

[Airport bosses face noisy protest](#)

Night flights. Fed-up residents joining forces to fight air traffic

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The Gazette

Thursday, May 8, 2008

Night flights out of Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport and their rerouting over parts of Montreal, Laval and now Lachine have set the stage for a potentially tumultuous annual general meeting of the city's airport authority today.

Hundreds of residents of municipalities surrounding the Dorval airport - members of a group called Citoyens pour une qualité de vie - have chartered buses to show up and protest at the Aéroports de Montréal meeting downtown this morning.

Opposition to night flights - flights outside of standard operating hours of 7 a.m. to 1 a.m. - has traditionally been concentrated in Dorval and Pointe Claire, the two cities closest to the airport.

However, in September 2006, new flight paths introduced nighttime traffic over St. Laurent, Cartierville, Saraguay, Ahuntsic and Laval's Île Paton.

And most recently, a new night flight path is being tried over Lachine - close to Montreal West and Côte St. Luc near the Meadowbrook golf course.

Now, residents of all of these communities have come together to fight back.

"These flights are destroying our health and the quality of our lives," said Paul Wilkinson, the president of Citoyens pour une qualité de vie's newly formed Dorval chapter.

"Dispersing night flights is not what we want," Wilkinson said, adding he is often awakened at 2 and 3 a.m. by jets flying over his home.

"We want them stopped."

Since ADM moved international flights back from Mirabel in 1996 and charter flights in 2004 and started expanding Trudeau - \$1.5 billion to date - there has never been an environmental impact study, he said.

In 2007, the Trudeau airport saw a record 12.4 million passengers - up from 7.8 million passengers in 2002 - and projections foresee 14.6 million passengers a year by 2012.

ADM says there are now an average of 600 takeoffs and landings a day at the airport.

Rather than becoming divided by what could become a night-flight sweepstakes, Wilkinson and other leaders of the coalition say residents have decided to pool their resources and energies for a unified fight.

Several European studies suggest a link between night flights over densely populated areas and increased rates of hypertension and other medical conditions.

The growing number of flights taking place between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. must be curtailed, the coalition says, and Dorval's early-morning scheduled flights transferred back to Mirabel, which now handles only limited cargo flights.

Short-haul flights - those 2 1/2 hours and shorter - make up 70 per cent of Trudeau's air traffic. Only 12 per cent of flights are transatlantic.

On a typical weekday morning, ADM's website lists 20 to 25 scheduled commercial flights between 5:30 a.m. and 6:45 a.m. - small jets usually filled with business travellers - departing for Toronto and New York, Chicago and other U.S. cities.

According to Transport Canada regulations, flights into and out of Trudeau between 1 a.m. and 7 a.m. are allowed only for smaller aircraft, such as regional and executive jets.

Planes weighing more than 45,000 kilograms - such as Airbus 320s and Boeing 747s - are supposed to fly during these restricted hours only for exceptional reasons, like bad weather or emergencies.



A plane flies over Dorval homes. Residents complain night flights make too much noise. Vincenzo D'Alto, The Gazette

[ENLARGE](#)

In April 2000, however, ADM started grant-ing exemptions to Air Canada and American Airlines to allow them to schedule flights of large aircraft at night. In 2004, exemptions were extended to Air Transat and Skyservice - in this latter case, without the ADM's noise-abatement committee even being consulted.

Normand Boivin, ADM's vice-president of operations, said the airport will never be able to satisfy everyone. Noise is going to be an issue at the airport, he said.

"We've never hidden any of our intent," he said in response to the complaint that ADM has failed to inform Montrealers about the airport's operations.

He said Montreal's seat on the ADM's noise-abatement committee was left vacant for four years before Noushig Eloyan, a city councillor for the Bordeaux-Cartierville district, took the seat in October 2006.

During that time, Pointe Claire Mayor Bill McMurchie, Dorval Mayor Ed Rouleau and St. Laurent borough mayor Alan De Sousa were the only politicians on the committee.

"I can't help that," Boivin said of the lack of representation from the city of Montreal and how that might have affected the dissemination of information.

Over the past decade, however, he said, ADM has introduced several new noise abatement measures that have dramatically reduced the number of Montreal Island residents being affected.

In 1995, Boivin said, there were 107,333 residents living in the airport's "soundscape" - the zone around the airport where the noise level makes the area unsuitable for residential use.

Today, that number has been reduced to 16,832 residents, Boivin said.

Quieter planes have played a big part in the improvement, but so have new flight paths and airport operating procedures, he said.

The flight path introduced over St. Laurent, Saraguay and Cartierville in September 2006, he said, meant planes no longer needed to fly east over the island of Montreal, "sometimes as far as Ville d'Anjou," when the winds demand an easterly takeoff. (Planes must take off into the wind.)

The flight path from runway 06L - a main west-to-east runway - calls for pilots to make a sharp turn left when their planes reach an altitude of 520 feet, climbing above St. Laurent's industrial zone and Highway 13.

The innovative manoeuvre, the first of its kind in Canada, he said, has attracted interest from New York and Chicago airport officials anxious to learn new ways to reduce their impact on residential communities they fly over.

Now, he said, that same manoeuvre - a sharp turn at 520 feet, this time to the right - is being used off runway 06L with the new flight path being tested over Lachine.

Though some pilots have had trouble following the two paths perfectly, he said, the procedure will improve ADM's ability to route planes around residential neighbourhoods. "We don't want to throw in the towel yet," Boivin said.

City councillor Eloyan, however, said she doesn't buy that argument.

Since joining the noise abatement committee in 2006, she said, she has been lobbying for a transfer of night flights back to Mirabel.

"The people in Saraguay, Cartierville and Lachine never had night flights before," she said. "These flights were implemented without consultation. What I have proposed is to have a curfew during the night so that everyone can sleep tight.

"We have a problem to face in the very near future. With all the development in a densely populated area, no matter which way they send the flights there are going to be problems."

Lachine is a case in point, said Jean Marc Héту, president of the coalition's new group in the borough and the one that will probably fill the most buses with protesters today.

Over the past two months, Héту, a former mayor of Lachine, said he has been spending four hours a day on the case and fielding four or five calls a day from panicked residents.

Even though ADM has said planes flying over Lachine will be at an altitude of 2,000 to 2,500 feet, Héту said, residents are still concerned they will be awakened at night by the thunder of jets and chattering windows.

During a flight overhead, "my glass was shaking at the breakfast table this morning," he said.

"At first, I thought, 'What was that?' But then I realized."

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