

By email to: [ruth.edwards.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:ruth.edwards.mp@parliament.uk) and [paul.honey@parliament.uk](mailto:paul.honey@parliament.uk)

25 June 2021

## Noise management at East Midlands Airport

Dear Ruth

Thank you for contacting us regarding the concerns of your constituents and for taking the time to meet last week. As promised, please find below a summary of our conversation and some information which may be helpful to inform your response.

### Background and approach to noise management at East Midlands Airport

As you know, East Midlands Airport (EMA) facilitates a mixture of passenger flights and dedicated cargo flights. With an established express freight operation, and because of the need for next day delivery, a number of flights at the airport take place at night. Due to the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, these flights currently make up a greater proportion of our operation. Overall, during 2020, the number of flights at EMA reduced by 35%, with a 10% reduction in the number of night flights.

We recognise that aircraft noise can be disturbing to those who live near to the airport, particularly at night. Our [Noise Action Plan](#), which was adopted by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, sets out the steps we are taking to minimise noise disturbance. These include:

- Prohibiting the operation of the noisiest aircraft at night, and implementing noise-based charges which incentivise airlines to fly during the day and to operate newer, quieter aircraft;
- A wide range of operational procedures to ensure aircraft operate in the quietest way possible and, for departing flights, in areas where fewer people live;
- Fining aircraft which exceed our recently reduced noise limits, with proceeds returned to local communities through the East Midlands Airport Community Fund; and,
- A suite of [published performance reports](#) to share information about noise performance and inform discussion with our Independent Consultative Committee and airline partners.

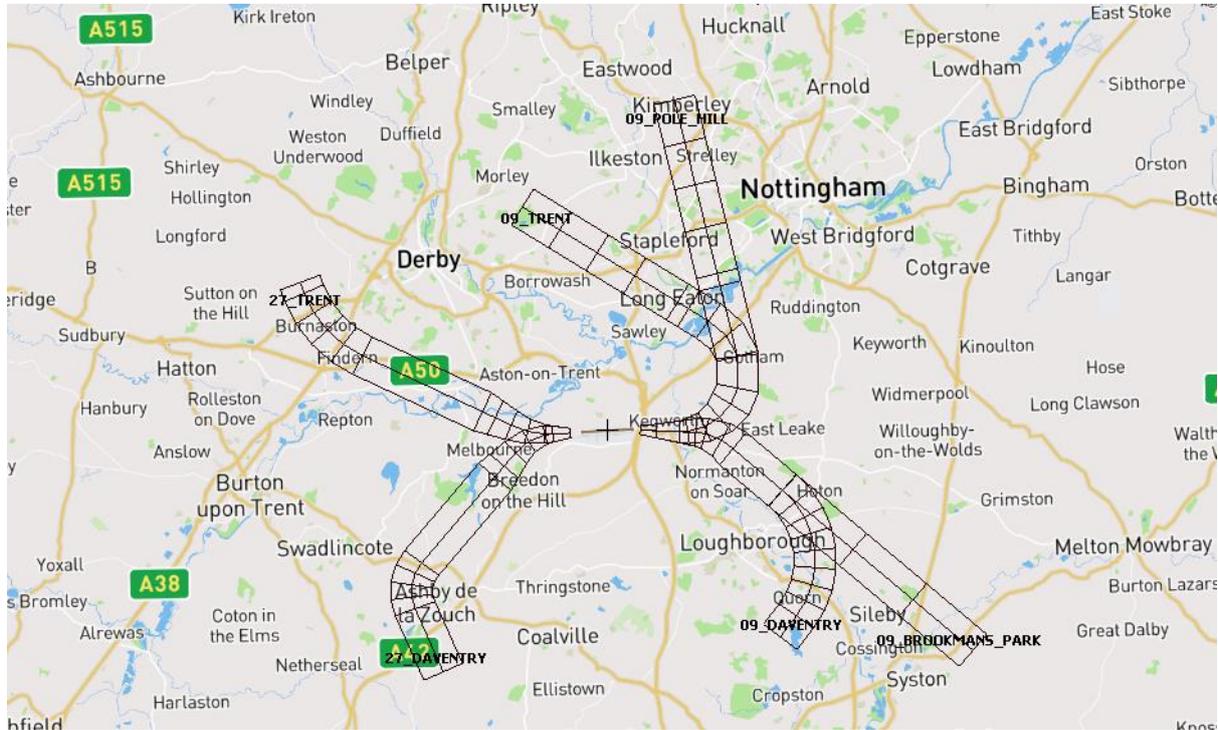
As a result of the steps we have taken, we have been pleased to note the continued phase out of noisier aircraft types in favour of quieter and generally newer aircraft. We have also made substantial investments in noise and track monitoring systems to ensure that all aircraft operations are undertaken as quietly as is possible and, through this system, observe high compliance with noise abatement procedures.

### Monitoring airline performance and investigating community concerns

Our Flight Evaluation Unit brings together technical experts and community engagement colleagues to monitor and evaluate aircraft operations. The team work closely with operational colleagues, including air traffic controllers and our airline customers, to minimise noise and improve operational performance. Through our [WebTrak](#) service, we also offer a self-serve facility which allows users to replay flight tracks and noise monitoring results – as well as reporting concerns which they would like us to investigate. The Flight Evaluation Unit receive, investigate and respond to these reports, as well as enquiries received by mail, email and telephone. We would be pleased to look into the concerns of your constituents, who can report concerns through [WebTrak](#), using our [online form](#), by emailing [community@eastmidlandsairport.com](mailto:community@eastmidlandsairport.com) or telephoning 0845 1088540.

## Track compliance for departing flights in the vicinity of Thrumpton

To minimise the impact of noise from departing aircraft, aircraft leaving EMA are required to follow noise preferential departure routes. These routes have been established for many years and were designed to minimise the number of people overflowed by departing aircraft. Two of our departure routes are relevant to your constituents. Specifically: the '09 Pole Hill' departure route is used by aircraft heading north towards Scotland; and the '09 Trent' departure route used by aircraft heading west. These are shown on the map below.

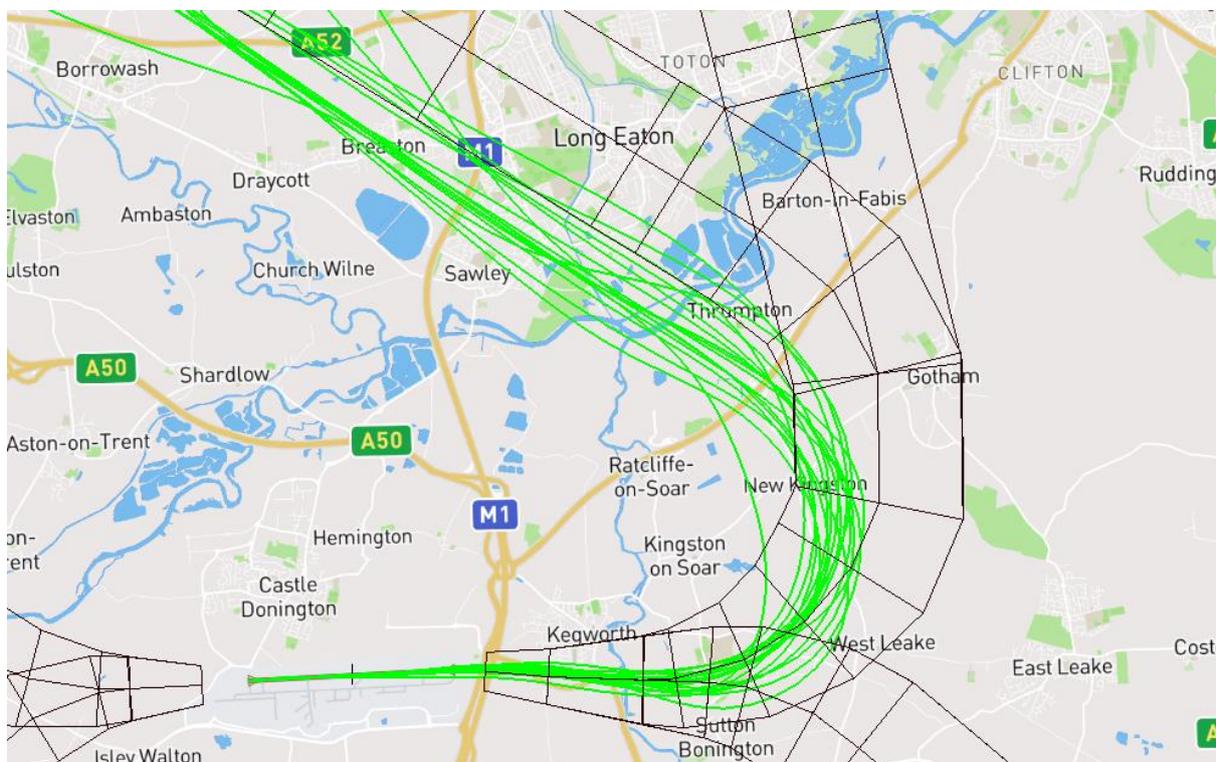


In order to maintain safe operation, the direction in which aircraft land and take-off is influenced by the wind direction. As such, the departure routes in question are used by aircraft departing the airport when the wind is coming from the east (approximately 30% of the time). During westerly winds, aircraft depart towards Melbourne and follow departure routes from the other end of the runway. Through longstanding community engagement programmes, we understand that most people living near to the airport prefer aircraft to operate in a westerly configuration. As such, we implement a preferential runway policy which reduces the number of easterly operations (to 25% in 2020) by allowing the airport to operate in a westerly configuration for as long as it is safe to do so, even with gentle easterly winds.

By working closely with our air traffic controllers and customer airlines, we ensure that compliance with noise preferential departure routes is high. Our Noise Action Plan 2019-2023 introduced a new target that 98% of departing aircraft remain within their designated departure route to a minimum height of 5,000ft. It is important to recognise that there are sometimes occasions when it may be necessary for aircraft to leave the departure route earlier than we would like – for example to avoid thunderstorms or other adverse weather conditions.

Through our monitoring programmes we are aware that, compared to our other departure routes, track compliance is poorer for aircraft using the '09 Trent' departure route. To illustrate, during 2020, overall track compliance (on all departure routes) was 93%. Compliance on the 09 Trent departure route is considerably lower, at 36%. Excluding the 09 Trent departure route, overall departure track compliance was 96%.

We have investigated this this issue extensively and engaged our airline partners to understand the root cause of the non-compliance, which is observed as aircraft ‘cutting the corner’ of the departure route (as shown in the map below). Our investigation confirmed that aircraft are in fact following the technical instructions issued to them and found that, to bring aircraft back ‘on track’, it will be necessary to update the technical procedures issued to airlines to reflect changes in aircraft performance and to magnetic drift. Implementing this change constitutes a ‘Level 1’ airspace change, as defined by the Civil Aviation Authority in CAP1616 “Airspace change: Guidance on the regulatory process for changing the notified airspace design and planned and permanent redistribution of air traffic, and on providing airspace information” and would require the airport to undertake a project lasting several years that involves route design(s), route option(s) development, consultation, implementation and post implementation review. Having discussed this issue with our airport consultative committee, it has been agreed that the airport should use its existing airspace change project to implement new procedures, rather than initiate a second airspace change project which would run in parallel.



### Boeing 747 operations

East Midlands Airport is the UK’s largest pure freight airport and home to express freight integrators who specialise in overnight delivery of high value goods. However, a significant quantity of freight also travels in the ‘belly’ of passenger aircraft. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of express and pure-freight airlines has become increasingly important – providing ongoing import and export capacity, including for medical supplies and PPE, despite travel restrictions significantly reducing the number of passenger flights and available ‘belly hold’ capacity. In response to this challenge, there has been increasing demand for larger aircraft to operate longer routes – with the Boeing 747 ‘jumbo jet’ offering unique capabilities as a large long-haul aircraft.

Whilst the number of Boeing 747 movements has increased over the last year, our approach to noise management has been successful in ensuring that the majority of flights by these aircraft take place during the day. As such, over 80% of flights operated by Boeing 747 aircraft took place

during the daytime (between 7am and 11pm). Considering departing flights, 83% of Boeing 747 movements were during the day.

Despite the increase in demand for larger aircraft such as the Boeing 747, in April 2021 we introduced additional night noise controls outlined in our Noise Action Plan 2019-2023. As such, operators of aircraft with a noise categorisation of 'QC4' – including Boeing 747-400 aircraft – are required to pay an additional noise surcharge if they depart at night. Proceeds from this charge are added to our Community Fund which provides grant funding to support community organisations near to the airport.

### **Airspace modernisation and our 'future airspace project'**

At a national level, the Government has set out its policy on the future of UK airspace. As such, like other UK airports, we at East Midlands are in the process of reviewing our airspace. Currently, arrival and departure routes at East Midlands Airport do not fully utilise the capability of modern aircraft navigation technology and techniques. By modernising airspace, we will allow aircraft to more fully realise the benefits of modern technology, potentially: increasing efficiency; reducing fuel burn and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions; enhancing safety; and, reducing the impact of aircraft noise.

We launched our 'future airspace project' in 2019 and undertook public engagement to develop a suite of 'design principles' which were approved by the Civil Aviation Authority last year. These are the principles which will guide the development of proposals for how aircraft could arrive at and depart from East Midlands Airport. As you would expect, our design principles consider the impact of noise from aircraft on communities living near to the airport.

I should note that, due to the impacts of COVID-19, our airspace change project, like those of other airports, has progressed more slowly than we would have liked. Given the need for airspace change sponsors to progress individually, but at a pace that allows the Government's future airspace strategy to come together nationally in a cohesive manner, we have recently agreed a timetable to restart our project with the Civil Aviation Authority. Details of our project, and other airspace change proposals, are available on the Civil Aviation Authority [website](#). Further information is available on our own [website](#), where your constituents can sign up to receive further information.

Thank you for talking to us about the concerns of your constituents. Please be assured that we are dedicated to listening to community feedback and minimising the impacts of airport operations. Regular engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, through our airport consultative committee, local MPs such as yourself, and directly with members of the community is important to us and we are grateful that you have taken the time to reach out.

I hope this letter addresses your concerns and ask that you get in touch with me or Joe Chapman, Head of Public Affairs at EMA, if you'd like to discuss anything further.

Yours sincerely



Adam Freeman  
Group Head of Environmental Strategy