



NEWS RELEASE

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New Poll on Metro Airports Reveals Big Concern About Delays

Public Wants Better Rail Alternatives, More Use of Stewart Airport and New Technology; Rejects “Congestion Pricing”

(New York, NY) – Regional Plan Association today released the results of a public opinion poll on airports in the New York – New Jersey – Connecticut metropolitan area. The poll shows that, except for the cost of air travel, the public believes flight delays are the biggest problem plaguing travel, and that many solutions are heavily supported including better rail alternatives, use of Stewart Airport in Orange County for more flights, investment in modern air traffic control systems known as NEXTGEN and redesign of air traffic flight patterns.

“Air traffic congestion and the delays it causes damages the metro area’s economy; this poll and the analysis we have undertaken will point to the feasible solutions to solve air congestion that otherwise is only going to get worse,” said Jeffrey Zupan, study director and Senior Fellow at the Association.

The poll was conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research between August 20-27, 2009 among 812 adults in the 31-county, three-state New York Metropolitan Region.

“This poll gives us a window into the thinking of New York metropolitan area residents and in particular those who fly to and from the three major airports,” said Al Quinlan, President of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner.

Key findings include:

- **Flight delays are a top problem for airports to focus on** – more important than baggage check-in and retrieval, security lines, or the difficulty of moving on, around or to the airport. Delays are judged much more important than number of choices as

to where to fly, when to fly, or whether the flights are non-stop. Ninety-two of every 100 respondents believe that flight delays are an “important issue for airports to focus on.” (See [Table One](#): Concerns with Air Travel.)

- **There is wide-ranging support for potential solutions.** Four ideas received at least 20 % more favoring than opposed. (See [Appendix A](#): Congestion Proposals.) These include speeded up intercity rail service – 69 % favor and only 27 % oppose; use of Stewart Airport in Orange County for more flights to relieve the three airports – 64 % favor to 32 % oppose; investment in modern air traffic control systems known as NEXTGEN – 61 % favor to 34 % oppose, and redesign of air traffic flight patterns – 58 % favor to 35 % oppose.
- **Support for these ideas varied significantly.** Intercity rail service and NEXTGEN were both more heavily supported among frequent flyers and business travelers. Not surprisingly, those who live closer to Stewart favored its use more than those who live in New York City, much farther away.
- **Other ideas that received more support than opposition, but by lesser margins** including banning smaller planes and planes traveling shorter distances during peak times, more flights from other more far away airports and the expansion of the three existing airports.
- **Building an entirely new airport anywhere in the Region was rejected by a majority, as was pricing flights by time of day** to encourage shifts of travel time away from the peak periods.
- **Almost everyone, 91 percent, said changes were necessary and more than half of those felt major changes were needed.** Among those who experienced the worst delays and delays more often a very large majority – 66% and 76% respectively, believed that major changes were called for.
- **Waiting to take off from the three major airports – LaGuardia, JFK and Newark-Liberty – is the worst component of delay** – more important than delays in the air, or at the airport terminal waiting to board, or delays after landing or waiting to pull into a gate. Sixty-six percent of the frequent flyers find waiting to take-off the biggest problem, with never more than 13 % of this group rating other components of delay the biggest problem. (See [Table Two](#): Tarmac Delays Seen As Biggest Problem.)
- **Air traffic congestion is getting worse.** Six times as many of those responding to the poll think that air traffic congestion is getting worse rather than better – 37 % to 6 % . Among frequent flyers and business travelers almost half – 47% and 43 % respectively – thought delays are getting worse, this despite the recent drop in number of flyers and flights during the current recession. Only 9 % think the problem is easing.
- **Other than bad weather, respondents concluded that the chief cause of delays was just too many people for too little air and runway space.** In an open ended question about what they thought was the biggest cause of delays at the three airports,

the variations of the same theme were continually cited. “Too few airports. Too many flights.” or “Runway availability.”

The poll was conducted by Regional Plan Association, which is in the midst of a major study of the future of the airports in the New York – New Jersey Connecticut metropolitan area and how best to prepare for growth while reducing air traffic and airport congestion.

RPA also launched a companion website this week – www.BetterAirportsNYNJ.com – as part of the study and in an effort to inform and activate the public on the issue of airport congestion.

The study findings and recommendations are due next year. More information about the study can be found on the web at www.BetterAirportsNYNJ.com.

Table One:

Concerns with Air Travel

	Very Important	Total Important
Keeping the price of air fares as low as possible	79	95
Reducing flight delays	76	92
Making it easier and faster to check luggage and get your boarding pass	63	87
Making the security lines easier and faster	61	87
Making it easier and faster to get from the security area to the gate	59	86
Increasing the number of non-stop flights available	59	84
Making it easier and faster to get to the terminal from the parking lot or transit station	42	76
Increasing public transportation options to make it easier and faster to get to the airport	42	72
Increasing the choice of different flight departure times during the day	31	72
Increasing the number of flights to different destinations	30	66

Q.10-19 ...Please tell me how important to you is that issue is for these airports to focus on – very important, somewhat important, a little important, or not at all important.

Table Two:

Tarmac Delays Are Seen As the Biggest Problem

	Total	Less Frequent Fliers	Frequent Flyers	Business Travelers
Being delayed on runway while waiting for the plane to take off	46	44	66	53
Being delayed in the air while waiting for the plane to land	21	22	11	12
Being delayed in the airport terminal while waiting to board the plane	17	16	13	16
Being delayed on runway after the plane lands while waiting to pull up to the gate	14	16	10	17

Q.26 Now I'm going to read you a list of some different kinds of flight delays that airline passengers experience. Afterward, please tell me which ONE you think is the biggest problem.

Appendix A: Congestion Proposals

	Total Favor	Total Oppose	Favor - Oppose
Speed up rail service between major cities to reduce airport congestion by encouraging travelers to choose rail over air for shorter trips. Critics say we cannot afford major government spending on railroads.	69	27	+43
Use Stewart Airport located 60 miles north of the New York City to ease the burden at the three major airports. Critics say that it would require that people travel long distances to reach it and might require making high speed rail improvements to reach it from New York City.	64	32	+32
Have the federal government invest heavily in modern air traffic control systems, known as NEXT-GEN, which will use new technology to handle more flights than the current system allows. Critics say the cost will be passed on to passengers.	61	34	+27
Redesign the approach and takeoff flight patterns to make it possible to land and take off more flights per hour. Critics say that some New York area residents will experience increased aircraft noise.	58	35	+23
Ban smaller planes with less than 80 seats from taking off and landing during the busiest times of the day to clear up room for larger planes with more people. Critics say this will reduce the choice of flights available to smaller cities.	54	42	+12
Expand the number of flights at other airports farther away from New York City to ease the amount of air traffic at the three major airports. Critics say that people will have to travel longer distances to reach these airports.	54	42	+12
Ban flights shorter than 300 miles from taking off and landing during the busiest times of the day to clear up room for longer flights. Passengers on short flights could use rail or drive. Critics say there will be fewer flights available to cities like D.C. or Boston during the day.	51	44	+7
Expand the size of airports in the New York City area to add new runways and gates which will allow these airports to handle more flights. Critics say expanding airports is expensive and residents near the airports would face increased noise and air pollution.	49	48	+1
Build an entirely new major airport away from New York City to ease the burden of air traffic at three major airports. Critics say building a new airport is very expensive, and that people will have to travel a long distance to reach this airport.	44	50	-5
Build an entirely new major airport close to New York City on reclaimed land to ease the burden of air traffic at three major airports. Critics say building a new airport is very expensive, and that it would hurt the surrounding environment.	38	57	-19
Increase the price for flights that take off and land during the most congested times which will encourage airlines to spread flights out during the day and ease congestion. Critics say this cost would be passed on to passengers and passengers would have less choice when to fly.	37	60	-22