How We Did it

Strategies for working with the FAA to achieve Noise Mitigation

At DCA,

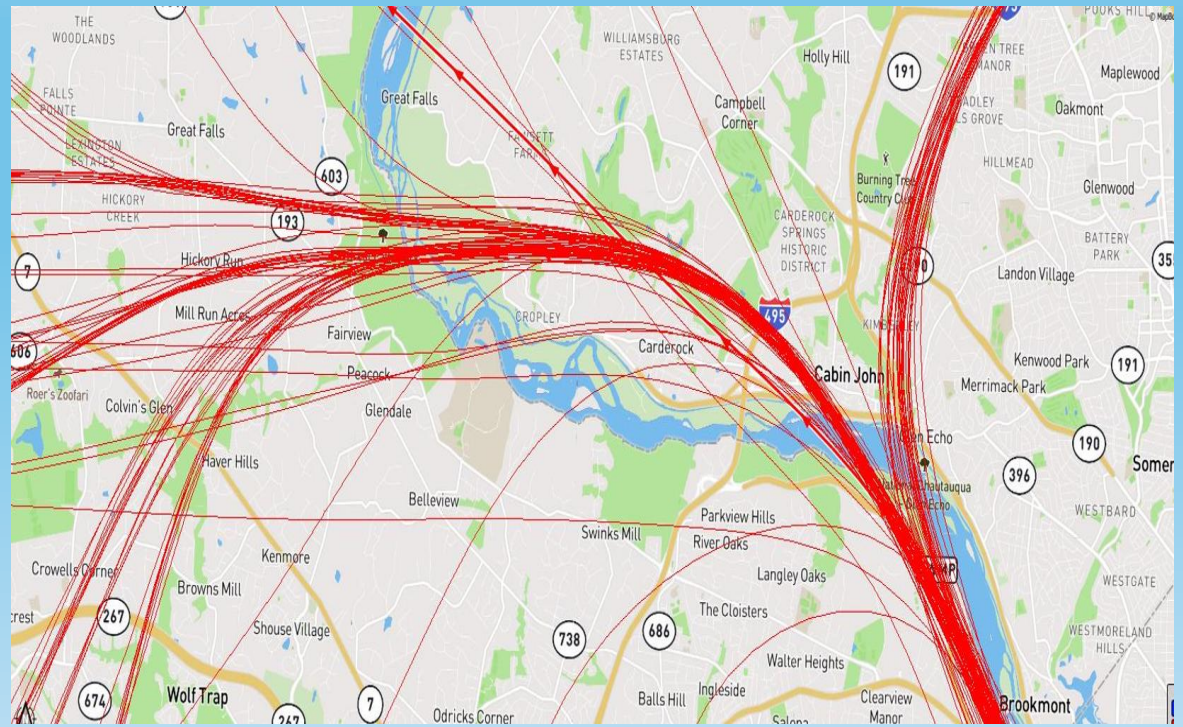
We had two problems:

- Departure paths were shifted and concentrated as part of the Metroplex project in 2013, and
- Arrival/Approach paths were shifted and concentrated in a 2015 stand-alone action with no notice or environmental review



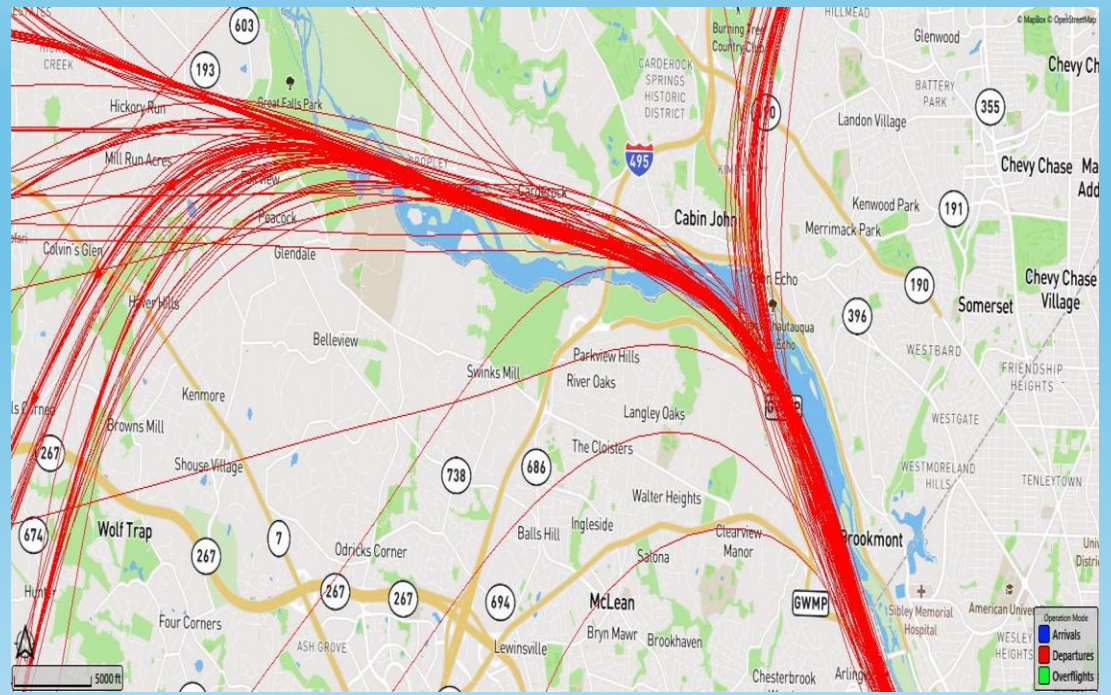
Departures

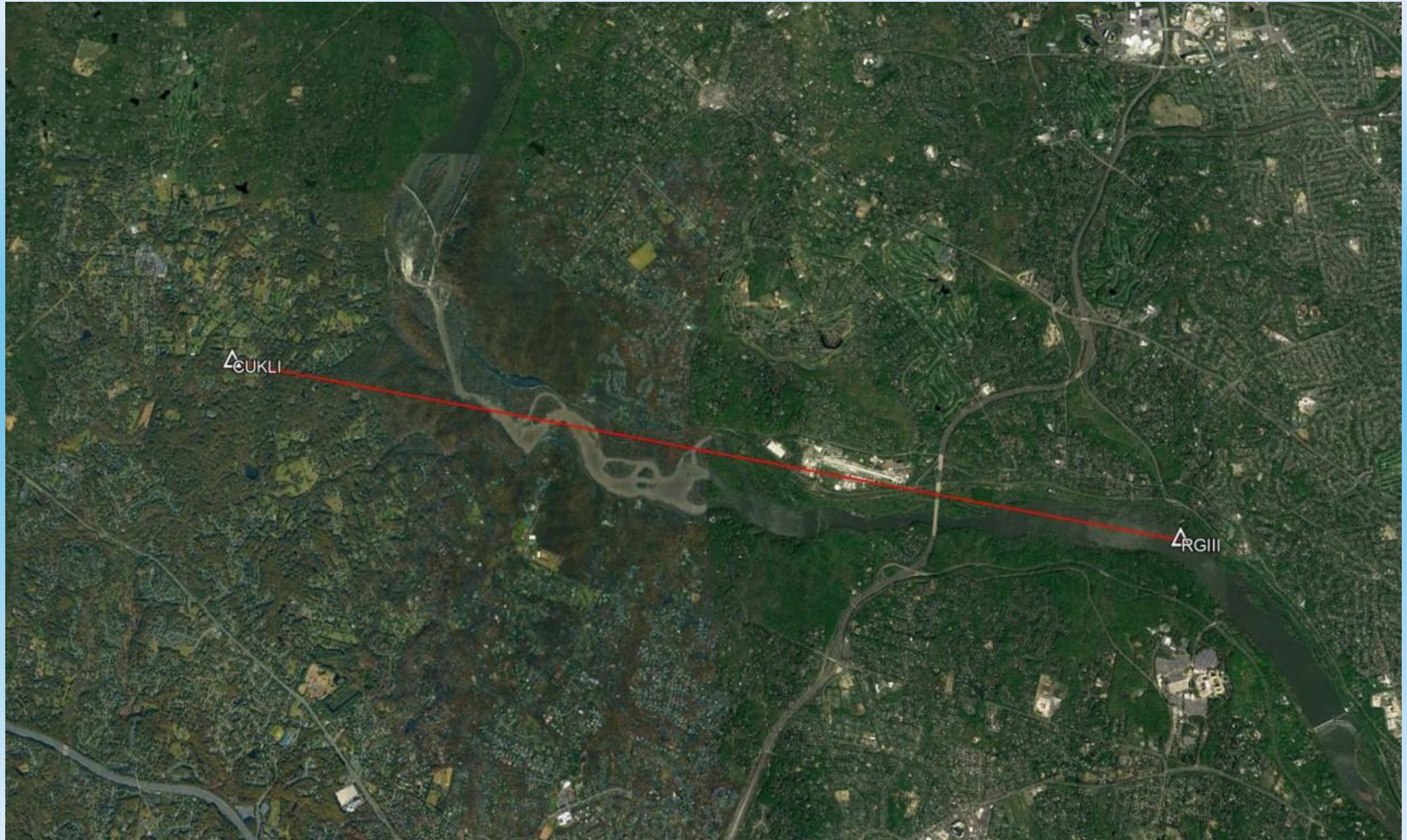
- As aircraft depart north, they split east and west over Montgomery County, MD
- Because overflown communities are not stakeholders, and there are no noise SMEs involved in the FAA procedure design process, it didn't occur to the FAA that a more noise compatible westerly departure could overfly government land near the Potomac River
- After impacted communities cried foul and garnered political support, the FAA offered to drop the westerly path towards the river
- The problem was that we had people suffering under the easterly departures too; the FAA said that there wasn't anything they could do about that . . . We didn't believe them

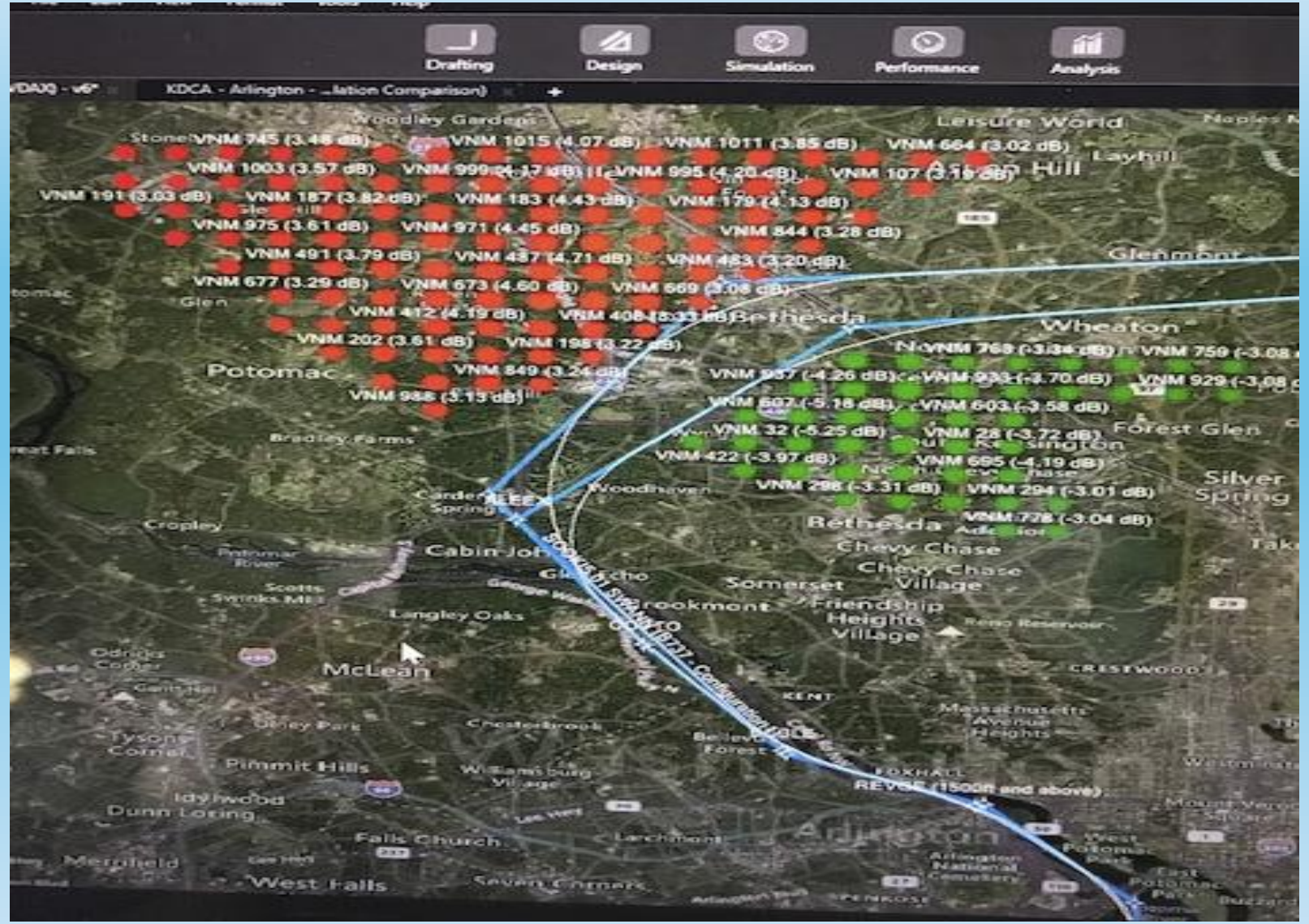


Outcome

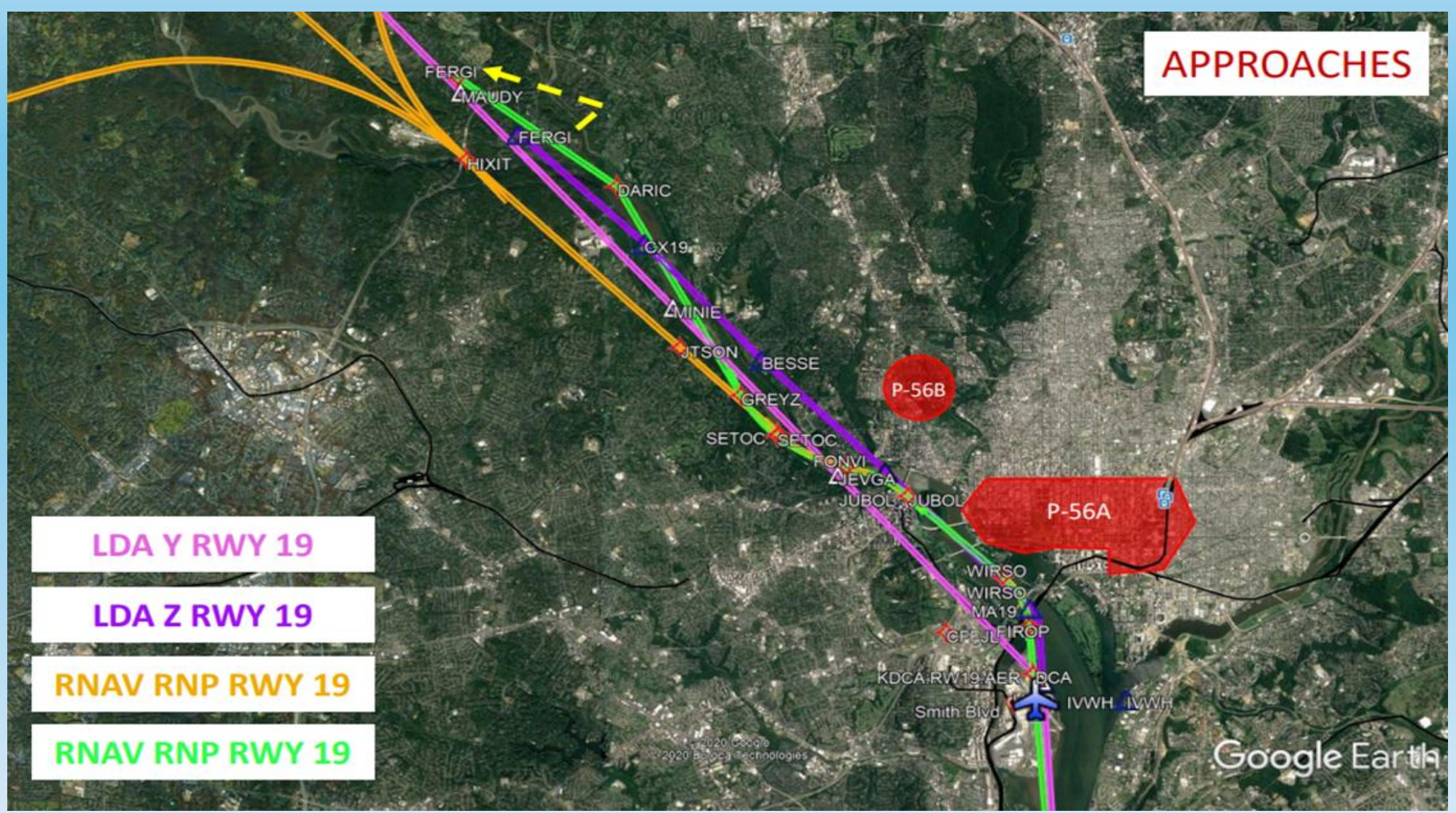
- Montgomery County, MD partnered with Arlington County, VA (DCA is located in Arlington Co.) to hire Jim Allerdice of Vianair
- Jim confirmed that there really wasn't a feasible procedural change that would mitigate noise from the easterly departures
- It was very helpful to have our own expert confirm this. There was a lot of distrust of the FAA; we just didn't believe that the agency was really trying to help. Jim's analysis provided acceptance for the community



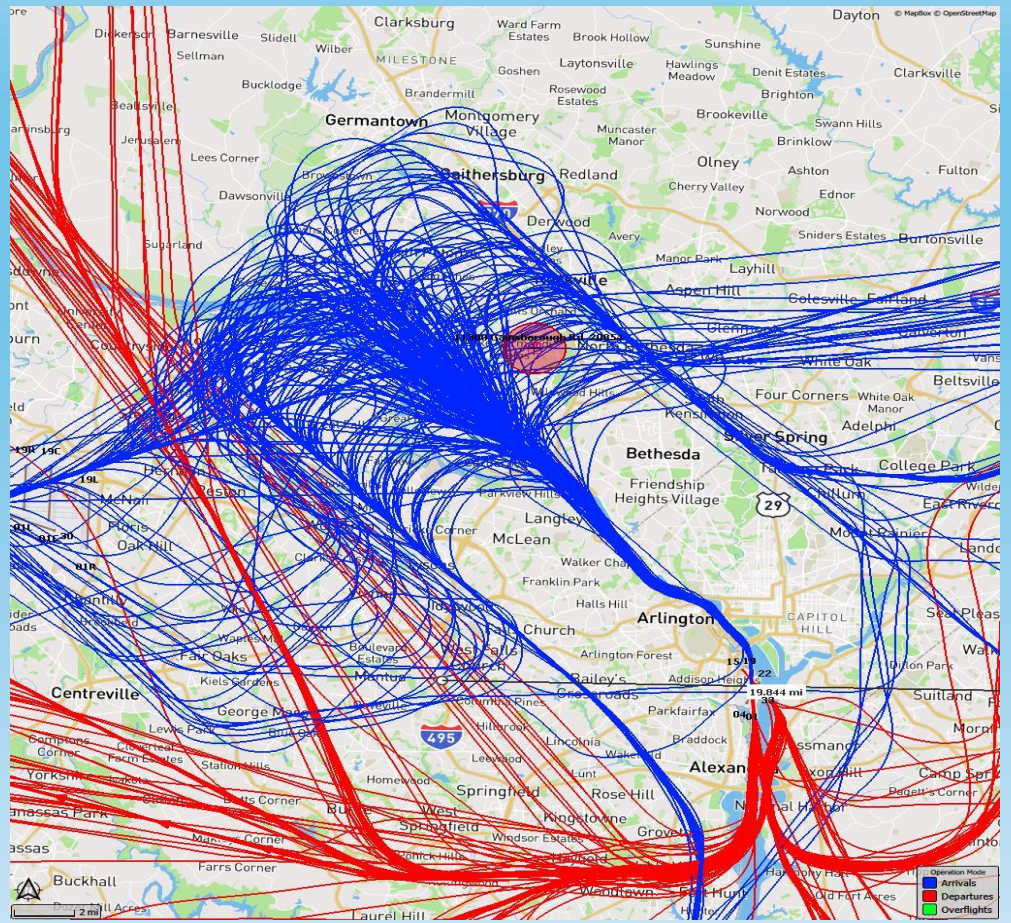

CUKLI
RGIII


Drafting
Design
Simulation
Performance
Analysis
KDCA - Arlington - ...lation Comparison)
VNM 745 (3.48 dB)
VNM 1015 (4.07 dB)
VNM 1011 (3.85 dB)
VNM 664 (3.02 dB)
VNM 1003 (3.57 dB)
VNM 995 (4.20 dB)
VNM 191 (3.03 dB)
VNM 187 (3.82 dB)
VNM 183 (4.43 dB)
VNM 179 (4.13 dB)
VNM 975 (3.61 dB)
VNM 971 (4.45 dB)
VNM 844 (3.28 dB)
VNM 491 (3.79 dB)
VNM 487 (4.71 dB)
VNM 483 (3.20 dB)
VNM 677 (3.29 dB)
VNM 673 (4.60 dB)
VNM 669 (3.08 dB)
VNM 412 (4.19 dB)
VNM 202 (3.61 dB)
VNM 198 (3.22 dB)
VNM 849 (3.24 dB)
VNM 988 (3.13 dB)
VNM 957 (-4.26 dB)
VNM 933 (-3.70 dB)
VNM 607 (-5.18 dB)
VNM 603 (-3.58 dB)
VNM 32 (-5.25 dB)
VNM 28 (-3.72 dB)
VNM 422 (-3.97 dB)
VNM 695 (-4.19 dB)
VNM 298 (-3.31 dB)
VNM 294 (-3.01 dB)
VNM 778 (-3.04 dB)
Leisure World
Layhill
Glenmont
Bethesda
Wheaton
Potomac
Forest Glen
Silver Spring
Chevy Chase
Somerset
Friendship Heights
Village
McLean
Tysons Corner
Pimmit Hills
Falls Church
West Falls
Arlington
FOXHALL
REVISE (1500ft and above)

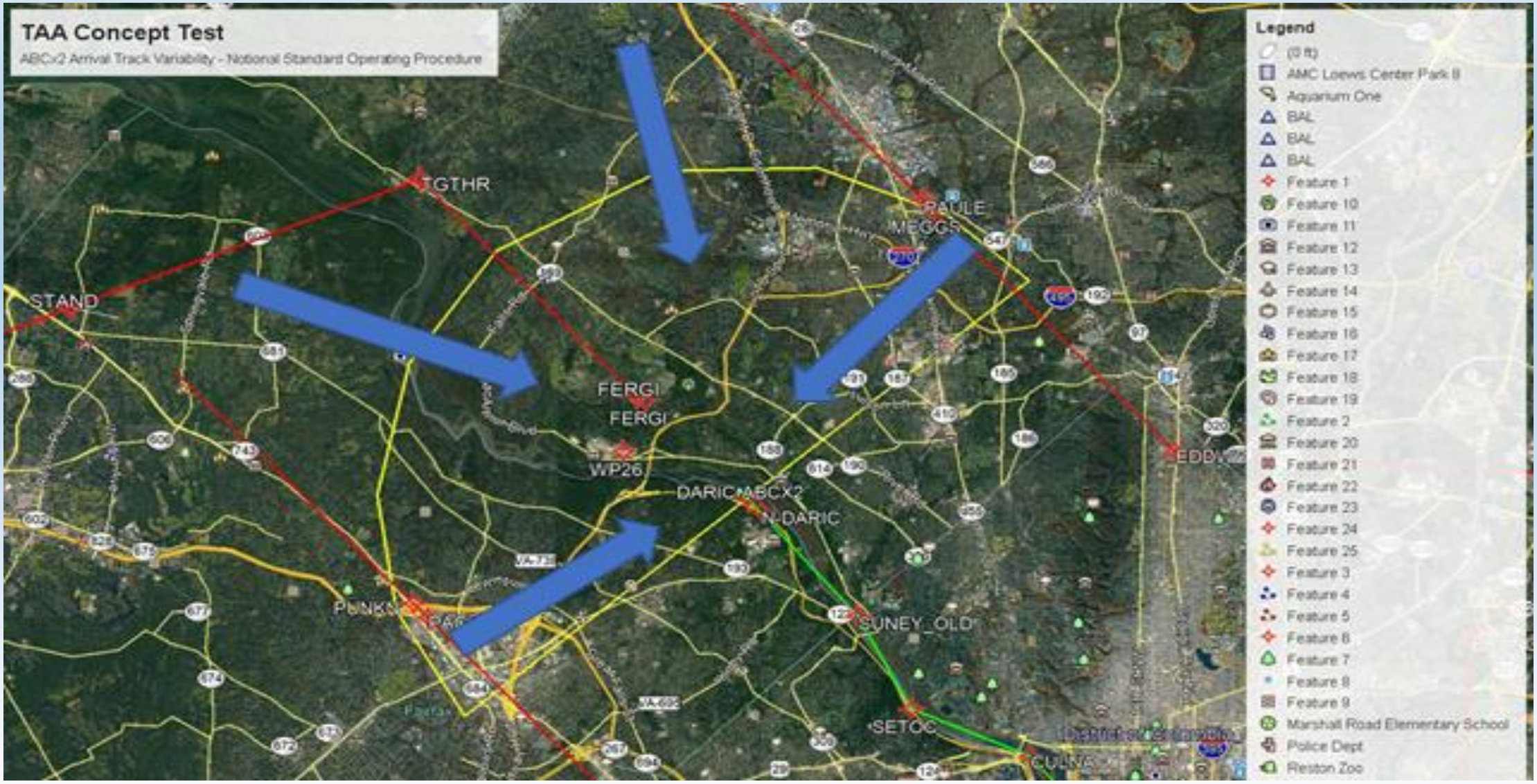
2015 Change in Approaches/Arrivals



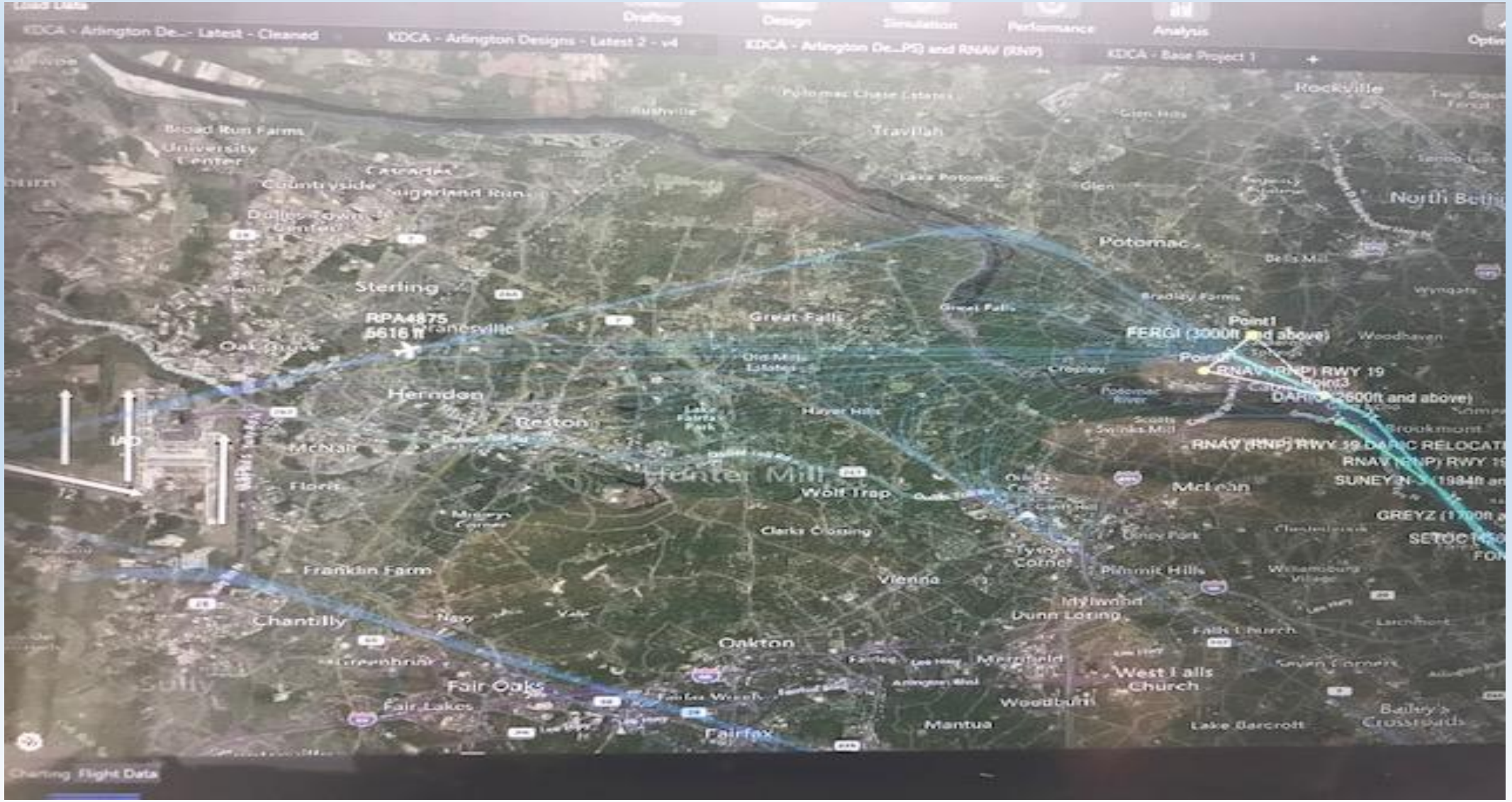
The Blue Arrival Blob that resulted over Montgomery County, MD is a killer



“TAA Concept” for Arrivals



A Snapshot of where Arrivals are flying today



Arrival outcome



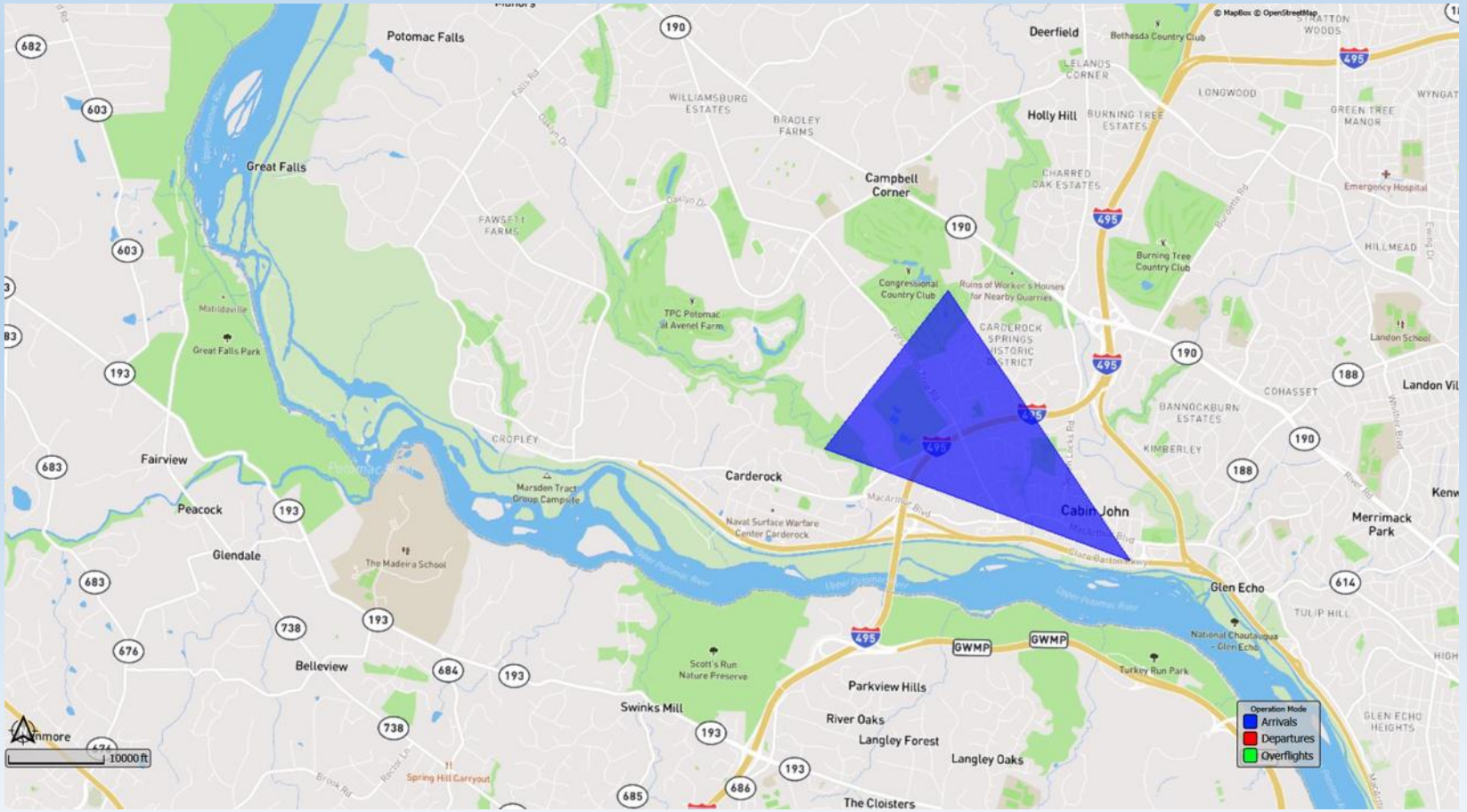
Before: 16% of arrivals* were vectored off of the published procedure

After: 24% of arrivals* are vectored off of the procedure

This is at least a 50% increase in aircraft flying in places other than the procedure which for DCA amounts to an additional 33 flights a day. We use the descriptor, TRACK VARIABILITY (not dispersion)

* on average

We consider Track Variability to be arrivals “outside of the polygon”



So, about the FAA . . .



Many people think that . . .

. . . the FAA is an intransigent agency full of group-think bureaucrats who could care less about noise impacts

Sure felt like it at times, but no . . .



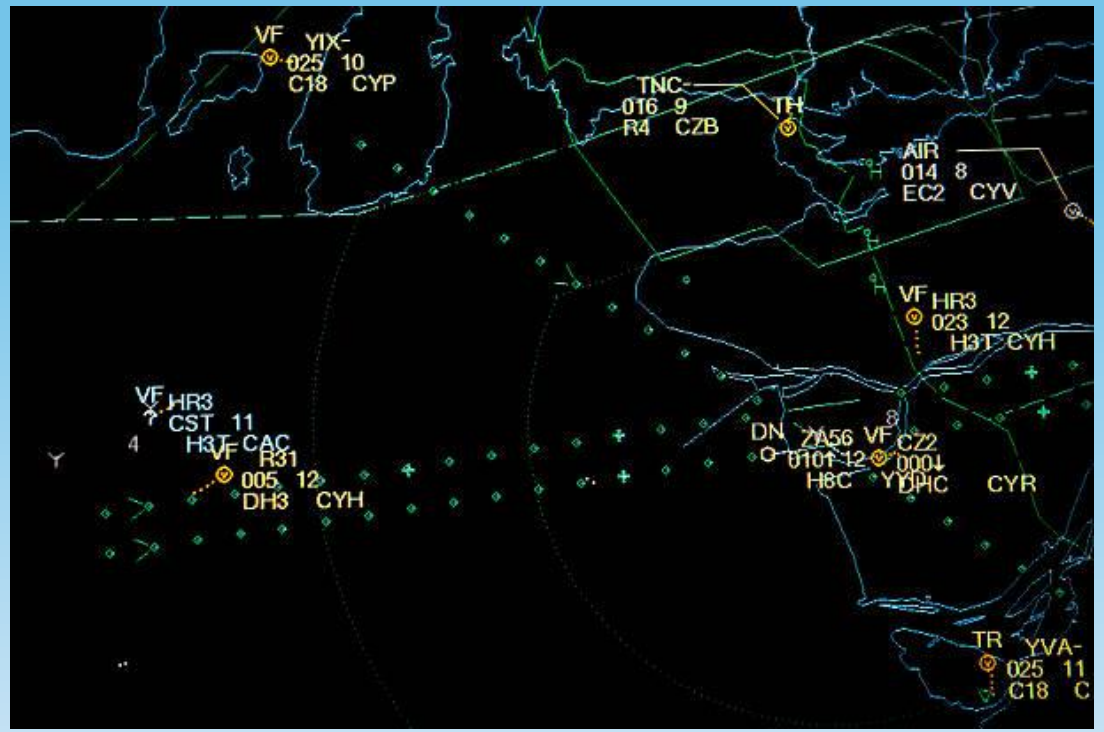
It is our Federal Government officials who love and support aviation (and really don't care much about noise) and the FAA knows it

***** No matter the party in power, aviation interests always win *****

- EPA Office of Noise Abatement & Control defunded (Reagan, Senate: R, House: D, 1981)
- Airport Noise & Capacity Act passed (H.W. Bush, D's control,1991)
- FAA ATO created in anticipation of NextGen (Clinton*, 2000)
- NextGen – initial authorization (Bush, R's control, 2003)
- NextGen – initial funding of $2.8 billion (Bush, D's control, 2007)
- NextGen/PBN - $11 billion (Obama, Senate: D, House: R, 2012)

* by executive order

I once marveled at the how similar FAA TRACON screens are to 1980's ATARI game consoles!





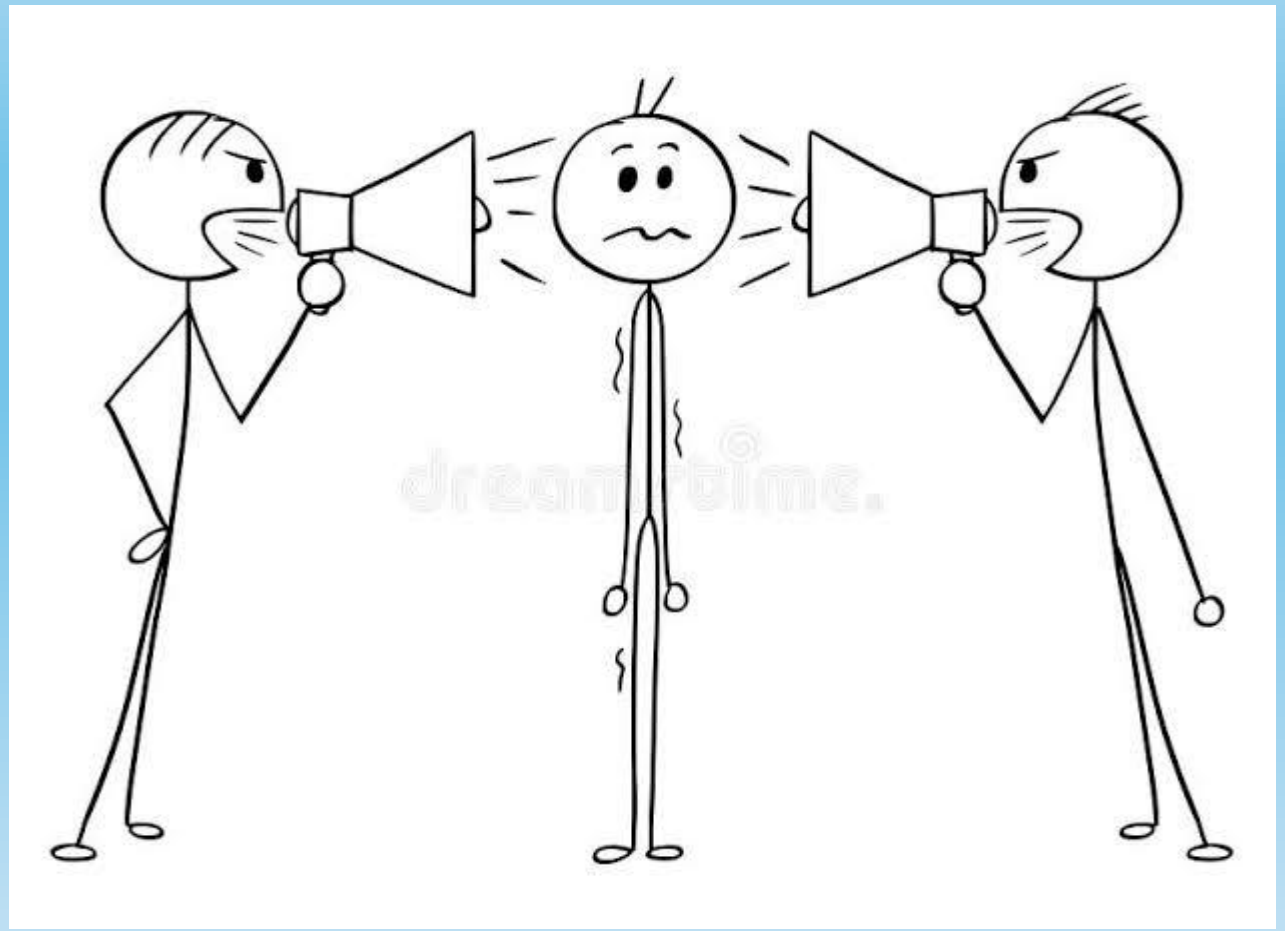
Many people think that . . .

. . . the FAA has a budget for community engagement, so they are required to attend airport roundtable meetings

Yes, and no

- Until recently, the FAA community engagement budget was mostly used for FAA communications (i.e. marketing) that explain FAA authority and actions with no real engagement
- Starting in 2021, Congress appropriated $5M for the FAA to hire Community Engagement Officers (CEO's) to participate in roundtables
- In 2023, Congress appropriated $1.3M more
- Interestingly, the FAA is still legally mandated to fund regional noise ombudsmen to serve as public liaisons
- Beyond the CEO's, ***FAA staff are not paid to attend roundtable meetings and do so on a volunteer basis***

So BE NICE TO FAA STAFF!!!



Or they will stop attending your meetings.

Many people think that . . .

. . . roundtables won’t get anywhere with FAA CEOs; they think that FAA brass from the Regional Service Centers with decision making authority need to attend roundtable meetings

Yes, and no

- The **FAA CEOs** seem to add very little. They can't answer questions, and never seem to follow up at a later date even though they say they will (my impressions)
- **FAA brass** can be helpful behind the scenes. At DCA, we had PBN technical leads, Operations Support Group Team Managers, the VP of Mission Support Services for the ATO, and two different Eastern Region Directors attend our meetings
- ***The most valuable and helpful FAA staff at DCA roundtable meetings was the lead Air Traffic Controller***


A.T.C.
STAFF
PARKING

Many people think that . . .

. . . the FAA is a captured agency with airlines calling the shots

Yep. That's true.

- NAC – NextGen Advisory Committee (renamed National Airspace System Advisory Committee) is the forum for industry to direct the FAA
- In 2025, the **Airlines for America (A4A) Political Action Committee reported only $15k** in total contributions according to the Federal Election Commission. Rather than direct candidate donations from its primary PAC, A4A has a multifaceted political strategy:
  - **Corporate Lobbying:** A4A and its major members (such as United, Delta, and American Airlines) expend the bulk of their political funds directly on lobbying efforts. For instance, United Airlines reported that **$1.02 million** of its 2025 annual dues paid to A4A went toward lobbying activities.
  - **Individual/Executive Giving:** Under individual corporate governance rules, A4A members and their executives frequently make separate personal contributions or manage independent company PACs to engage with members of Congress.
  - This makes adding up total aviation giving difficult
- In 2015, former PA Congressman Bill Shuster, who served as Chair of the House Transportation Committee, acknowledged a romantic relationship with Shelley Rubino, the VP of Government Affairs for A4A, and it barely registered beyond a Politico article. He retired on his own terms 4 years later.



Many people think that . . .

. . . there is a revolving door between the FAA and Congressional Committees

That’s true too

- **Moving to Industry:** Congressional aides and committee staffers who oversee aviation policy frequently leave public service to work for airlines, aerospace manufacturers, or Washington lobbying firms
- **Leveraging Connections:** Former congressional staff members essentially sell their knowledge of the legislative process, funding streams, and relationships with Hill co-workers
- **Agency Crossflow:** Officials move back and forth between top FAA regulatory roles and executive suites at major commercial carriers or defense contractors
- **Regulatory Capture:** Critics argue that deep familiarity between regulators, lawmakers, and industry creates a cozy relationship that blurs the line between overseer and regulated

Some people think that . . .

. . . the FAA is a bloated and inefficient agency

True, but . . . (in aviation matters, there always seems to be a but)

- The FAA has a budget of $27B
- There are 44k people working for the FAA



- The agency still lags in technical innovation
- The agency is roiled by safety scandals like its lack of oversight of Boeing that led to the 737Max crashes and agency nonresponse to hundreds of close calls at DCA that culminated in the January 29, 2025 crash between an AA regional jet and an Army helicopter
- It seems like the money isn't going to the right places
- In addition to chronically low ATC staffing, there are only 2 FAA flight procedure designers (based in Oklahoma City) working for the **ENTIRE COUNTRY**

So, how do communities get anything done in this environment?

- You are not considered a stakeholder
- Your Airport is a stakeholder and is the conduit between you and the FAA
- Understand that the FAA is under fire from all sides. Courtesy and understanding go a long way
- Hire a consultant like Jim Allerdice who understands community impacts and is well liked by the FAA because he was FAA. By working with someone like Jim, the FAA cannot turn you down by claiming that they don't have the resources to redesign flight paths because Jim does it for them. He hands them a disc. A good consultant will design procedures that benefit communities and the FAA and air carriers too



Win Win Win



Communities Win – noise mitigation

FAA Wins – improved procedures for a more efficient operation

Air Carriers Win – typically by a decrease in track miles

Working with Members of Congress

* Explain that the FAA needs money for procedure designers and the entire country would be grateful if they would sponsor a bill for that

* In the meanwhile, ask them to write a letter supporting your consultant's proposal. Use DCA as an example that meaningful noise mitigation is possible, but that you need their support to *make it happen*

* Meeting with Congressional staff is 99% as good as meeting with the MOC themselves

Learn how to write a one-page "white paper" summarizing the situation. You can go to 2 pages if you add visuals.

Keep it simple

Near Longridge Ct, Bethesda, MD
Monday, 6/26/17
NOISE STATION 3/4 mile

Time	Aircraft	Altitude	LAeq @ CJ
5:41	B738	6637	65
5:56	A319	7379	62
6:00	B737	7808	62
6:08	B737	7743	64
6:10	B737	7959	63
6:13	B738	7825	63
6:14	E170	6001	63
6:15	A320	6276	65
6:18	B737	6775	64
6:20	B737	7628	62
6:23	B737	7336	63
6:30	MD90	7490	62
6:36	E145	6939	58
6:42	B738	6135	65
6:43	MD90	6916	60
6:45	E170	7218	62
6:46	B712	5679	61
6:53	E45X	7972	55
7:06	B737	5948	61
7:08	B738	6371	66
7:09	E145	6604	53
7:10	CRJ2	6827	55
7:12	B737	6516	64

Key Takeaways:

1. You need both a consultant and a receptive FAA to be successful
2. Your consultant must have the technical chops to understand FAA flight criteria, the software to input FAA national offload data to then design flight paths for the FAA, and have a positive working relationship with the FAA
3. Your successful consultant will not hand the FAA a wish list with words like “dispersion.” He will hand the FAA a disc with flight procedures that Air Traffic Control has already signed off on
4. Your Congressperson and Senators AND STAFF can help you greatly. Describe the impacts in human terms and explain that there is an opportunity for noise mitigation (and a better quality of life), but you need their support
5. This will be a full-time job. Make or bring friends
6. Pinch your noise and advocate for more funding for the FAA (for procedure designers especially). The FAA will suddenly like you and be more responsive to you and your MOC
7. Get your Air Traffic Controllers involved in all discussions about potential changes. They are the magic ingredient. Thank them at every opportunity

3 Key Ingredients for Success

1. Money for an Airspace Consultant
2. Political support for a receptive FAA
3. Air Traffic Controller involvement is critical



