

O'Hare-weary homeowners could get insulation tax credits

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Illinois lawmakers on Tuesday will outline legislation aimed at offering relief to residents east and west of O'Hare International Airport hard hit by new flight paths.

The package of at least four bills or resolutions includes an attempt to give residents living 20 miles east or west of the airport's busiest runways tax credits for insulating their homes against the barrage of new jet noise.

Its sponsor, State Rep. Christine Winger (R-Wood Dale), estimated that hundreds of homes outside the current "noise contour" would be eligible for tax credits under the bill. Only houses within the contour currently can receive free sound insulation.

State Rep. Michael McAuliffe (R-Chicago), state Sen. John Mulroe (D-Chicago), and state Sen. Laura Murphy (D-Des Plaines) are expected to join Winger on Tuesday at a news conference at 10 a.m. at the Thompson Center, 100 W. Randolph. They will outline bipartisan attempts to address new waves of O'Hare jets that triggered close to 4 million complaints last year alone.

Other bills or resolutions expected to be discussed include efforts to require the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to report on the environmental and health effects of the new jet traffic, as well as a measure to turn up the heat on airlines that ignore voluntary night "Fly Quiet" flight procedures.

West of O'Hare, Winger said, homes outside the existing contour are "getting pounded by jet noise with no offer of relief."

In addition, Winger said, her constituents in Wood Dale and Itasca fear that the noise contour may never change. It is due to be verified and redrawn only after both another runway and a runway extension are completed as part of an \$8.7 billion ongoing airfield overhaul, but the runway extension has yet to be funded, Winger noted.

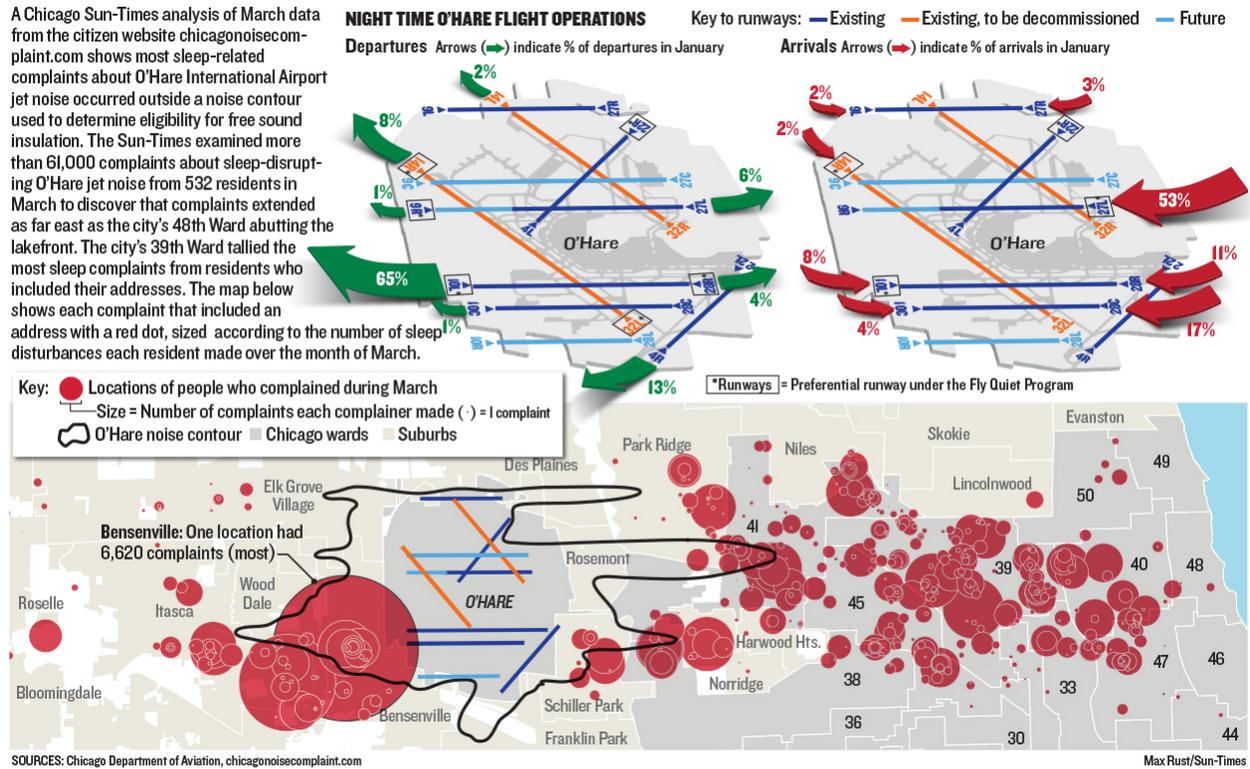
"I represent people who have the fear that — what if it never gets built out [to completion]? Then what?" Winger said.

East of O'Hare, a Chicago Sun-Times analysis last May indicated that more than 95 percent of Chicagoans who complained that their sleep was being disturbed by night jets lived outside the current noise contour.

Some lived as far as 8 miles outside the contour, and east of east-west parallel runways that O'Hare has been heavily relying on since a dramatic switch in flight paths in October 2013.

WIDE AWAKE: O'HARE JET NOISE COMPLAINTS THAT DISRUPTED SLEEP

A Chicago Sun-Times analysis of March data from the citizen website chicagoisnoise.com shows most sleep-related complaints about O'Hare International Airport jet noise occurred outside a noise contour used to determine eligibility for free sound insulation. The Sun-Times examined more than 61,000 complaints about sleep-disrupting O'Hare jet noise from 532 residents in March to discover that complaints extended as far east as the city's 48th Ward abutting the lakefront. The city's 39th Ward tallied the most sleep complaints from residents who included their addresses. The map below shows each complaint that included an address with a red dot, sized according to the number of sleep disturbances each resident made over the month of March.



However, many other Chicago sleep complaints emerged from homes situated between two runway flight arrival paths. Winger's tax credit bill could cover some of them, too, because it also would provide tax credits to homes as many as 3 miles north or south of an east-west runway.

Proposals thus far by Chicago Aviation Commissioner Ginger Evans don't go far enough in addressing homes outside the existing contour, Winger said.

"I have been told people outside the contour have to wait until full build-out to even see if they would qualify for soundproofing," Winger said. "That's at least six years down the road. And that's not acceptable."

Evans has proposed rotating night runways to alternate night noise among different neighborhoods and suburbs, but she has offered few specifics about daytime noise relief.

She suggested this past summer that she might try to work with federal officials on re-insulating the hardest-hit homes inside the existing contour but her spokesman, Owen Kilmer, was unable to identify possible funding sources for that idea on Monday.