions, such as those resulting from airfield changes or changes in airspace management. Many other federal and international agencies that are responsible for noise impact assessment also employ noise modeling techniques.

Due to the need to generate detailed noise results over large areas, noise modeling is the only practical way to accurately and reliably determine geospatial noise effects in the surrounding community when analyzing proposals related to aviation noise. The many challenges and limitations to using noise measurements for evaluating airport vicinity noise are summarized below:

- Non-aircraft sound can have a large influence on noise monitoring data, which can be difficult to separate from aircraft noise during data post-processing.
- Long-term (e.g., year-long) noise monitoring requires regular maintenance and calibration of the individual noise monitors on a continuous, year-round basis, which has considerable costs.
- To ensure the same accuracy and fidelity of data generated by noise models, an extremely large number of noise monitoring locations is required. (e.g. tens of thousands of noise monitors, collecting year-round data in the vicinity of an airport would be needed to match the fidelity and accuracy of noise modeling).
- Noise monitoring data is not capable of analyzing either "what if" scenarios or proposed future action airport and air space scenarios.

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[35] Data is managed by the European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL) through the Aircraft Noise and Performance (ANP) database

Airport vicinity noise measurements are therefore not appropriate for assessing environmental project determinations or for considering single project validation of noise modeling results. While these limitations make it unsuitable for “real world” noise measurements to consistently inform environmental decision making, the FAA does review noise measurement data when provided as part of an environmental report. In cases where data from modern, well maintained noise monitoring systems are provided, a close agreement between measured and modeled results is typically found, which further validates noise modeling accuracy.

The different roles of aviation noise measurements and modeling are also understood in the international aviation community. For example, the European Civil Aviation Conference states that “the measurement of long-term sound exposures from aircraft is not normally possible as it would require acceptable weather conditions and 100% functional instrumentation and data collection for the entire time period of interest—normally up to 12 continuous months. (And to generate even rudimentary contours this would have to be done at a very large number of locations.)”[36] The United Kingdom’s Civil Aviation Authority states that provided “sufficient noise measurements are collected from a large enough number of locations and that the data is normalised appropriately, it is relatively straightforward to produce validated noise estimates. There are, however, a number of difficulties and limitations with such simplistic models. Data from a large number of measurement sites would be extremely expensive and time consuming to collect and process for a major airport, especially if aircraft noise contours were required on a regular basis. Further, such models do not provide a capability to assess the effects on the contours of changes to aircraft flight profiles, for forecasting or ‘what if’ analyses.”[37]

Other domestic federal state and local agencies, including all federal domestic transportation agencies also employ modeling for noise level predictions when conducting noise measurements would be impractical.

While airport noise monitoring is not generally used for predictive purposes, a noise monitoring program is often a useful tool to inform the airport and neighbors about current aircraft activity and corresponding noise levels in the community. This type of noise monitoring may be accomplished via a permanent noise monitoring system; however, these systems can be quite sophisticated and require numerous permanent noise monitoring stations distributed throughout the community adjacent to the airport.

8. Role of Supplemental Metrics

As discussed in Section 3, FAA’s environmental decision-making for noise must use a metric that considers the magnitude, duration, and frequency of the noise events under study. The DNL noise metric uniquely meets these requirements. However, in specific situations, additional information focused on a more targeted type of noise exposure may require the use of supplemental noise metrics.

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[36] European Civil Aviation Conference. 2016. CEAC Doc 29 4th Edition Report on Standard Method of Computing Noise Contours around Civil Airports Volume 1.
[37] D.P. Rhodes, and J.B. Ollerhead. 2001. Aircraft Noise Model Validation. Environmental Research and Consultancy Department, Civil Aviation Authority, Internoise.

Individually, supplemental metrics may not fully consider the magnitude, duration, and frequency of the noise events, but may be used to support further disclosure and aid in the public understanding of community noise exposure.[38] Supplemental noise analyses are often useful to describe aircraft noise exposure from unique operational situations or for noise sensitive locations to assist in the public's understanding.

For example:

- Single event metrics like SEL and Lmax or Leq-type metrics associated with specific time periods may be useful in categorizing the noise associated to short-term activities or from individual flights, but do not fully consider the number of flights or account for the operational variations over a longer-term period.
- Operational-Acoustic metrics like NA and TA provide an alternative way to consider noise exposures over longer time periods while emphasizing details about aircraft operational characteristics, but do not fully consider the cumulative intensity of aircraft noise.
- For typical vehicle noise levels, time audible provides a comparison of aviation noise to the underlying ambient noise levels, but is only a practical consideration where ambient noise occurs at relatively low constant levels.

There is no single supplemental metric that is preferable in all situations and the selection of an appropriate supplemental metric depends on the circumstances of each analysis. However, where warranted, consideration of established supplemental metrics is encouraged.

In addition to the established supplemental metrics discussed above, ongoing research activities sponsored by the FAA and the broader research community are working to develop a greater understanding of other noise-related impact criteria. New supplemental metrics based on this research could then be developed.

Examples of these potential supplemental metrics include:

- N75 (Speech Interference): Considers speech interference (i.e., disruption) between a speaker and listener at a normal conversation distance.
- % Awakening (Sleep Disruption): Based on a standard ANSI[39] developed to predict sleep disturbance in terms of the metric "percent awakenings" or numbers of people awakened.
- L_{eq} (8) (Learning): Based on a standard ANSI has developed[40] to consider the effects of noise on classroom learning.

[38] For example, the FAA's 2005 Environmental Impact Statement for the Modernization of Chicago O'Hare International Airport provided supplemental noise metrics (SEL, Lmax, and TA).

[39] ANSI/ASA S12.9-2008. 2008. Part 6 Quantities and Procedures for Description and Measurement of Environmental Sound—Part 6: Methods for Estimation of Awakenings Associated with Outdoor Noise Events Heard in Homes.

[40] ANSI S12.60-2002. 2002. American National Standard Acoustical Performance Criteria, Design Requirements, and Guidelines for Schools.

- L_{max}(c) (Rattle): Considers the effects from low frequency aircraft operations[41,42] including the potential to induce "rattle" to structures.[43]

9. Summary

In summary, no single noise metric can cover all situations. However, the DNL metric, and similar versions such as L_{den}, are being used world-wide to assess aircraft noise effects on communities. In 1992, the Federal Interagency Committee on Noise (FICON) report[44] concluded that DNL is the recommended metric and should continue to be used as the primary metric for aircraft noise exposure. The successor to FICON, the Federal Interagency Committee on Aviation Noise (FICAN) has also reaffirmed this recommendation in their 2018 report[45].

In accordance with ASNA, the FAA adopted DNL as its standard metric. The FAA uses the DNL metric for purposes of determining an individual's cumulative noise exposure, for land use compatibility under 14 CFR part 150, and for assessing the significance of predicted noise impacts under NEPA. Federal and state agencies other than the FAA, as well as international agencies, employ similar noise metrics to evaluate a project's noise impacts.

Table 1 compares the various noise metrics discussed in this report, specifically in terms of ASNA requirements for a metric to account for noise level, time of day, and number of events.

Table 1. Noise Metrics

	Noise Level	Time of Day	Number of Events
L_{eq}	✓		✓
DNL	✓	✓	✓
LAeq(hr) (e.g. 16hr, 8hr)	✓	✓	✓
L_{den}	✓	✓	✓
CNEL	✓	✓	✓
SEL and CSEL	✓		
L_{max}	✓		
PSF[a]	✓		
NA[b]	✓		✓
TA[c]	✓		
Time Audible[d]	✓		

[a] PSF, or pounds per square foot, is functionally a measure of "noise level" instead of decibels. PSF is typically used as a measure of the peak overpressure of a sonic boom.
[b] NA is the number of noise events above a certain noise level threshold.

[41] Federal Aviation Administration. 2004. Nonmilitary Helicopter Urban Noise Study.
[42] Schomer, P., and R.D. Neathammer. 1985. The Role of Vibration and Rattle in Human Response to Helicopter Noise. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Technical Report N-85/14. September.
[43] Hubbard, H.H. 1982. Noise Induced House Vibrations and Human Perception. Noise Control Engineering Journal. Vol. 19., No. 2.
[44] Federal Agency Review of Selected Airport Noise Analysis Issues (FICON), 1992
[45] FICAN Research Review of Selected Aviation Noise Issues (FICAN), 2018

[c] TA is the time of noise events exceeding a certain noise level threshold.
[d] Time Audible is the amount of time noise events exceed ambient sound levels. This could be interpreted as taking into account the number of noise events.

Noise modeling is the only practical way to predict geospatial noise effects in a surrounding community when analyzing proposals related to aviation noise. Noise modeling is also necessary for a wide variety of other proposed federal actions, such as those resulting from airfield changes or changes in airspace management. The assessment of these actions requires the review of future case proposals and can therefore only be considered through predictive modeling.

Finally, while the DNL metric is FAA's decision-making metric, other supplementary metrics can be used to support further disclosure and aid in the public understanding of community noise effects.