

Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport (WSI) flight path proposals online community information and feedback session

Frequently asked questions and answers

This document sets out the questions and issues most commonly raised during the online community information and feedback session on 12 August 2024 (you can view the recording at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vs-KhzSMjG8>), and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' (the department) responses.

If you feel that your question has not been answered, you can email the flight paths team at wsiflightpaths@infrastructure.gov.au, and the team will get back to you.

The flight path proposals

Many people wanted to understand how the proposals would work, and the impact of the proposals on communities in terms of number of flights and noise.

Response:

The department is considering 2 proposals for the WSI preliminary flight paths:

1. a redirection of jet aircraft travelling to the East from WSI at night; and
2. a night-time noise abatement procedure.

Both proposals relate to the Reciprocal Runway Operations (RRO) mode, which can be used at night between 11pm and 5.30am when weather conditions permit (generally calm wind conditions with no rain). The RRO mode is expected to be available approximately 78% of the night-time period.

The presentation on the proposals and their impacts at the online session was recorded, and is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vs-KhzSMjG8>. The presentation begins from 8 minutes 10 seconds (8:10) on the video.

The department has also published a brochure and information posters on the proposals at www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au/resources. The brochure is available at https://www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au/pdf-documents/Flight_path_proposals_for_night_time_procedures-2-aug-2024.pdf.

Proposal 1

The Runway 23 Departure Southeast Night (RRO) flight path has been designed to avoid direct overflight of communities in Werombi, Nattai, Theresa Park, Brownlow Hill, Wallacia, Oakdale, Picton, Douglas Park, Wilton and Appin. However, aircraft noise may still be noticeable in some of these locations.

This proposal would result in 1 additional forecast air traffic movement per night being reallocated to the southeast flight path in 2033. As demand grows, the expectation is that this number could increase to a maximum of 5 additional movements in 2055.

Proposal 2

Under the proposed RRO noise abatement procedure, when RRO mode is in use and when traffic permits, jet aircraft departing WSI to destinations in the north, north-west and west would be kept on runway heading longer until clear of Silverdale, before being processed by air traffic control to their destinations.

Aircraft would be kept south of Silverdale and further away from other noise sensitive locations, such as Warragamba and Wallacia.

Aircraft would pass to the south of Silverdale at approximately 2,500ft above WSI runway height. Under the proposal, aircraft are expected to be at approximately 10,000ft above the Megalong Valley for north and north-west destinations and higher than 10,000ft above the Jenolan State Forrest for destinations to the west.

When RRO mode is available to use (approximately 78% of the night-time period), the proposed RRO noise abatement procedure can be used approximately 80% of the time in 2033.

By 2033, this proposal is expected to benefit communities near Wallacia and north Silverdale by reducing the potential number of average air traffic movements from 10 to 2 per night. There would also be additional noise reduction for locations in the mid-Blue Mountains, such as Linden, who are expected to receive an average of 5 less movements under this proposal.

Overall, less people and dwellings are expected to be overflown by aircraft as a result of this proposal, However, the benefits would be offset by an increase of air traffic movements for areas south of Silverdale, who could experience an additional 7 movements as a result of this proposal.

Many people wanted to know the reason for the proposals, and why some communities would experience more aircraft and noise under the proposals.

Response: The proposals directly address feedback in the submissions received on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the preliminary flight paths. While they would reduce the number of people and dwellings experiencing noise, they would also share noise across communities, and provide relief to some communities that would be impacted under other runway modes of operation.

Proposal 1 (the removal of the Runway 23 Departure Northeast Night (RRO) flight path for jet aircraft and reallocation of those aircraft to the flight path southeast of WSI [the Runway 23 Departure Southeast Night (RRO) flight path]) responds to feedback received from the north-east of WSI and the mid-Blue Mountains.

Proposal 2 (the RRO noise abatement procedure) responds to feedback from residents in Wallacia, Silverdale and the mid-Blue Mountains. Residents from Wallacia and Silverdale expressed concerns with the RRO departures making a right turn near their communities. They suggested the turn could be made later along runway centreline, to avoid overflight of their communities.

RRO mode of operation

Many people queried when the RRO mode – one of three runway modes available to use overnight – would be available to use.

Response: RRO mode can be used at night between 11pm and 5.30am when weather conditions permit (generally calm conditions with no rain). Use of RRO includes the following criteria:

- tailwinds (including gusts) must not exceed 5 knots (9 km per hour);
- runway surface must be dry; and,
- when air traffic demand levels permit safe operations – in practice, this is expected to be when air traffic demand levels are less than 20 movements per hour.

The RRO mode is expected to be available approximately 78% of the night-time period.

What flight paths will be used when RRO is not available?

Air traffic control nominates the runway to be used. Which particular runway mode is selected depends on a number of factors, most notably but not limited to wind velocity (head wind, crosswind or tailwind), weather phenomena (at the airport and on the preferred flight path), the disposition of other air traffic and if a pilot advises of an operationally required runway.

The flight paths associated with Runway 05 Overnight or Runway 23 Overnight operational modes will be used if RRO is unavailable.

Flight paths

People wanted to know how the flight paths would overall affect a suburb or location, and what the predicted noise impact would be at a location.

Response: People can use the Aircraft Overflight Noise Tool, which is available online at www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au, to see how the preliminary flight paths that were released in June 2023 and contained in the draft EIS would affect their address or location. You can search an address or location to see the impacts. The Aircraft Overflight Noise Tool also shows the expected aircraft noise impacts. The Aircraft Overflight Noise Tool includes a report generation feature that summarises the preliminary flight paths and noise forecasts for a specific address. The department will update the Aircraft Overflight Noise Tool to show the final preliminary flight paths when the final EIS is published in late 2024.

If people would like further detail on the preliminary flight paths and noise modelling, they can read the draft Environmental Impact Statement, in particular:

- Chapter 7 (The project) describes the runway modes of operation and the preliminary flight paths for WSI. Available at: https://www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au/pdf-documents/WSI_EIS_Chapter_7_The_project.pdf
- Chapter 11 (Aircraft noise) presents a summary of the nature and extent of likely short-term (year 2033), mid-term (2040) and long-term (year 2055) aircraft noise impacts associated with the preliminary airspace and flight path design (the project). It presents a suite of noise metrics and supporting information to help understand the potential implications of single runway operations at WSI. Available at: https://www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au/pdf-documents/WSI_EIS_Chapter_11_Aircraft_noise.pdf
- Chapter 9 of Technical paper 1 sets out the assessment of projected aircraft noise exposure from the future operational use of WSI's flight paths. The assessment quantifies the impacts based on the air traffic forecasts provided by WSA Co, overflights, the number of movements above a representative noise threshold and the cumulative noise exposure. Available at: https://www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au/pdf-documents/Technical_paper_1_Aircraft_noise_Oct-2023.pdf

Other changes to the preliminary flight paths

People wanted to know if additional changes to the preliminary flight paths are being considered, in addition to the proposals that are being consulted on.

Response: The department is currently consulting on the 2 proposals that relate to the night-time RRO mode. Submissions on the draft EIS also raised other suggested changes to the preliminary flight paths, which are being considered by the flight path design team. The final EIS will include all changes to the preliminary flight paths, and will be released in late 2024.

Consultation on the proposals

People expressed concern about the lack of a formal submission process for the flight path proposals. People also queried how feedback on the proposals would be recorded during community information and feedback sessions and then considered.

Response: The department's consultation on the flight path proposals is additional to previous consultation on the preliminary flight paths. This follows the formal submission process on the draft EIS from 24 October 2023 to 31 January 2024, and the release of the preliminary flight paths in June 2023. The department is now consulting on 2 flight path proposals developed in response to submissions on the draft EIS.

While there is no formal submission process for the proposals, the department is taking feedback at community information and feedback sessions throughout August 2024 and by email to wsiflightpaths@infrastructure.gov.au. The department is recording feedback received at the sessions with pen and paper, and will consider all feedback received at the sessions in reviewing the proposals for inclusion in the final EIS. The department will also endeavour to consider written feedback.

Aircraft Overflight Noise Tool

People wanted to know whether and when the Aircraft Overflight Noise Tool would be updated to show the flight path proposals and noise impacts. People noted that the Noise Tool enabled them to view impacts for a specific location or address, and this is harder to do with paper-based information or images.

Response: The flight path proposals are not currently shown on the Aircraft Overflight Noise Tool, because the department has sought to consult on the proposals as early as possible. The department has prepared a brochure and information boards to explain and illustrate the proposals and noise assessment information. The department is also holding community information and feedback sessions in affected communities to explain the proposals.

The department will update the Aircraft Overflight Noise Tool to show the final preliminary flight paths when the final EIS is published in late 2024.

In the meantime, people can continue to use the Aircraft Overflight Noise Tool to see the predicted flight path and noise impacts for the day-evening runway modes of operation (Runway 05 and Runway 23) and the overnight runway modes of operation (Runway 05, Runway 23 and the current RRO design).

Curfew

People expressed concern about the 24/7 operation of WSI, and put forward the need for a curfew or queried why WSI cannot have a curfew on aircraft operations.

Response: The hours of operation at WSI is a decision of the Government. WSI has always been envisaged and planned to operate as a 24/7, curfew-free airport. The proposal for WSI to operate curfew-free was considered under the Environmental Impact Statement process for the stage 1 development of WSI in 2015-16.

A curfew was raised in submissions on the draft EIS for the preliminary flight paths. This and other issues raised in submissions will be responded to in a submissions report, which will be published with the final EIS in late 2024.

Noise insulation and property acquisition policy

People wanted to know if the draft Noise Insulation and Property Acquisition policy would change or expand. People also asked whether their houses would receive noise insulation treatment.

The final Noise Insulation and Property Acquisition policy will be published at the same time as the final Environmental Impact Statement for the WSI preliminary flight paths in late 2024.

The department is considering submissions on the draft Environmental Impact Statement with feedback on the draft policy. In particular, the department is considering submissions identifying impacts on properties crossed by the Australian Noise Exposure Concept (ANEC) 20 contour adopted by the draft policy and suggesting natural boundaries in finalising the eligibility boundary for the Noise Insulation and Property Acquisition program.

Environmental and health impacts from flight paths

People enquired whether there has been an assessment on the flight paths' impact on environmental and health matters, including water quality, air pollution and wildlife. People also raised concerns about the flight paths' impact on these and other matters, including the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

Response: The draft EIS on the preliminary flight paths, released on 24 October 2023, includes assessment of the flight paths' impact on a range of topics including noise, the environment, human health, air pollution, aircraft hazards and risks, biodiversity and economics. The draft EIS is available at www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au. The submissions on the draft EIS raised a range of issues. An overview of the issues raised in submissions is available at <https://www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au/pdf-documents/draft-eis-submissions-overview-may-25.pdf>. The department is considering all issues raised in submissions, and will respond to each issue in a submissions report. The submissions report will be released with the final EIS in late 2024.

Other frequently raised questions

Will fuel dumping increase? Where will fuel be dumped?

Response: Fuel jettisoning (also known as fuel dumping) is only required in extremely rare circumstances in the event of an emergency, and is only possible in certain types of aircraft. For example, some of the most common aircraft types in use in Australia, the Boeing 737 and Airbus A320 do not have the ability to jettison fuel in flight.

In the event that fuel jettisoning is required, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and Airservices Australia enforce strict procedures on when and where it can occur. Jettisoned fuel vaporises rapidly and disperses widely. This means it is highly unlikely to reach the ground and will have a negligible effect on air or water quality or the environment.

Will there be a Sydney basin review of flight paths?

Response: There are currently no plans to undertake a review of flight paths and airspace in the Sydney basin.

When will the draft Environmental Impact Statement final be released?

Response: The final Environmental Impact Statement and the submissions report responding to issues raised in submissions will be published in late 2024.

Will test flights occur?

Response: The Civil Aviation Safety Authority and Airservices Australia will undertake test flights of flight paths. WSA Co Limited will also undertake test flights to test ground equipment and lighting.