IFATCA

Who Carries the Consequence?

Noise-abatement, Reciprocal Runway Operations, curfews and PBN routings are justified locally — but someone has to stand at the point where that local decision meets the person who manages them.

Policy Maker

Sets the noise / emissions target

→

ANSP Designer

Designs the procedure

→

Approach Controller

Implements it, live, every shift

→

Community Response

Directed at the visible face

The controller didn't design the flight path or set the target. They applied the procedure they were handed — and to the resident under it, they're the system made human.

Tim Rees — ATC supervisor, Airservices Australia | IFATCA ENV WG Representative

HOW THIS IS CURRENTLY "ARBITRATED"

When Nobody Arbitrates, the Cost Doesn't Disappear — It Just Lands Somewhere

PHOENIX, ARIZONA — PBN IMPLEMENTATION

220 noise complaints, all of 2013 — before the reroute

84,264 complaints in 2016, two years after

62,000+ in just the first half of 2017 alone

No public scoping process preceded the change — the City of Phoenix's own case cited the FAA moving flight paths "without any public input process." In 2017 the U.S. Court of Appeals (D.C. Cir.) ordered the FAA to discard the 2014 routes and redo the process.

Source: Cronkite News / Tucson Sentinel (Aug 2017); City of Phoenix v. FAA

WHEN SYSTEM BLAME FALLS ON INDIVIDUALS

2013 → 2019

Swiss Controller — Federal Court, Lausanne

Two aircraft converged near Lucerne — no injury, no damage, safety systems worked as designed. Six years later the controller was criminally convicted of "negligent disruption of public transport." BGATC: prosecuting an honest mistake within system limits undermines Just Culture and puts retention at risk.

This case is an operational safety event, not an environmental procedure — cited here as precedent: individuals, not system designers, carry the legal consequence when something goes wrong within a system they didn't design.

Source: Federal Supreme Court, Lausanne, 4 Jul 2019; BGATC statement

WHAT'S MISSING IN TERMS OF MEASUREMENT

Every Other Cost on This Panel Gets Measured. This One Doesn't — Yet.

~20%

of US controllers show moderate-to-severe anxiety

Southern Illinois University study, 2024

10–15%

of controllers globally show high chronic stress symptoms

IFATCA Wellbeing Task Force

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existing wellbeing frameworks capture external community stigma

Identified gap

The existing wellbeing data is real — but it only measures what happens inside the tower, inside rostered hours. Community-role displacement operates outside both, in the social spaces that should be restorative: the uniform left in the car, the local pub not visited, the neighbour's question left unanswered.

Retention risk: a controller who can't comfortably exist in their own noise affected suburb is a risk from the profession: if that social contract has visibly broken down, hiring into affected regions gets harder.

THE GOVERNANCE GAP TO CLOSE

Build the Human Factors Check Into the Procedure — Not Just Into the Aftercare

THE ASK

Any environmentally-driven procedure — noise abatement, curfews, PBN routings — should carry a human factors assessment before it goes live, alongside whatever arbitration mechanism this panel converges on for CO_2 / non-CO_2 trade-offs.

Not workload and complexity alone — the social and reputational environment the controller will be operating in once the procedure is live.

A controller should be able to go home. To wear their uniform. To visit their local pub. That this isn't a given in some communities is a failure of systems thinking — not an inevitable cost of aviation's environmental transition.