

aircraft operations in the Houston terminal area. Further, this effort supports the FAA's national airspace redesign goal of optimizing terminal and en route airspace areas to reduce aircraft delays and improve system capacity.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before June 2, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Send comments on this proposal to the Docket Management System, U.S. Department of Transportation, Room Plaza 401, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001. You must identify both docket numbers, FAA-2003-14402/ Airspace Docket No. 01-AWA-4, at the beginning of your comments.

You may also submit comments on the Internet at <http://dms.dot.gov>. You may review the public docket containing the proposal, any comments received, and any final disposition in person in the Dockets Office between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. The Dockets Office (telephone 1-800-647-5527) is on the plaza level of the Department of Transportation NASSIF Building at the above address.

An informal docket may also be examined during normal business hours at the office of the Regional Air Traffic Division, Federal Aviation Administration, 2601 Meacham Boulevard, Fort Worth, TX 76193.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Rohring, Airspace and Rules Division, ATA-400, Office of Air Traffic Airspace Management, Federal Aviation Administration, 800 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20591; telephone: (202) 267-8783.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Comments Invited

Interested parties are invited to participate in this proposed rulemaking by submitting such written data, views, or arguments as they may desire. Comments that provide the factual basis supporting the views and suggestions presented are particularly helpful in developing reasoned regulatory decisions on the proposal. Comments are specifically invited on the overall regulatory, aeronautical, economic, environmental, and energy-related aspects of the proposal.

Communications should identify both docket numbers and be submitted in triplicate to the address listed above. Commenters wishing the FAA to acknowledge receipt of their comments on this notice must submit with those comments a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which the following statement is made: "Comments to Docket Nos. FAA-2003-14402/Airspace

Docket No. 01-AWA-4." The postcard will be date/time stamped and returned to the commenter. All communications received on or before the specified closing date for comments will be considered before taking action on the proposed rule. The proposal contained in this notice may be changed in light of comments received. All comments submitted will be available for examination in the public docket both before and after the closing date for comments. A report summarizing each substantive public contact with FAA personnel concerned with this rulemaking will be filed in the docket.

Availability of NPRM's

An electronic copy of this document may be downloaded through the Internet at <http://dms.dot.gov>. Recently published rulemaking documents can also be accessed through the FAA's Web page at <http://www.faa.gov> or the Superintendent of Documents Web page at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara>.

Additionally, any person may also obtain a copy of this notice by submitting a request to the FAA, Office of Air Traffic Airspace Management, ATA-400, 800 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20591, or by calling (202) 267-8783.

Communications must identify both docket numbers for this notice. Persons interested in being placed on a mailing list for future NPRM's should call the FAA's Office of Rulemaking, (202) 267-9677, for a copy of Advisory Circular No. 11-2A, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Distribution System, which describes the application procedure.

Background

On April 13, 2000, the FAA published a final rule modifying the Houston, TX, Class B airspace area (65 FR 19826). The modified Class B airspace area, implemented on June 15, 2000, eliminated references to the Hobby Very High Frequency Omnidirectional Range/Distance Measuring Equipment (VOR/DME) as the point of origin and made the new point of origin the current geographical location of the Hobby VOR.

The Houston terminal area has experienced a significant growth in aircraft operations in the last 10 years. To accommodate this growth, the City of Houston is scheduled to complete construction of the new Runway 8L/26R for IAH in October 2003. Additionally, the flow of aircraft operations at HOU will be adjusted to use Runway 4 as the primary runway. To provide protection for operations to the new runway at IAH and the planned traffic flow adjustments at HOU, the FAA has developed the

proposed modifications to the Houston Class B airspace area.

Public Input

In June 2002, an *ad hoc* committee was formed to provide comments and recommendations regarding the planned modifications to the Houston Class B airspace area. Details were provided to the *ad hoc* committee regarding planned airspace changes required to conduct triple simultaneous approaches to IAH using the new Runway 8L/26R and the need to adjust the flow of aircraft operations at HOU. The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) participated in the *ad hoc* committee and suggested developing visual flight rule (VFR) flyways to help pilots transition the Houston terminal area while remaining clear of the Houston Class B airspace area. Additionally, AOPA suggested the FAA solicit input from representatives from the military, Weiser Airpark, and West Houston Airport. These groups and numerous other user groups were contacted for their input and the suggestion to include VFR flyways was incorporated into a presentation for public meetings. Additionally, AOPA's flyway comment will be addressed later in this document.

As announced in the FAA Southwest Region Airspace Branch letter to Airmen 02-02, three pre-NPRM informal airspace meetings were held on October 15 at Fletcher Aviation on HOU; October 16 at North Harris College; and October 22 at West Houston Airport. These meetings allowed interested airspace users an opportunity to present their views and offer suggestions regarding the planned modifications to the Houston Class B airspace area. All comments received during the informal airspace meetings and the subsequent comment period were considered in developing this proposal.

Analysis of Comments Received

Twelve commenters expressed a concern that the planned expansion of Area B and Area C of the Class B airspace area would compress general aviation traffic into lower altitudes, or would cause general aviation aircraft to fly further east or west of IAH to remain clear of the Class B airspace. The FAA partially agrees with these comments. To remain clear of the Houston Class B airspace area, aircraft would have to fly at lower altitudes or fly further east or west of IAH; however, this is necessary to separate them from large turbine-powered aircraft conducting instrument approaches within the Houston Class B airspace area. Aircraft conducting simultaneous, parallel approaches may