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July 1, 2015

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

Chairman Thune and Ranking Member Nelson,

As your Committee drafts legislation to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), we wish to bring to your attention a matter of serious concern for many of our constituents in Arizona who have been affected by flight path changes around Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. We ask that you consider, as part of that legislation, options to address the situation already underway in Phoenix—a situation almost certain to arise in the future in other communities around the country—by requiring substantive community participation in the process.

As you may be aware, on September 18, 2014, the FAA instituted new flight patterns for departure routes from Phoenix Sky Harbor as part of that Administration's ongoing implementation of NextGen. These flight path changes have acutely impacted residents around the airport who assert that they have experienced an intolerable increase in flight noise due to a dramatic increase in the number of overhead flights. We have heard the first-hand accounts of the impact the flight noise is having on the daily lives of residents unlucky enough to find themselves under these new paths, and we share the frustration they feel for not being afforded an opportunity to have their voices heard and their interests considered prior to the implementation of these changes.

Since last September, the City of Phoenix, airport representatives, and affected members of the community attempted to have these concerns addressed through a Phoenix Performance Based Navigation Working Group. Earlier this year, we wrote to Administrator Michael Huerta urging the FAA to renew discussions with stakeholders in Arizona in order to reach a workable solution for the residents of this community. These

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discussions failed to produce a suitable outcome, and in June of this year, the City of Phoenix filed suit against the FAA challenging these flight adjustments.

While we continue to support the important policy goals of modernizing and improving the safety of our National Airspace System through NextGen, it is essential that these efforts give sufficient consideration to communities where these changes will have unintended, yet significant, impacts. And, to the extent possible, efforts should be undertaken to have intolerable noise levels derived from flight path changes mitigated. This is especially true at Sky Harbor, which is one of the busiest airports in the country and located in the heart of a rapidly growing metropolitan area.

As your Committee turns its attention to FAA reauthorization legislation in the coming weeks, you will undoubtedly be considering a number of policy proposals aimed at improving the nation's airspace. It is imperative that these discussions include proposals that would allow affected communities the opportunity to engage substantively in the process with the FAA before changes, like those last September in Phoenix, go into effect. Community participation in a process certain to impact the daily lives of members of that community is both desirable and necessary.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to working with you on this issue moving forward.

Sincerely,

John McCain
United States Senator

Jeff Flake
United States Senator