

# O'Hare runway plan helps with jet noise, might be renewed



A United Airlines jet lands at O'Hare International Airport on July 15, 2016. (Phil Velasquez / Chicago Tribune)

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**A** program to reduce jet noise in the worst-hit areas around [O'Hare International Airport](#) appears to have worked most of the time, officials said Wednesday, and might be renewed this spring.

The program faces serious challenges, however. While the nighttime runway rotation plan provided relief to some residents closer to the airport, officials said it spread more noise to the northwest suburbs, and that the scheduled closing of one key runway next year will force fundamental changes to the program.

In addition, the [Federal Aviation Administration](#) raised safety concerns about some aspects of the plan. The FAA cited air traffic controllers' recommendations that they should stop having planes cross runways where other flights are landing, and that a long runway should be kept available on standby.

The program, called the Fly Quiet Runway Rotation, was tested for six months last year as a way to spread night flights around O'Hare, rather than concentrating them immediately east and west of the airfield. Each

week, a different pair of runways was designated for use, on a rotating basis.

The rotation operated as planned 67 percent of the time, according to an analysis by the Chicago Department of Aviation. The rest of the time, pilots did not use the designated runways, often because they wanted longer runways to handle larger loads.

Though Fly Quiet was designed to operate from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m., because of air traffic and other factors, it ran on average from 11:16 p.m. to 5:25 a.m.

Compliance varied widely, depending on the weather and which runways were designated. When winds were from the west, as they were half the time, flights were more likely to land from and take off into the west, regardless of the plan.

The runway most frequently used as part of the program, 15/33, runs southeast to northwest. It was used for 27 percent of departures, directing more flights over Arlington Heights, Mount Prospect and nearby areas, and diverting noise from the most affected areas, such as Schiller Park, northwest Chicago and Bensenville.

That runway, however, is scheduled to close next year, as Chicago proceeds with construction to replace it with a new runway. Noise complaints hit record levels in recent years near the airport after Chicago started building new east-west runways that are meant to be safer and more efficient than crossing concrete.

Monitors showed that Schiller Park still had the most noisy incidents overnight, with 27 flights of more than 65 decibels and nine of more than 85 decibels. Mayor Barbara Piltaver said that showed the need for Chicago to pay for more soundproofing of homes there.

Several members of the O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission's Fly Quiet Committee expressed support for the runway rotation. Bensenville Village Manager Evan Summers thanked the city, FAA and air traffic controllers for implementing the plan. He asked that any plan move more flights from over his residents' homes and instead go over industrial areas.

Schaumburg supported the test program, but its transportation director, Karyn Robles, cautioned that officials would have to consider the higher number of night flights taking off over its residents.

And Chicago resident Frank Gagliardi, a member of a residents' group called Fair Allocation of Runways, said the runway rotation concept was good, but there's room for improvement.

"I was shocked," he said. "It gave me a little more sleep."

City officials are scheduled to return Feb. 22 with a plan to renew the program, likely for another six months at most, with a final vote expected March 10. If approved by the FAA, which according to its spokesman is open to looking at renewing the program, it likely would start up again in the spring.

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