

Correcting the Record: F-35A at Truax Field

Myth: According to Lockheed Martin, the F-16 can fly to 2070 and beyond. If the base is not in danger of closing, the real economic impact of the F-35A is 64 new jobs.

Fact: The F-16C/D Block 30 has been in service at Truax Field since 1992 and is nearing the end of its service life. The U.S. Air Force is replacing the F-16 with the F-35A, and basing the F-35A at Truax Field will secure a [flying mission](#) for the 115th Fighter Wing for decades to come.

Air National Guard bases that lose their flying mission have faced significant personnel cuts and commensurate reductions in economic impact. After losing its flying mission, the 131st Fighter Wing of the Missouri Air National Guard [transferred its F-15s](#) to other bases and reassigned 600 guardsmen to a base 3 hours away. 400 guardsmen remain to provide mission support functions. Then U.S. Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson [said under oath](#) to Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont during a 2018 hearing that if Burlington did not get the F-35A, they would likely lose their flying mission.

Without a flying mission, the 115th Fighter Wing would have less [military value](#) and be much more susceptible to closure in a future round of base realignment. The F-35A ensures continuation of the 115th Fighter Wing's 1,200 jobs and \$100 million local economic impact, as well as 64 new permanent jobs and 315-420 construction jobs.

Opponents have suggested that the 115th Fighter Wing could simply accept used F-16s from other bases when its jets reach the end of their life or extend the life of its current F-16s. There are a few problems with this. The U.S. Air Force [stopped purchasing](#) F-16s in 2005, so these would be used jets with flight hours on them already. Additionally, these jets would be newer Block 40-52 F-16s that have approximately the same noise levels as the F-35A. The [Service Life Extension Program](#) is for the Block 40-52 jets, not the Block 30.

Myth: The F-35A jets will be at least four times louder than the F-16s that currently fly over Madison.

Fact: The Royal Netherlands Air Force conducted [noise trials](#) in advance of their F-35A basing to allow residents to compare the noise levels with the F-16. Both jets flew 14 passes each and 1,500 residents provided real-time feedback on their impressions. Based on their responses, the differences were minor, with the F-16 perceived as having a more piercing sound. Sensors measured sound on the ground at various locations and the F-16 registered 112 dB at its loudest, while the F-35A was 109 dB at its loudest. [According to experts](#), the minimum change in sound level the human ear can detect is 3 dB.

Myth: The F-35A jet will fly 47 percent more than the current F-16 squadron.

Fact: After pilots are F-35A qualified and the [alert mission](#) (protecting the homeland from threats) is transitioned from the F-16s to the F-35s, the EIS projects an overall increase of 27 percent instead of 47 percent. The EIS states that F-35A will arrive 2023-2024, and the U.S. Air Force has clarified that pilots should be qualified on the F-35A by 2025-2026.

Once pilots are F-35A qualified, off-station sorties (flights that takeoff or land from other airfields) and deployments will resume, and that has historically made up 20 percent of all aircraft operations. Additionally, Madison should have fewer flights than other comparable Wings with F-35s because the 115th Fighter Wing averages a 10 percent loss of flights due to weather and needs fewer takeoffs and landings due to the ability to refuel in the air, thanks to the 128th Refueling Wing in Milwaukee. These reductions are not accounted for in the EIS, which uses the same number of baseline flights for all 5 beddown locations.

Myth: Thousands of residents will be in homes unsuitable for habitation.

From the [City of Madison EIS analysis](#): "This should not, however, be interpreted as the homes being uninhabitable as has been discussed by some in the community. It's not uncommon for residential units to be within the 65 dB contour, particularly in older cities and metro areas where the airport is relatively centrally located. This is the case with other airports in the region including Chicago O'Hare, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis Saint Paul."

Municipalities determine where residents can live. The [City of Madison EIS analysis](#) says clearly that incompatible for residential use does not mean uninhabitable. The FAA's designation of incompatibility defines whether FAA funding can be used to mitigate noise.

The noise impact figures and noise contours found in the EIS are based on aircraft operations that will only exist during the first year. The long-term noise impact will be substantially lower, affecting far fewer residents than indicated in the EIS.

Dane County Regional Airport's official noise exposure maps include the F-16 taking off in afterburner 100 percent of the time without roughly 30,000 more annual aircraft operations than the airport had last year. The Royal Netherlands Air Force [noise trials](#) show the F-16 at its loudest (in afterburner) is louder than the F-35A. The logical conclusion is that the noise contours for the F-35A should not be too dissimilar than today's noise exposure maps.

Just as Dane County Regional Airport did in the 1990's, a Part 150 study would be conducted, and sound mitigation provided for anyone impacted by airport noise. As a result of the study, the number of residents within the 65-75 dB DNL contours has dropped by roughly 3,000 since 1990.

Myth: Mitigation will not be available for residents just outside the EIS noise contours.

Fact: EIS maps are not the maps that determine [Part 150 eligibility](#). Dane County Regional Airport will conduct its own study using actual measurements and operations to determine noise exposure, and after approval from the FAA, eligibility will be established. The airport's official noise exposure maps have been very different than what the [1996 EIS](#) showed, due to poor assumptions in the EIS and proactive operational mitigation strategies by the airport and the 115th Fighter Wing.

Myth: Dane County is responsible for all noise abatement.

As the sponsor, Dane County Regional Airport would apply for an [Airport Improvement Program](#) grant with the FAA as part of [Part 150](#). Under the program, the FAA would cover 90 percent of noise abatement costs. Dane County Regional Airport last sponsored a Part 150 program in the 1990's.

Myth: The F-35A will bring nuclear weapons to Madison.

Fact: The 115th Fighter Wing does not have a nuclear mission. The F-16s that have been flown at Truax Field for the past 32 years were also nuclear capable jets. While the F-35A is a nuclear capable aircraft, it will not ship to Truax Field with the necessary hardware or software due to the lack of a nuclear mission. The [City of Madison EIS analysis](#) supports this.