

July 2014

MAYOR EMANUEL: SILENCED BY THE PLANES?

An Open Letter from the Fair Allocation in Runways (FAiR) Coalition to Mayor Rahm Emanuel:

What do thousands of citizens from the city and suburbs, 22 community organizations and 14 elected officials have in common? Each of them decided to support the Fair Allocation in Runways (FAiR) Coalition because they could hear and feel in their homes and lives the horrible impact of the October 2013 O'Hare runway, as well as that of the concurrent takeoff and landing pattern changes. Moreover, they know that democracy was denied to tens of thousands of citizens when the runway plans were put together, excluding those citizens who would be most affected by the changes from having a real seat at the decision-making table. That exclusion continues to this very day, even as another new runway is about to open, bringing even more noise and pollution to neighborhoods yet untouched by this unfolding disaster. In joining their voices with FAiR, citizens and civic groups alike seek neighborhood-based solutions to address these challenges. Yet, one public official's voice is conspicuously absent from this civic chorus, even as planes roar overhead minute after minute after minute. That voice is yours, Mayor Emanuel. In fact, despite 7 attempts by FAiR to meet with you, we have not been given the courtesy of even a response.

By now it is abundantly clear that the Chicago Department of Aviation and the Federal Aviation Administration have been neither honest brokers nor good neighbors to the residents of Chicago and nearby suburbs. They need to be. And, the residents need the Mayor of Chicago to be an advocate alongside them. Fair Allocation in Runways (FAiR) is the leader in speaking up for residents in city and suburbs, north and now south, east and west, all negatively impacted by runway and flight path changes at both airports as a result of denied democracy. Your opportunity to make positive changes both with and for the people of Chicago has arrived, Mr. Mayor. Show that a world-class city and its world-class airports won't sacrifice world-class neighborhoods in pursuit of efficiency. It is, after all, "we the people" who make these neighborhoods world class.

To be clear, FAiR absolutely supports the economic engines which O'Hare and Midway represent. For us, however, it is not a question simply of planes and noise, it is a question of whether we had a real say in deciding when and where those planes would come over our homes, yards, parks, schools and businesses. In fact, this is what sets FAiR apart from other groups: democracy is at the center of our struggle. We are citizen-led, and we assert the rights of real people in real neighborhoods to be involved in a real way in decisions impacting our communities. A rapidly growing coalition of residents--city and suburban, north and now south--were never told of the potential impacts, never invited to offer meaningful input on plans, never given an equal seat at the table with those city and federal government agencies that were running the show. Shouldn't the very people who sleep, breathe, work, relax, and live under those planes count just as much and actually more than a government agency? And, because folks impacted by the O'Hare changes must shoulder the burden for our shared public good--airports used by the entire metropolitan region--shouldn't those same people have a real seat and fully participate in the decision-making process? FAiR, the voice for those people, declares, "Yes, they should and must." What is your response to this same question? How long will the planes silence you, Mr. Mayor?

While you remain absent from this critical discussion, FAiR will continue to speak for people whose quality of life has been sacrificed on the altar of expediency. As Mayor of Chicago, you must join the conversation.

Do the right thing and show that democracy still counts in Chicago, Mr. Mayor. Stand up for the people. FAiR is active and engaged and we're not flying away.

Jac A. Charlier
FAiR Co-Founder

Started in March 2013, the Fair Allocation in Runways (FAiR) Coalition is a rapidly growing coalition of citizens and 22 civics on Chicago's Northwest side and the near Northwest suburbs. FAiR seeks a real seat at the O'Hare decision making table for residents impacted by the October 2013 runway takeoff and landing pattern changes. Learn more about FAiR at www.fairchicago.org and on Facebook.