

internal flight. Moe Haupt, the NBAA's senior manager of airports and environmental services, believes that increasing business activity between the USA and Pacific Rim countries will continue to be the lever when it comes to negotiations to open up Asian airports to business-aircraft traffic.

"Companies such as Gulfstream and Bombardier are building long-range aircraft like the GV and the Global Express because they are betting on the fact that people want to go to Pacific Rim countries and that there will be access," says Haupt. "That is why we keep pushing Japan to build a general-aviation [GA] airport." Haupt would like to see a trend develop along the same lines which has happened in the USA, where nearby reliever airports are open to business aircraft even if the main airport allows Stage 3 aircraft only.

THE NOISE ISSUE

Within the USA, Haupt says, noise is the most critical issue when it comes to ensuring that an airport remains open to GA traffic. The NBAA has a noise-abatement programme in which it encourages pilots to act responsibly, comply with curfews and be aware of restrictions which may apply to particular airports. There are some 620 airports in the USA which have some sort of noise restriction, says Haupt. "It's self-serving — we encourage the pilots to behave rationally and we experience fewer problems from the local communities," he adds.

Voluntary night-time curfews, which have been adopted by many frequently used airports, such as the Peachtree DeKalb and Fulton County airports near Atlanta, Georgia, have proven to be a good way forward. "Voluntary curfews represent a meeting of minds," says Haupt. "You sometimes have lots of politics going on about whether or not an airport should stay open. At the NBAA, we like to get involved very early and get the two sides together to negotiate. We find that it's very difficult to get people together if they have already polarised into separate camps."

Haupt says that problems are arising where urban areas are spreading into what was formerly open countryside, so that residential communities develop around airports which used to be relatively isolated. "The classic example of this is Long Beach, California, where you now have people living quite near to the runway. The airport was there way before the community, but that does not cut any ice," says Haupt, who adds that Long Beach is also an example of how the different sides took up strong opposing positions because joint negotiations were not started early enough.

"Voluntary curfews, if we can get everybody to understand, are the way to go. The worst place to settle a noise problem is in court. But it

is an education problem for both sides — you have to get the pilots to understand what a voluntary curfew means and you have to get the residents to understand that, if it's voluntary, you won't get absolute quiet all night," says Haupt.

Long Beach has now been transformed into a "success story" because a severe downturn in the local economy forced the community to realise that access to the airport could bring in new business, so fresh negotiations about its use became possible and compromises were reached.

Airport fees are another issue which the NBAA has to tackle on behalf of its 4,000 members. Large airports can price out GA aircraft simply by making their usage fees prohibitively high. Many of the USA's main airports now resemble shopping malls with chain stores, restaurants and other services to attract the custom of transient passengers. A Boeing 757 with up to 200 people on board brings with it a high probability that those passengers will use some of those services and, therefore, spend money at the airport. By comparison, a Cessna Citation with, perhaps, four passengers is — in airport spending terms — a dismal prospect.

The NBAA, however, has gained some recent success in preventing airports from effectively banning GA aircraft. Boston's Logan Airport attempted to price out GA aircraft with high landing fees, but was overruled when the NBAA took the case to a US Department of Transport administrative law judge and successfully defended the right of GA aircraft to have access to that airport. Several laws now exist which the NBAA can use to protect access rights, and it is now also more difficult for local communities to discriminate against small aircraft.

Once again, Haupt finds it comes down to education — when people are made aware of the potential benefits of business aircraft flying into their neighbourhoods, they are less likely to set up obstacles. "Most GA airports do not make money, so they are relying on the local municipality to keep them running," says Haupt. "If the community does not see why it should support the airport, then they stop doing it and it goes. We need to make it clear what business is being brought into community by that airport — the economic impact that it has."

Even with the large number of reliever and GA airports available in the USA, the number one airport used by NBAA members, according to Haupt, remains Washington National in the heart of the country's capital — where GA traffic accounts for 26% of movements. That is proof positive that, where there is business to be done and good access to the local airport, corporate-aircraft operators — many of which are Fortune 500 companies — will be landing. □

UK squeeze

Corporate aircraft are deemed to be a more vital ingredient of the overall traffic mix in the UK.

CHRIS YATES/MANCHESTER

AS PRESSURE ON slots intensifies at many of the UK's primary airports, operators are becoming choosy about the type of general-aviation activity they wish to support, says Graham Forbes, chief executive of the General Aviation Manufacturers and Traders Association (GAMTA). Of the two types, private/flying-club activity and business aviation, he claims there is now a definite bias toward corporate users which are deemed to be a more vital ingredient of the overall traffic mix.

Different airports, he says, have varied opinions on how the two aspects of GA activity should be treated. "At Manchester, for example, there is the hint of a squeeze on the flying schools, yet clearly the airport wants to retain the business-aviation facilities". He says that the same is true at Birmingham, and that, although the airport states that it is keen to retain all GA, there is "...a feeling that private and flying club activity is not as welcome".

At the BAA-owned airports in the south of England, meanwhile, he says that there is a "...continuing uneasy situation. Business aviation is achieving opportunity slots at Heathrow, but Gatwick is the great problem, and this year so far corporate users have had great difficulty getting suitable slots, particularly in the mornings."

Mike Huddart, Manchester's general manager, airfield, confirms that the squeeze is on at ►