FAQs

WINGS
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ANSWERS TO THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT WINGS FIELD

Who is responsible for Wings Field?

The airport is owned by Wings Field Preservation Associates, LP (WFPA), the Partnership that bought Wings Field on October 30, 1998. The Partnership is comprised of about forty-five (45) individuals and corporations who base and use aircraft at Wings and community-minded citizens who desired to preserve Wings' 217 acres as predominately open space. The Partnership acquired Wings Field to save and improve it as an airport. It is not intended to be treated as an ordinary investment or to emphasize a return from the investment.

The Partnership does not operate the airport, however. The operator, known as a Fixed Base Operator (FBO), is an entirely separate and unrelated entity responsible for maintaining the airport, fueling, storing and repairing the airplanes. It also provides flight instruction and operates an air charter service.

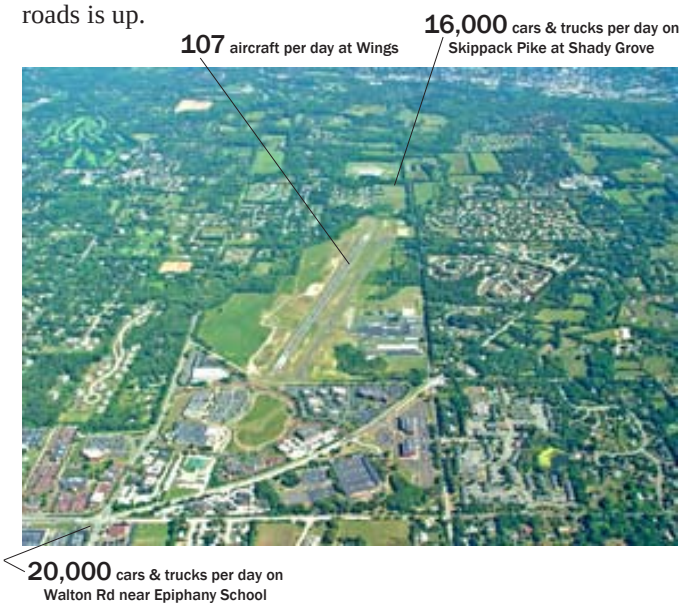
Operations at Wings Field are licensed and regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Bureau of Aviation.

How busy is Wings?

According to the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), there were 39,000 annual operations (either one take-off or one landing), or about 107 a day, at Wings Field in 2003. In 1990, when the now-defunct Wings Airways was at its peak, there were 55,540 annual operations (152 a day). In 1962, operations were estimated at 72,000 per year (197 a day). Since its peak nearly 40 years ago, volume at Wings has dropped off significantly.

*An *operation* is defined as either a take-off or a landing. An airplane that lands at Wings, picks up a passenger, and then takes off has had 2 operations.

As a frame of reference, according to the latest average daily traffic volume counts gathered by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, more than 16,000 cars and trucks a day pass along Skippack Pike at the Walton Road intersection near Shady Grove Elementary School (versus 15,800 in 1976) and nearly 20,000 a day travel on Walton Road between Township Line Road and Germantown Pike near the Epiphany School (versus about 11,000 in 1985). Ironically, while traffic at Wings is down, traffic on the area roads is up.



According to the *Airport Master Plan Study* conducted for the airport in 1998, it is estimated that Wings will have 52,500 operations by the year 2020. The projections calculated by the Wings Community Advisory Committee in 2003 were much the same, although they did predict that the 52,500 level may be achieved as early as 2017.

How frequently are jets using Wings?

According to airport officials, take-offs by jets represented only two of the 54 take-offs averaged daily at Wings during the first five years (between 2001 and 2006) of operations with the extended runway.

As predicted, the jets using Wings are almost exclusively

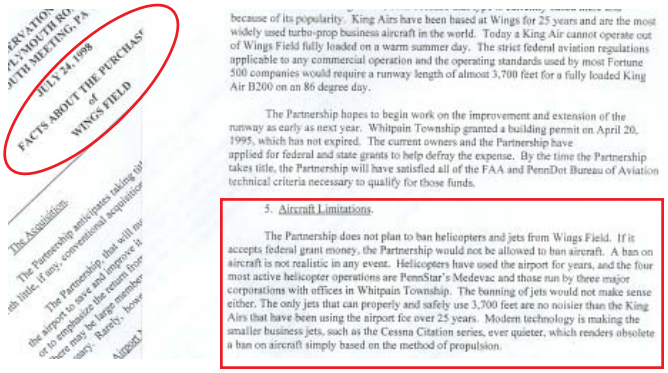
the smaller Cessna Citation types that typically weigh less than 12,500 lbs., are quieter than many propeller-driven aircraft, and are designed to operate at airports with runways as short as Wings' 3,700 feet. Popular medium- to large-sized corporate jets like the Gulfstreams, Hawkers, and large Citations that weigh more than 22,000 lbs. do not come into Wings Field because the 3,700' runway is too short. Jets weighing between 12,500 and 22,000 lbs. and that can operate on runways up to 3,700 feet use the airport about twice a week.

Were the Township and community told that small jets could use Wings with an extended runway?

Some area residents and Township officials have alleged that the current owner of Wings Field, WFPA, did not alert the community to the likelihood of the operation of jets in and out of the airport once the runway was extended. That is not true. Here are the facts.

Even before WFPA acquired the property on October 30, 1998, it recognized the need to put the community and the Township on notice of the probability of the use of the field by jets. WFPA included reference in all of its communications about the probability of the use of the airport by small jets, typified by the Cessna Citation series.

- On **May 19, 1999**, less than seven months after the acquisition of the field, Wings officials widely circulated a flyer to the neighborhood that specifically said that jets would not be banned from the field and would most likely use the field.
- That flyer was also given to the Township Supervisors and the audience at the Township public hearing on **June 15, 1999**, when Wings Field made its first request for Township approval of government funding for the runway extension. [Note: There once was a Commonwealth of Pennsylvania statute – since held unconstitutional – requiring Township approval of government funding of airports within Montgomery County.]
- Furthermore, when Wings officials appeared for the second time before the Supervisors on **January 13, 2000**, seeking permission to obtain government funding, they made it clear once again that Cessna Citations would use the field. A flyer, almost identical to the May 19, 1999 flyer, was submitted to the Township Supervisors as Exhibit A, along with a photograph of the likely Cessna Citation to use the airport. One of the owner's expert witnesses, a charter pilot who described the airplanes likely to use Wings Field, testified that Cessna Citation jets could certainly be among them.
- Wings Field officials also arranged to have two of the Supervisors witness the operation of the Cessna Citation in and out of Pottstown-Limerick Airport to compare its noise with the noise produced by a KingAir turboprop and a single-engine Beechcraft Bonanza.


JULY 24, 1998
FACTS ABOUT THE PURCHASE
of
WINGS FIELD

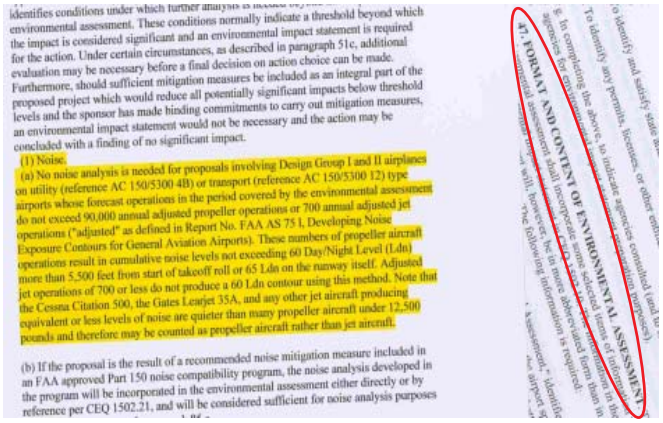
because of its popularity. King Airs have been based at Wings for 25 years and are the most widely used turbo-prop business aircraft in the world. Today a King Air cannot operate out of Wings Field fully loaded on a warm summer day. The strict federal aviation regulations applicable to any commercial operation and the operating standards used by most Fortune 500 companies would require a runway length of almost 3,700 feet for a fully loaded King Air B200 on an 86 degree day.

The Partnership hopes to begin work on the improvement and extension of the runway as early as next year. Whitpain Township granted a building permit on April 20, 1995, which has not expired. The current owners and the Partnership have applied for federal and state grants to help defray the expense. By the time the Partnership takes title, the Partnership will have satisfied all of the FAA and PennDot Bureau of Aviation technical criteria necessary to qualify for those funds.

5. Aircraft Limitations.

The Partnership does not plan to ban helicopters and jets from Wings Field. If it accepts federal grant money, the Partnership would not be allowed to ban aircraft. A ban on aircraft is not realistic in any event. Helicopters have used the airport for years, and the four most active helicopter operations are PennStar's Medevac and those run by three major corporations with offices in Whitpain Township. The banning of jets would not make sense either. The only jets that can properly and safely use 3,700 feet are no noisier than the King Airs that have been using the airport for over 25 years. Modern technology is making the smaller business jets, such as the Cessna Citation series, ever quieter, which renders obsolete a ban on aircraft simply based on the method of propulsion.

The root of the allegations that someone misled the community and the Supervisors about use of the field by jets is the *Airport Master Plan Study* and the *Environmental Assessment* commissioned by the former owner of the airport. The former owner funded the studies, with government help, and retained the consultant, The LPA Group, which was responsible for preparing both documents. For reasons unknown, the prior owner and its consultants did not include any reference to jets in either the *Master Plan Study* or the *Environmental Assessment*. Their rationale may have been that they expected jet traffic to be negligible and that noise and fume levels produced by small jets in the Citation series would be equivalent to noise and fumes generated by the KingAir turboprop aircraft that had been operating at Wings for 35 years and that was designated as the critical design aircraft for the studies. Four years of experience with jet operations since the runway was extended have confirmed these expectations.


identifies conditions under which further analysis is needed by the environmental assessment. These conditions normally indicate a threshold beyond which the impact is considered significant and an environmental impact statement is required for the action. Under certain circumstances, as described in paragraph 51c, additional evaluation may be necessary before a final decision on action choice can be made. Furthermore, should sufficient mitigation measures be included as an integral part of the proposed project which would reduce all potentially significant impacts below threshold levels and the sponsor has made binding commitments to carry out mitigation measures, an environmental impact statement would not be necessary and the action may be concluded with a finding of no significant impact.

(1) Noise.

(a) No noise analysis is needed for proposals involving Design Group I and II airplanes on utility (reference AC 150/5300 4B) or transport (reference AC 150/5300 12) type airports whose forecast operations in the period covered by the environmental assessment do not exceed 90,000 annual adjusted propeller operations or 700 annual adjusted jet operations ("adjusted" as defined in Report No. FAA AS 75 1, Developing Noise Exposure Contours for General Aviation Airports). These numbers of propeller aircraft operations result in cumulative noise levels not exceeding 60 Day/Night Level (Ldn) more than 5,500 feet from start of takeoff roll or 65 Ldn on the runway itself. Adjusted jet operations of 700 or less do not produce a 60 Ldn contour using this method. Note that the Cessna Citation 500, the Gates Learjet 35A, and any other jet aircraft producing equivalent or less levels of noise are quieter than many propeller aircraft under 12,500 pounds and therefore may be counted as propeller aircraft rather than jet aircraft.

(b) If the proposal is the result of a recommended noise mitigation measure included in an FAA approved Part 150 noise compatibility program, the noise analysis developed in the program will be incorporated in the environmental assessment either directly or by reference per CEQ 1502.21, and will be considered sufficient for noise analysis purposes

FORMAT AND CONTENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Airport opponents make much use of the omission of jets from the *Airport Master Plan Study* and *Environmental Assessment* but neglect to say that, if that omission had not occurred or if the defect had been corrected, the runway funding decision by the FAA would have been the same: the *Environmental Assessment* would have been approved by the FAA with a **F**inding **O**f **N**o **S**ignificant **I**mpact (FONSI). Subsequent noise and air quality studies conducted by the current owners, FAA, and Pennsylvania Bureau of Aviation as part of the Community Advisory Committee's work in 2003 included amended traffic assumptions and aircraft mixes that included jets and that far exceeded any realistic expectations of future jet operations. Results from those amended studies confirmed that, had jets been included in the 1998 studies, the EA would still have resulted in a FONSI and approval of funding for the runway extension.

Anyone who knows anything about the operation of airports, and the nature of airplanes that can use a 3,700 foot runway, is aware that an airport with a 3,700 foot runway will not attract jets in any significant numbers or of any significant size that would change either the noise study results or the air quality study results.

Why are there allegations that Wings misrepresented the weight of aircraft that would use the airport?

A pilot's primary criteria when considering whether to land at an airport are runway length, width and the nature of the runway approaches. Runway length, not the runway strength and aircraft weight, is the most significant factor in determining and predicting what kinds of airplanes can use an airport. Simply put, the vast majority of business jets flying today cannot use Wings Field because its 3,700 foot runway is too short. And, contrary to statements from airport opponents and a Township official, Wings' 3,700 foot runway is far too short for the smallest commercial airliners like the Boeing 737-300 (needs 7,150 feet for takeoff and 5,080 feet for landing) or any of the smaller regional jets used by the airlines – in other words, it is physically impossible for these airliners to land at Wings Field.

When the *Airport Master Plan Study*, the *Environmental Assessment*, and the related engineering design work for the 3,700 foot runway was started by the previous owners, the largest aircraft that used the airport on a fairly regular basis was the Beechcraft KingAir B200. That turboprop airplane has a maximum certificated gross take-off weight of 12,500 lbs., holds 8 to 15 passengers and crew, has two jet engines with propellers, uses jet fuel, and had been operating at Wings Field since the mid-1960s. Engineers used the KingAir and its operating specifications as the "critical" or "design" aircraft for the new runway. This did not mean that heavier propeller-driven aircraft or business jets that could operate from an airport with a 3,700 foot runway could never use the airport. Rather, the engineers did not expect that these types of aircraft would regularly use the airport. So, in calculating pavement strength, engineers used the 12,500 lb. weight of the KingAir as their base for the design, and this became the minimum required runway strength. Because of frost and heaving issues in this area of the United States and because of the expansive nature of the soil, engineers will always factor in a greater pavement strength than that required for the critical or design aircraft.

Because the runway and approaches to the runway were designed primarily for airplanes with maximum certificated gross take-off weights of 12,500 lbs. or less, the Township Supervisors and the community have claimed that Wings Field officials had represented there would be some kind of cap on the weight of the aircraft using the runway – i.e., 12,500 lbs. In fact, the prior owners designed the runway to accommodate airplanes weighing up to 22,000 lbs.

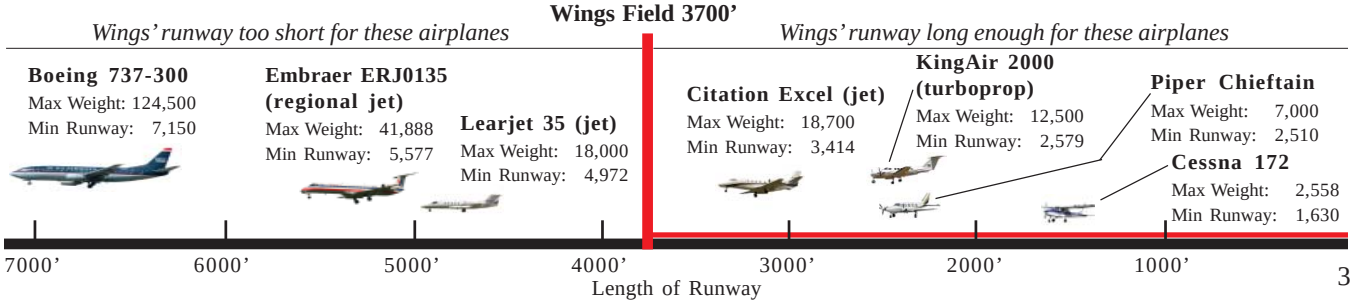
It is important to note that the use of Wings Field by operators of jet aircraft is exactly what Wings officials predicted to the Township and the community would occur. In the more than five years since the longer runway has been in use at Wings, the KingAir is still the most commonly used large aircraft. Business jets take-off from the airport on average about twice a day and Cessna Citations weighing around 12,500 lbs. are the most common jets using the airport. As stated before, jets weighing between 12,500 and 22,000 lbs. use the airport about twice a week.

The use of Wings by airplanes weighing more than 12,500 lbs. is nothing new. As far back as the 1940's and 1950's, the Ford Tri-Motor 5-AT (13,750 lbs.), Lockheed Lodestar Model 18 A67 (17,500 lbs.), and even the Douglas DC-3 (25,000 lbs.) operated out of Wings. DC-3s used Wings well into the 1980s.

Ford Tri-Motor

Lockheed Lodestar

Runway length is major factor determining size of airplanes that can land at an airport



How active is Wings at night?

Aircraft operations at Wings between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. are rare. The medevac helicopter, operated by the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, based at Wings Field, does operate between those hours on an emergency basis an average of two or three times a week.

What are the plans for Wings?

The WFPA's plans for the development of Wings Field have been a matter of public record since shortly after it acquired the airport on October 30, 1998. The group's final *Airport Layout Plan*, as approved by the FAA and the Commonwealth's Bureau of Aviation in 1999, sets forth the only changes WFPA has ever envisioned:

1. Extension of the runway from 2,600 to 3,700 feet with related taxiway, lighting and weather reporting improvements, which have already occurred;
2. Installation of the visiting aircraft parking apron, originally recommended by those living closest to the airport;
3. Hangar renovation project that constitutes a combination of replacing the very old and dilapidated hangars and adding new hangars as a substitute for most of the outdoor, fully exposed tie-down parking spots, if and when demand develops.

What is not apparent from the 1999 *Airport Layout Plan* are two changes WFPA has made in response to concerns expressed by the community:

First, new hangars will eventually be concentrated near the Stenton Avenue office complex, far away from the Huntsman Lane neighborhood. None of the hangars that were planned in the Township-approved 1984 plan for an area northeast of the current entrance to the airport – and across the street from the Huntsman Lane and Blue Bell Woods developments – will be built.

Second, all large aircraft will eventually be confined to hangars to be constructed along Stenton Avenue.

There is no question that the current hangars should be replaced. Two hangar rows were built in the early 1930s, two rows were built in the late 1930s, another row was built in the mid-1940s, and the final row was built in the mid-1950s and supplemented in the mid-1960s. The roofs leak, windows are broken, doors stick, pavement is cracked, and wood is rotting. Township officials routinely approve renovations and replacement projects such as these.

The *Airport Layout Plan* sets forth the number of aircraft that will be based at Wings Field. The 1988 Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court opinion allowed 153 aircraft to be based at Wings. The number based at Wings, currently, is 115, down from a peak of 150 during 1973. Today, about 57 of the aircraft are stored in hangars and 58 are tied down outside. Although WFPA is still in the process of completing its hangar plans, its long-term plan, as detailed in its official Airport Layout Plan, calls for a total capacity of 152 aircraft. Furthermore, WFPA has no desire to engage in near-term construction of all of the hangars shown on the plan. Wings would like to tear down Hangars 1 through 4, which were built between 1931 and 1938 and currently hold 27 aircraft, and replace them with modern hangar buildings for the current tenants. Up to 33 aircraft would share space in the planned single story, steel replacement hangars. When and if demand develops, the airport would also like to build several T-hangar buildings for small, single-engine airplanes across Stenton Avenue from the Sentry Park office complex, near the Narcissa Road intersection and far from the Huntsman Lane neighborhood.

Is the runway going to be extended?

WFPA does not plan and never has planned to extend the runway beyond its current 3700 feet. Furthermore, the topography makes it difficult or impossible to do so, the Township would not permit it and the government would not fund it.

Why is a parking apron needed for visiting turbine aircraft?

The parking apron is a parking lot for visiting airplanes and helicopters. Every airport has one. Today at Wings the only visitor parking apron is located up the hill from the

runway, in front of the Driscoll Terminal Building and maintenance hangar.

The construction of the new parking apron for visiting turbine aircraft is in the best interest of the nearby residents. WFPA wants to build the apron next to the runway and taxiway so as to move the concentrated area of noise and engine fumes generated by visiting turbine-powered airplanes and helicopters from the Driscoll Terminal area down the hill and far away from the neighbors on Huntsman Lane, in Blue Bell Woods, and along Narcissa Road. This will significantly reduce the impact on the Huntsman Lane residents of the noise and fumes from visiting aircraft. The proposed apron was never intended to increase jet and helicopter traffic, as alleged by some airport opponents.

The owner of Wings Field was surprised when some residents appeared at the hearing in early July 2003 to oppose its application and when the Supervisors voted against it at their August 2003 meeting. WFPA appealed the Township's decision because it was clear that the apron was needed to make Wings a better neighbor by reducing noise and fume levels experienced by neighbors on Huntsman Lane. On January 18, 2005, the Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas denied Wings' appeal of the Township's decision. The airport resubmited their plans for the parking apron to the Township and, on June 6, 2006, the Whitpain Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to approve Wings' application. On July 5, 2006, a small group of neighbors filed an appeal to the Supervisors' vote in the Court of Common Pleas.

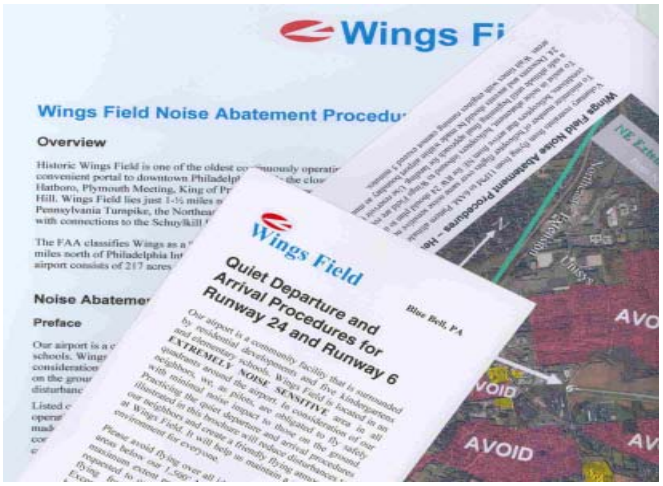
What is being done to reduce noise at Wings?

Wings Field, like all airports, is a source of noise. However, Wings is considered to be a relatively quiet airport by any aviation standards and the noise generated at Wings is deemed by the FAA as compatible with the community. Both the FAA's computerized sound measurement system and results of actual noise monitoring studies show that the contour lines defining average day-night noise levels indicate that those levels that reach residential areas around Wings Field are lower than the 65 dBA FAA standard, the sound level you would expect to hear in a corporate office. Comprehensive studies were made in the course of the 1998 *Environmental Assessment* in advance of the runway extension and again in an amended noise study for the Citizens Advisory Committee in the year 2003, two years after the runway had been extended.

Not satisfied with the status quo, however, WFPA has taken a number of steps, primarily the implementation of noise abatement procedures, to keep the perceived noise level as low as possible. These procedures include:

- Special traffic patterns have been adopted that keep aircraft using Wings Field at least 1,200 feet above the ground, except during take-offs and landings and bad weather that brings low clouds, rather than the standard 800 feet used at most general aviation airports. Traffic patterns for turbojet and turboprop aircraft and helicopters are even higher – at least 1,700 feet above the ground.
- Unique patterns have been adopted by the operators of the large helicopters that regularly use the field, as it is generally recognized that helicopter noise is the most troublesome noise to nearby residents.
- There is an automated weather observing system (AWOS) on the field that all pilots listen to prior to taking off and landing and, as part of the broadcast, pilots are reminded of the noise abatement procedures and the traffic pattern.

- Engine run-up procedures have been modified and time limits have been set for waits with engines running and for use of auxiliary power units.
- Noise abatement policies have been distributed to pilots and aircraft owners, and pilot educational sessions have been held for pilots based at Wings Field, flight instructors, student pilots, transient pilots, and helicopter pilots. Wings has also produced brochures that include an aerial map showing the locations of noise sensitive neighbors and schools.



Why do so many helicopters use Wings?

Wings Field is a very important facility for well-known corporations with major facilities and thousands of employees working in or near Whitpain Township. Merck, Unisys, Wyeth (formerly American Home Products), and Aetna (USHealthcare) all use the large, relatively noisy twin-engine S-76 (Sikorsky) helicopters to transport employees, customers, and others between their research facilities, manufacturing plants, and administrative offices in Pennsylvania and to their corporate offices in New Jersey and beyond. Although helicopter operations have decreased in the last few years – because Aetna (USHealthcare), which had been making regular use of the field, now makes less use of it – the corporate helicopters used by the three other companies each average two landings per business day.

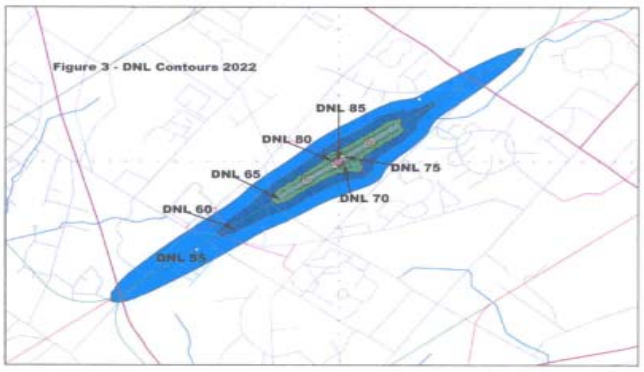
The PennStar medevac helicopter, operated by the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, is also a twin-engine helicopter, but smaller than the Sikorsky. It operates about two times per day on a 24-hour basis. The helicopters use the same kind of fuel as jet airplanes.

Based on the comments of nearby residents, the noise and fumes emanating from the helicopter operations are of greater concern than those produced by jets that make comparatively much less use of the airport. Because helicopters do not require a runway for landing, the noise and fumes from the helicopters would exist regardless of Wings Field's extension of the runway. It is the runway extension and the average two times a day jet traffic that airport opponents continue to claim, quite unjustifiably, has made the airport and its operations more objectionable. According to some neighbors who live under the airport's traffic pattern, Wings' special noise abatement procedures for helicopters have been successful in decreasing noise levels.

Should another *Environmental Assessment* be conducted?

Although another *Environmental Assessment* is not required to determine the effect on the community of the runway extension and improvement, Wings hopes to obtain Pennsylvania Bureau of Aviation approval and funding for a new *Environmental Assessment* to address the misperceptions concerning the airport.

In response to allegations that the 1998 *Environmental Assessment* is outdated, the Wings Community Advisory Committee, established by the FAA in 2003 in conjunction with former Congressman Joseph Hoeffel and Whitpain Township officials, updated both the noise study and the air quality study in 2003. The updated noise study included jets that have been using Wings since the runway was extended and jets that might be anticipated to use it in the future. Furthermore, PennDOT's Bureau of Aviation commissioned an air quality study by McCormick, Taylor and Associates, Inc. pertaining to the exhaust emissions of the aircraft using Wings today and projected to use Wings in the future. The results show that there would be no difference in the *Environmental Assessment* and its resulting in a FONSI had the information about the current and projected use of Wings by jets been included in the initial EA process.



Is security adequate at Wings?

The security at Wings should be of little concern to neighbors and public officials. There has never been an airplane stolen at Wings in its 76-year existence and the last episode of any theft – of radio equipment – at Wings took place well over ten years ago.

Security measures at Wings Field are typical of those prevalent at the vast majority of the 5,000 public use airports in the United States that do not have any airline service. Rarely do such airports provide 24-hour service, any form of formal security service at night or full perimeter fencing. All of the airplanes at Wings are kept locked, of course, and most of the larger airplanes are kept in locked hangars. Some of the airplanes that are tied down outdoors are also protected by special control, propeller or wheel locks.

The Whitpain Police Department regularly patrols the airport, just as it does for other businesses and transportation facilities operating in the Township. In addition, Wings Field has adopted the nationwide Airport Watch Program developed by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) in partnership with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Similar to Neighborhood Watch programs, the Airport Watch Program uses local pilots as eyes and ears for observing and reporting suspicious activity. This helps general aviation keep airports secure without needless and expensive security requirements.

The use of the typical small general aviation airplanes by terrorists is highly unlikely. Small general aviation airplanes, which are the size of an SUV, can do little damage when flown into a building. They may punch a hole in the building, but basically, they are not heavy enough nor do they carry enough fuel to do any significant damage. Nor need anyone be concerned about someone flying a small general aviation airplane into a nuclear power facility. The structures housing nuclear reactors at all such facilities were built to withstand the impact of a huge Boeing 707 airliner. Fears that someone might steal a small plane to drop a bomb or other hazardous material is very much overblown. It is far easier for someone to steal a car or truck to do the deed. In short, while a non-pilot's concern about airport security is understandable, a more thorough analysis of the issue always reveals that genuine grounds for concern are not warranted.

What can be done about airplanes that fail to abide by the prescribed noise abatement procedures and flight patterns?

Wings Field has published its noise abatement procedures and flight patterns in every major airport reference

publication used by pilots. It has distributed brochures to pilots who regularly use the airport and conducted educational seminars on its procedures. A copy of the airport's noise abatement procedures and a map of noise sensitive areas surrounding the field are available to all pilots.

As a result of communication materials, education sessions, and one-on-one interactions, the vast majority of pilots who use Wings Field are very conscious about both the noise abatement procedures and flight pattern configuration and altitudes. As a matter of their own safety, pilots will do their best to adhere to both the procedures and patterns because that is the safest way to fly. Both the procedures and patterns are broadcast by the automated weather observing system on a frequency that pilots using Wings are expected to monitor as they take-off and land at the field

Like the vast majority of public use airports, Wings does not have someone who is in a position to monitor aircraft activity at and around Wings Field and able to communicate in every situation with errant pilots. Wings is among the vast majority of the 5,000 public use airports in the United States that does not have a control tower. In fact, only 485 airports in the United States have control towers.

Why not work out a compromise with the Township and local residents?

Wings officials are asked periodically why they are not willing to work out a compromise with the Township so that a mutually satisfactory resolution can be achieved. Wings has always been willing to work out a compromise with the Township, and those who were present at the hearing on the aircraft parking apron in July 2003 will recall that representatives of the airport even suggested a number of concessions. Unfortunately, there are two significant obstacles to that very sensible solution. First, the Township Supervisors may not agree among themselves on what should constitute the compromise. Second, and more significantly, even if a compromise could be worked out with the Township, Wings Field would face litigation launched by a small core of ardent airport opponents who have opposed any change WFPA has proposed for Wings.

What about the allegations that Wings Field "went around" the Township to obtain the government funding for the runway improvement and extension?

Whitpain Township had given Wings Field zoning approval in the 1980s for the extension of the runway to 3,700 feet and the hangar plan. However, when WFPA attempted to obtain government funding for the runway work from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1998, funds to which it was absolutely entitled and for which it had been qualified for years, Wings encountered an unexpected obstacle: a new Commonwealth law had been passed that required an airport owner to obtain the approval of its Township before it could use Commonwealth-controlled state and federal funds for runway improvements. This law effectively halted Wings Field's access to funds for the runway improvements.

Some local residents, with the aid of local public officials, had convinced former-Senator Dick Tilghman and former-Representative Joseph Gladeck to put the unique law (Section 2210 of the County Code) on the books. They did that without public notice or hearings and by tacking it on as a rider to a fast-moving budget bill in June of 1998. There was no other law like it in the United States and the new Pennsylvania law was applicable only to airports in Montgomery County (read: Wings Field). Other airports in Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Lehigh, and in any of the other 66 counties in Pennsylvania could apply for and, if qualified, obtain funding without the approval of the local municipality. When WFPA was twice denied the right to apply for the funds by Whitpain Township, it became apparent it had to take another approach.

First, Wings filed a petition with the Commonwealth Court seeking a declaration by that court that the law was unconstitutional. The Commonwealth Court agreed and struck the law from the books.

Second, the airport asked the FAA to award the funds directly to Wings and to bypass the Commonwealth. Within a matter of months, the FAA awarded the funds directly to Wings, as requested. The FAA's position was that it would not countenance inappropriate local interference with federal government funding of airports such as Wings that are officially part of the nation's airport system plan. The FAA took the position that a municipality does not have the expertise to determine how federal funding should be applied to, or for the benefit of, a local airport that the municipality does not own.

What tax money is used for Wings Field?

Federal, state, and local income taxes, Social Security taxes, business taxes, capital gains, inheritance, property and other taxes have never been used to pay for infrastructure improvements at Wings Field.

When public money from the federal government or the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is used to finance airport projects, the money comes primarily from two grant programs administered by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Aviation that are financed by taxes on aviation-related activities:

First, the Federal government's Block Grant Program (BGP) – funding is generated through federal taxes collected nationally on aviation-related activities including airline tickets, freight waybills, international departure fees, and the sale of avgas and jet fuel.

These tax receipts are deposited in the FAA's Aviation Trust Fund. BGP funds are available only to general aviation airports, airports designated as reliever airports, and non-primary commercial airline airports that are part of the National Plan of Integrated Airport System, as approved by the FAA.

Second, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Aviation Development Program (ADP) – funding is generated through Commonwealth taxes on aircraft fuel, the revenues from which are collected and deposited into Pennsylvania's Aviation Restricted Account. These funds are typically used to pay for eligible airport-related projects.

Airports receiving a grant must be a public-use airport. A public-use airport is an airport which is either publicly or privately owned and which is open to the public. Additionally, the airport must be appropriately licensed by the Commonwealth.

Why are any tax dollars used to support a privately-owned airport?

Although it is privately-owned, Wings has long been eligible for federal and state grants, with funding exclusively from taxes on aviation-related activities, that will pay up to ninety-five percent (95%) of certain airport projects, including improving and extending the airport's runway. Aviation interests recognize that without a strong web of general aviation airports throughout the United States, aviation access to communities would be severely affected and major metropolitan airports would become even more congested. Because only 5,000 of the approximately 18,000 landing facilities in the U.S. are open to the public, federal policy supports a number of privately-owned facilities, like Wings, that are near a major metropolitan area and open to the public. Accordingly, government funds are made available to help insure the financial viability of, and minimize the possible closure of, hundreds of privately-owned public use airports like Wings to forestall the movement of small aircraft to large airports like Philadelphia International. As it provides this "reliever" function, Wings has long been considered a critical and integral part of the U.S. aviation infrastructure by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, PennDOT's Bureau of Aviation and the FAA, and is eligible for government funding.

Why is an airport located in the middle of a residential area and near schools?

Contrary to conventional wisdom, Wings did not suddenly move into a neighborhood of expensive homes. Wings was there on Narcissa Road taking off and landing planes and helicopters for decades before developers -- and homebuyers -- converted the pastoral countryside around the airport into residential developments.

When Wings Field opened on May 23, 1930, on the site of the former Triple Springs dairy farm, it was surrounded by farms, woods, and open space. Whitpain Township was a small rural farming community with 2,378 residents, a far cry from the nearly 20,000 who live in the township today.

Wings Field today is like an island whose shores have been encroached by a flood of real estate development. For the first 50 years of its operation, until 1981, neighbors of this busy rural airport were few and far between. Complaints were almost non-existent.

That all changed in the early 1980s when the farmland bordering Skippack Pike and Narcissa, Stenton, and Walton Roads was gobbled up by homebuilders. Developers and public officials made conscous decisions to build schools, homes, and offices across the street from -- and under the flight path of -- an airport that had been doing business in the township since 1930. When homebuyers, teachers, and students moved in, it did not take them long to realize that their next door neighbor was an airport. Some of them chose to blame the 50+ year-old airport, not the decision-makers who had built there.

Thousands of airplanes had been flying into Wings each year for 27 years when the Shady Grove and Epiphany schools opened in 1957. When he learned that schools were being planned on land under the final approach paths to the airport's runway, John Story Smith, the owner of Wings Field, encouraged township, school district, and church officials to locate their school buildings and playgrounds as far away from the flight path as possible. Needless to say, the township, school district, and church officials decided to build their schools under the flight paths anyway.

Wings was more than fifty years old -- and one of the oldest businesses in Blue Bell -- when the Sentry Park office complex was built in the early 1980s. Wings had celebrated its golden anniversary when houses along Dundee Drive were ready for residents in 1980 and 1981. The others were built even later -- Whitpain Farms had its first homeowners in 1983; the Blue Bell Woods townhouse community opened in 1986; and Huntsman Lane, only two football fields away from the airport's hangars, ramp, and transient parking area came on the scene in 1986.

When residents first bought these homes in the 1980s, Wings was far busier -- and noisier -- than it is today. From 1977 to 1991, the airport was home to Wings Airways, a scheduled airline service that connected Wings to Philadelphia International Airport. Since the airline stopped operating in 1991, volume at Wings dropped more than 25% -- to levels experienced in the 1960s.

Little has changed at the airport since -- with the exception that hundreds of families are now next door neighbors. Perhaps the question should not be *why is an airport located in the middle of a residential area . . .* but *why would developers, public officials, and homeowners knowingly build homes and schools so close to an airport and then, afterwards, blame the airport for the inconvenience brought about by their actions.*