



30 April 2024

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

## **SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT AND MITIGATION OF AIRCRAFT NOISE**

Infrastructure Partnerships Australia is pleased to provide this submission in response to the Senate Inquiry into the *Impact and mitigation of aircraft noise*.

Infrastructure Partnerships Australia is an independent think tank and executive member network, providing research focused on excellence in social and economic infrastructure. We exist to shape public debate and drive reform for the national interest.

This submission provides an overview of Infrastructure Partnerships Australia's advice on the mitigation of aircraft noise, drawing from our advocacy and thought leadership in the sector over many years. Infrastructure Partnerships Australia proposes that aircraft noise is not a zero-sum game, where industry's interests come at the expense of the interests of communities around airports or under flight paths. Instead, there are plenty of opportunities for win-win reforms, including outdated regulations that could be enhanced to safeguard community interests without constraining the operations and growth of the aviation sector, along with all the economic and social benefits a thriving aviation industry brings.

### **Aviation brings enormous opportunities, and social licence is the key to sustainable growth**

Australia's aviation sector will be a critical factor in our broader national interests – economically, socially, geopolitically – in the twenty-first century. To make Australia a top-tier tourism destination and trading partner, we need continued investment in aviation infrastructure, as well as growth and development of aviation services. Airports investing in infrastructure also enables more competition and capacity into the network, which supports lower airfares. Australian airports and airlines need to be at the forefront of innovation and technology adoption, with a major focus on the shift to net zero aviation.

Governments have a critical role to play in enabling this success, by ensuring aviation rules do not unduly impede growth and development of the industry while balancing this with the needs of communities around airports and under flight paths, as well as the many other stakeholders who benefit from and rely on aviation. If governments can get the settings right, the aviation industry can deliver significant net benefits, and many of the communities around airports have the most to gain.



Meaningful community engagement is a critical factor in establishing social licence for growth and change. In the past, engagement with local communities around airports and under flight paths has too often fallen short. This has been exacerbated by a lack of transparent, long-term planning. Disconnects between Federal, state and local planning instruments, flowing through to decisions about zoning, building heights, the location of community facilities and a whole raft of other local factors have led to negative, lasting consequences for many Australians. These issues need not be repeated.

Communities around airports and under flight paths have a right for their perspectives to be heard, and to understand how decisions impact them. This is an essential component of building and maintaining social licence. The Federal Government could support this outcome by giving greater independence, reporting powers and a broader remit to the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman, including by establishing it as an independent statutory agency, reporting directly to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. This simple reform could enhance independent oversight of community engagement around changes to flight paths and potential investments in aviation infrastructure.

The land use planning frameworks implemented by the NSW Government around Western Sydney Airport and the Victorian Government around Melbourne Airport are good examples of how governments can work closely with communities and industry to build and maintain social licence. The areas around these airports have been protected from significant residential development for decades. This historical and ongoing framework enables these airports' unrestricted, 24/7 operations by ensuring the number of homes impacted by the highest levels of aircraft noise is very small compared to what would be the case at airports surrounded by dense residential development. In the case of Western Sydney Airport, ongoing land use protections consider the development of the airport's second runway, currently planned for the 2050s. This long-term approach will lead to stronger outcomes for future communities and will serve to protect the significant economic contribution of Western Sydney Airport to the region and the nation.

### **Aviation reforms should modernise outdated rules and move to an outcomes-based approach**

Many of the rules governing Australia's aviation sector are decades-old, piecemeal and arbitrary. The vast majority of these rules were drafted when there were fewer, noisier planes in the sky and before the advent of technologies that have hugely reduced the noise impacts and improved the efficiency of air travel. This has resulted in some curious legacies, including aircraft that no longer fly in Australia – such as the DC-9 – or noisy aircraft by modern standards – such as the BAE 146 – given special permission to operate during the Sydney Airport curfew. While reforms are planned to fix this anomaly, many other similar issues remain across the various legislative instruments governing aircraft noise.

Ultimately, both industry and communities lose out from poorly designed or outdated rules. So long as laws and regulations dictate restrictions based on technology or arbitrary settings, Australia's aviation risks being stuck in the past. In a highly competitive and fast-moving global aviation market, this is far from ideal. Caps and curfews are a blunt instrument for airports and freight handling facilities in urban areas, and are a reflection of a failure to optimise planning over the lifetime of the assets.

Infrastructure Partnerships Australia submits that regulations should be outcome-based, reflecting the scale of the impact on residents and businesses. Regulations should address genuinely disruptive and avoidable aircraft noise, the mitigation of concerns to do with aircraft noise, and balance these two issues with the undeniable society-wide benefits of operating aircraft infrastructure. Where caps and curfews exist, they should not be set arbitrarily in relation to certain technologies or processes at a moment in time, but should be



structured around a specific policy outcome and reviewed regularly as technologies change. This approach safeguards the interests of communities while enabling industry to innovate and invest in solutions that can extract greater use from their assets, enhance efficiency, reduce fuel use and minimise costs for end users.

### **The success of Australia's aviation in the twenty-first century relies on sensible, far-sighted decisions**

Investments in aviation have remarkably long lifespans. Sydney Airport has been operating on its site for over a century, while other major airports have operated on their current sites for many decades. Across almost all major airports, major works are underway or have recently been complete, which will support their growth for decades to come. The Australia and New Zealand Infrastructure Pipeline lists more than \$10 billion in major projects in planning or under construction, including new runways at Melbourne Airport and Perth Airport, as well as the construction of Western Sydney Airport. Beyond this, there is a considerable pipeline of works to improve the landside connections to airports, including the completion of the Sydney Gateway project, improvements to landside connections at Sydney and Melbourne Airports, and the delivery of Sydney Metro – WSA.

The scale of these investments highlights the importance of governments making considered decisions about how aviation infrastructure can operate over a long-term horizon. Aircraft noise is and will continue to be a major consideration in rule setting, but it must be balanced against other outcomes, including the potential for future growth and development of Australia's major airports. The imposition of new restrictions, particularly in the form of arbitrary caps and curfews, is in no stakeholder's best interests.

Infrastructure Partnerships Australia would be happy to provide further assistance to the Senate Inquiry. If you require additional detail or information please do not hesitate to contact Mollie Matich, Head of Policy and Research, on (02) 9152 6000 or [mollie.matich@infrastructure.org.au](mailto:mollie.matich@infrastructure.org.au).

Yours Sincerely,



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