

SUMMARY: This action modifies the current Houston, TX, Class B airspace area to contain large turbine-powered aircraft during operations to the new Runway 8L/26R at George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH), and to the new primary runway (Runway 4) at William P. Hobby Airport (HOU). The FAA is taking this action to enhance safety and improve the management of aircraft operations in the Houston terminal area. Further, this action supports the FAA's national airspace redesign goal of optimizing terminal and en route airspace areas to reduce aircraft delays and improve system capacity.

EFFECTIVE DATE: 0901 UTC, October 30, 2003.

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:

Background

On April 17, 2003, the FAA proposed to modify the Houston Class B airspace area (68 FR 18910). The FAA proposed this action due to a significant growth in aircraft operations in the last ten 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 is taking this action to modify the Houston Class B airspace area.

Subsequent to the proposal, further technical analysis conducted by the FAA revealed that the proposed modification to Area A will not be required to contain large turbo-jet operations to the new Runway 8L/26R within the Houston Class B airspace area. Therefore, this action does not reflect the proposed modification to Area A.

Discussion of Comment

In response to the notice of proposed rulemaking, the FAA received 68 comments.

Sixty-four commenters expressed concerns that aerobatic operations over the Sack-O-Grande Airport would be impacted. The FAA believes that there will be no impact on aerobatic operations in this area because the current waiver that permits aerobatic operations over the Sack-O-Grande

Airport will remain in effect. The upper portion of the waived area (3,000 feet to 3,500 feet) will be within the modified Houston Class B airspace area where an additional margin of safety will be provided through the application of appropriate Class B separation standards.

One commenter expressed a concern that noise from large turbine-powered aircraft at lower altitudes over populated areas to the east and west of IAH would be a problem. The noise issue was addressed during the environmental analysis for Runway 8L/26R at IAH. The noise impact was determined to be minimal because the affected areas east and west of the airport are largely unpopulated farmland and prairie. The same commenter also expressed a concern with increasing the Class B airspace area to a 50-nautical mile (NM) radius of IAH. The FAA, however, notes that the proposal did not expand the lateral dimensions of the Houston Class B airspace area beyond the current 30-NM radius of IAH.

One commenter expressed a concern that the proposed expansion of Areas B and C would compress general aviation traffic down to lower altitudes. The FAA recognizes that in order to remain clear of the Houston Class B airspace area, aircraft will either fly lower or further east or west of IAH. However, this is necessary to separate them from large turbine-powered aircraft arriving and departing IAH.

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association concurred with the FAA's efforts to add waypoints to the Class B airspace area chart to assist pilots navigating the busy terminal area. With the aid of the Aircraft Owners and Pilot's Association, the FAA has developed eight waypoints in the Houston terminal area. These waypoints are scheduled to be charted October 30, 2003.

The Air Line Pilots Association recommended that the FAA raise the 3,000-foot floor to 4,000 feet to the east and west of IAH to realistically reflect the air traffic control requirements for conducting triple, simultaneous approaches and to allow the efficient operation of aircraft. The FAA notes that the Houston Class B airspace area is designed to contain large turbine-powered aircraft within the Houston Class B airspace area while they are conducting triple, simultaneous instrument approaches at IAH. When conducting triple, simultaneous instrument approaches each aircraft must be assigned an altitude that differs by at least 1,000 feet from the altitude of the other two aircraft conducting

simultaneous approaches. This requires the use of additional lower altitudes to the east and west of IAH. Thus, the FAA is not amending the proposed altitudes.

The Rule

This amendment to part 71 of Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR part 71) modifies the Houston Class B airspace area. Specifically, this action expands the lateral limits of Area B to the east and west of IAH; expands the lateral limits of Area C to the east and west of IAH and to the southwest of HOU; and expands the lateral limits of Area D to the southwest of HOU to improve the containment of turbo-jet aircraft operating within the Houston Class B airspace area.

Area A. Area A is not modified.

Area B. Area B is modified to the east and west of IAH incorporating into Area B, two segments of the Class B airspace area that are currently contained within Area C. Specifically, Area B is extended to the east incorporating that part of Area C airspace that lies on the extended ILS localizer course and downwind legs for Runway 26R, 26L, and 27, between the IAH 15- and 20-NM arcs. Area B is extended to the west incorporating that part of Area C airspace that lies on the extended ILS localizer course and downwind legs for Runway 8L, 8R, and 9, between the IAH 15- and 20-NM arcs.

Area C. Area C is modified to the east and west of IAH incorporating into Area C, two segments of the Class B airspace area that are currently contained within Area D. Specifically, Area C is extended to the east incorporating that part of Area D airspace that lies on the extended ILS localizer course and downwind legs for Runway 26R, 26L, and 27, between the IAH 20- and 30-NM arcs and to the west incorporating that part of Area D airspace that lies on the extended ILS localizer course and downwind legs for Runway 8L, 8R, and 9, between the IAH 20- and 30-NM arcs of the airport. Area C is also modified to the southwest of HOU by incorporating into Area C, one segment of the Class B airspace area that is currently contained within Area D. Specifically, Area C is extended to the southwest incorporating that part of Area D airspace that lies on the extended ILS localizer course and downwind legs for Runway 4, between the IAH 15- and 20-NM arcs.

Area D. Area D is modified by expanding the boundaries of Area D to the southwest of HOU. Specifically, Area D is extended to the southwest of HOU incorporating airspace that lies on the extended ILS localizer course and downwind legs for Runway 4, between the IAH 20- and 25-NM arcs.