

Mary Reese: FAA needs to take responsibility for airport noise



Annapolis resident Mary Reese is the District 30 representative on the D.C. Metroplex BWI Community Roundtable. (HANDOUT)

By **Mary Reese**

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Throughout the country the [Federal Aviation Administration](#) is scrambling to deal with the fallout from its implementation of its satellite-based Next Generation Air Transportation System, or NextGen.

This system was a logical and potentially beneficial replacement for the aged ground-based radar system used to oversee commercial flights. But the FAA's reckless implementation of the technology, using a faulty environmental study and no public hearings, has resulted in multiple lawsuits and time-consuming negotiations with legislatively community representatives everywhere.

Maryland is no exception. There is a major problem with the low and concentrated air traffic going to and from [BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport](#).

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del County, I recently accepted an invitation to
on, Virginia.

My expectations of transparency and efficiency in working with the FAA have steadily declined after months of negotiations. I have listened to conflicting information provided by agency representatives and heard many excuses for the FAA's failure to provide clearer and more meaningful data in its presentations to us. I hoped that touring the Warrenton facility would provide an opportunity for candid conversation with ATC professionals who truly want to provide a service and a solution for the population they serve. I learned a good deal.

The FAA personnel described the hurdles faced by those trying to solve NextGen issues at BWI. The obstacles include insufficient scope for the work, the likelihood of insufficient funding, too little time to develop solutions and limited opportunities to communicate with representatives of impacted areas.

Air traffic controllers admit they have no training on population density or the locations of the community facilities, such as schools and hospitals, over which they direct traffic. Without such training and with the difficulties brought by time and funding constraints, as well as communication with affected communities, the ATC representatives assembled to fix our problem seem to have been given an impossible task. No wonder the FAA is repeatedly failing to solve problems it has created elsewhere.

While the taxpayers own the air space, the FAA is ultimately accountable to us. The agency's vision statement says it is "accountable to the American public and (the FAA's) stakeholders."

But the airline industry has far more influence over the FAA than do taxpayers. Multiple representatives for the airline industry can interact with ATC officials as they convene to develop solutions to our problems at BWI. But none of our legislatively appointed representatives are allowed to attend such meetings.

The FAA's lack of accountability to the taxpayer results from decades of minimal oversight. This is one of only two executive agencies exempted from the Federal Acquisition Regulation, the policies that ensure competitive and transparent procurement so our tax dollars are spent wisely.

Additionally, the FAA is essentially the sole proprietor of our airspace. In that capacity, it is unchecked.

I am not advocating privatization of our airspace, but the FAA needs to clearly recognize that it is accountable to the taxpayer before it answers to any other "stakeholder."

We continue to work to have the FAA fix the issues it has created. Our state attorney general is preparing to file a lawsuit on our behalf.

Meanwhile, in the upcoming FAA Reauthorization Act, Congress can reassert the American public's ownership over our national airspace and the taxpayer's place as the agency's primary stakeholder. Every effort should be made for it to do so. The alternative sets a dangerous precedent for future implementation of other large-scale infrastructure projects.

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