



# FOX POINT FILES

BY DOUGLAS H. FRAZER

## UP IN THE SKY: Commercial Air Traffic over the North Shore

**W**e have recently covered commercial shipping traffic along our shoreline; now we will turn to commercial air traffic in our skies. Let's start with General Mitchell or the renamed Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport (MKE).

Mitchell handles an average of 299 aircraft operations (take offs and landings) a day. Given its location on the south side of Milwaukee, much of Mitchell's traffic does not appear above our skies. The exception is aircraft approaches to runway 19R, which is Mitchell's longer north-south runway at a full 9990 feet. Aircraft land and take off into the wind. If the wind is from the south or is still, Mitchell Tower may vector aircraft to land on 19R with an approach from the north and a bank into the final approach just over the north shore.

Air traffic controllers in the tower use their eyes as the main means of managing traffic. One floor below is a terminal radar approach control facility (TRACON) room that controls traffic between 10 and 30 miles from the field.

Regional air traffic is managed by an Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) located in Aurora, Illinois. The Chicago Center (code ZAU), as it is called, provides service to the Chicago and Milwaukee metropolitan areas and 16 underlying approach control facilities. Its territory extends east to central Michigan, north to Green Bay, west to Des Moines, and south to central Illinois. The region's focal point, of course, is O'Hare International Airport in Chicago (ORD). O'Hare is the busiest airport in the world based on aircraft operations (Atlanta is #1 based on passengers) averaging about 2520 per day.

O'Hare provides us with many plane spotting opportunities. Aircraft going and coming from Europe or the Middle East frequently use the western part of Lake Michigan as a glide path into and out of O'Hare. In addition, aircraft heading to or from Anchorage, Alaska (a major cargo refueling hub) or points in Asia, including Tokyo, Seoul, and Shanghai, often fly over Waukesha.

Also in our skies are overflights between points east, including Detroit, Washington, New York, and Boston, and points west, including Madison, Minneapolis, Denver, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle.

A useful tool to identify flights is a Swedish internet-based service called FlightRadar24. This system tracks by radar or satellite in real time much of the world's commercial aircraft, including many wide body cargo flights to or from Chicago, Cincinnati, Columbus, Nashville, and Louisville.

When you now see a plane or spot a contrail, you will have a better idea of how to identify it and appreciate the behind the scenes management of the many flights in our skies.

*Douglas H. Frazer is a Fox Point resident and neighborhood contributor as well as the village president. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the village board, other village board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.*

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