

June 28, 2022

Dear Resident,

Thank you for contacting us regarding airplane noise over Belmont.

With the end of the pandemic-related restrictions and increase in both leisure and business-related travel, the volume at Logan airport is increasing¹. Though not quite back to pre-pandemic highs like what was experienced in 2019, it is getting close.

Runway 33L is used as the primary runway for departures in the Northwest Flow Operating Configuration². It can be used in concert with runway 27, though frequently is used as the only departure runway. Since 2014, Runway 33L has been used for on average 19% of all departures (high of 23% in 2017, low of 16% in 2015 and 2018). Massport publishes monthly runway use statistics on their website³. On a busy day, runway 33L can be used for more than 400 departures. We have seen as many as 40 departures using 33L during a peak hour.

The 33L departure flight tracks (33L RNAV SID procedure) that have been in place since June of 2013 have not changed. Three of those RNAV tracks cross over Belmont⁴. 70% of the 33L departures fly one of these three tracks with 55% flying the track over the Grove Street neighborhood. There can be some variability on the exact path but they are for the most part consistent as the plane is instructed to head to an outbound waypoint that the pilot programs into the flight management system. The tracks themselves are close enough to each other that the noise can be heard throughout town regardless of which of the three tracks are used.

Belmont joined the Logan CAC in the fall of 2013 and is an active participant in its successor committee – the MassportCAC (www.massportcac.org). We have worked in coordination with our neighboring communities (Arlington, Cambridge, Medford, Somerville and Watertown) as well as our State Legislators (Senator Brownsberger, Representative Rogers) and Congresswoman Clark to advocate for the FAA to make modifications to the concentrated RNAV flight paths and increase dispersion so there is more equitable sharing of the noise burden. These efforts resulted in the FAA and Massport enlisting MIT's Lab for Aviation and the Environment to conduct the RNAV Study which looked at possible alternatives. A complete collection of documents that chronicle Belmont's activities can be found here: <https://www.belmont-ma.gov/logan-airport-community-advisory-committee/pages/logan-cac-document-index>.

¹ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/04/15/business/logan-finally-bouncing-back-traffic-approaches-pre-pandemic-levels/>

² How Logan Operates: <https://www.massport.com/logan-airport/about-logan/noise-abatement/how-logan-operates/>

³ Logan Runway Use Monthly Reports: <https://www.massport.com/logan-airport/about-logan/noise-abatement/runway-use/>

⁴ Impact assessment maps: https://www.belmont-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif6831/f/uploads/maps_of_belmont_affected_by_rnav.pdf

The noise experienced in Belmont, though annoying to many residents, is well below the 65DNL threshold that is mandated by NEPA and used by the FAA for providing noise mitigation⁵. Logan airport is a 24/7 facility with no time restrictions or curfews.

Belmont and the neighboring 33L communities continue to advocate for the FAA to evaluate methods for decreasing concentration and increasing dispersion of 33L departures though at this point there is no clear path to a solution.

Summary:

- Volume at Logan is increasing and approaching levels we have not seen since before the pandemic. 2019 was a record high year for Logan operations.
- The 33L departure procedure that impacts Belmont is unchanged since June 2013.
- The MIT-RNAV Study has concluded and the proposed modifications to the 33L departure procedure were rejected by the 33L communities and the MCAC.
- The proposed alternative 2-D2, would likely have increased noise impact to parts of Belmont.
- Communities impacted by 33L RNAV departures continue to advocate for alternatives that would increase dispersion.

Noise Complaints:

Both Massport and the FAA provide mechanisms for filing noise complaints and residents are welcome to do so. However, one needs to know that these mechanisms are designed to report planes that are flying where or at an altitude they shouldn't be flying. The planes currently impacting Belmont are for the most part following the 33L RNAV SID (standard instrument departure) procedure and are not resulting in noise levels that exceed federal regulations. If you file a complaint for a flight that is following the procedure, you will receive a response to that effect.

Massport: <https://www.massport.com/logan-airport/about-logan/noise-abatement/>

FAA: <https://www.faa.gov/noise/inquiries/>

⁵ FAA – Fundamentals of Noise and Sound:

https://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/policy_guidance/noise/basics