

# VGP United Platform of Residents against Airport Nuisance

Ladies and Gentlemen,

## -----history -----

My story is about how airport area residents came to dialogue with airport officials and the authorities. To explain how that happened, I have to inform you about our history.

From 1968 onwards successive advisory committees have advised our government on the relationship between Amsterdam Airport Schiphol and its environment. All those years generations of airport and airline managers, local authorities and representatives of residents have tried to reconcile conflicting interests.

In the seventies the extension of the airport was fiercely protested. A professor, that gave his name to a measuring unit for airport noise, known as "Kosten unit", predicted that the extension of the airport would harm the development of local communities, as a result of the construction ban. He was right. In the eighties the inhabitants of a village started a series of rather grim protests and demonstrations supporting a proposal in the parliament to move one of the runways. The proposal was rejected by one vote.

In the nineties different groups, that opposed the airport nuisance, started to meet, began to share knowledge and tuned their policies and actions. The main issues were, and still are, the limitation of air traffic growth and the diminishing of sound nuisance by avoiding flying over homes. Local lobby groups and clubs were formed and a number of village councils joined them. The most prominent, of those that were involved in defending the residents rights on healthy and safe living conditions, was a general practitioner, called Van Ojik. He was driven by the cause since he had seen severe consequences of the increasing airport nuisance in a number of his patients. He is active in defending the residents rights for over 40 years now and was decorated for it. Mr. Van Ojik became leader of the residents delegation at the Table of Alders.

In 2003 the committee, that advised the government on Schiphol matters, was reformed into the present committee for regional consultation on Schiphol (CROS). Each municipality is represented in the CROS by an aldermen or civil servant but also by a residents representative.

Since then we know two types of residents representatives: the officially appointed ones of CROS and the, at that time, unorganized local groups of lobbyists, activists, quarter and village councils, calling themselves the Platforms.

In the same year 2003 a fifth runway was put into use generating a number of new groups opposing the airport noise pollution.

## VGP United Platform of Residents against Airport Nuisance

In 2005 a new phase in the relationship between Amsterdam Airport Schiphol and its environment started. The vice minister decided to evaluate the Schiphol policy and invited all parties involved, to make suggestions for improvement. Nearly 700 proposals were handed in.

In December 2006 Mr Hans Alders, former minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, and former provincial governor, was asked to advise the government on the development of the airport in the period up to 2020. The so called “table of Alders” was formed.

To be able to participate in the discussions, the Platforms united in a federation called VGP (United Platform of Residents against Airport Nuisance). Today the federation has around thirty members. Among them are a number of political lobby- and study groups as well as ward- and village councils. The VGP and the residents representatives of CROS synchronized their policies and since then they act as one residents delegation at the “table of Alders”.

### ----- **Mistrust and suspicion** -----

Over the years the public debate on Schiphol was troubled by mistrust and suspicion, caused by the way developments around the airport have been communicated to the residents. Worries about the increase of noise nuisance by the growth of the airport were trivialized by airport officials, claiming that future aircrafts, cynically referred to as “whispering giants”, would become much quieter, totally neglecting the negative effect of the increasing number of flights. As the ministry of transportation did not correct this image, they were since then considered to be hand in glove with the airport. When the fifth runway was added in 2003, it was presented as an “environmental runway”, claiming it was meant for diminishing the nuisance in certain areas instead of downright extending the capacity of the airport. When a embarrassing mistake was made in planning the use of the fifth runway, causing more nuisance in certain area’s than predicted, it was presented as a “minor calculation error”. If one lesson has to be learned from the past, it should be the banning of blurred or colored descriptions of the consequences of decisions. “It is better to tell us now than letting us find out later”.

### --- **Influence by expertise and reason** ----

As residents representatives we could only stand firm in a discussion with professionals and authorities by showing sufficient knowledge of how airports operate. The expertise that a number of people gathered in many years of discussion and study came together in the residents meetings. This accumulation of expertise made The VGP a welcome discussion partner for members of parliament. Up to that moment it was hardly possible for them to be informed about the residents view, by residents themselves, that were well informed.

## VGP United Platform of Residents against Airport Nuisance

At the same time the different groups and representatives realized that participating in the discussion at the Table of Alders had two consequences: readiness to compromise and putting the general interest above local interests. This meant a major shift in the platforms strategy which had always confined their activities to public protest and primarily defended local interests. Never before the platforms had mentioned other interests like economy and employment other than that these interests were being exaggerated. It took lengthy and emotional discussions before the platforms decided to participate. Unfortunately, at the end, when a compromise was within reach, a fraction of members of the VGP considered the price too high and stepped out. A vast majority however agreed on the final text of the advice. Keeping the ranks closed is still a mayor concern in the residents delegation.

### ----- "Table of Alders" -----

I will be brief on the Alders table, since it was explained to you yesterday. What you might want to know is: there was already an agreement, so what is the discussion about today? A topic in working out the details of the agreement is the introduction of a new system to control and maintain the environmental rules. I'll tell you more about it later.

### ---- Playing field ----

This slide shows the delegations at the table. Working groups on the different subjects make the proposals for the decision making sessions. In delegation meetings these proposals are discussed and tested on acceptability. In all three layers: "table of Alders", delegation meetings and working groups the four delegations are represented.

### ---- why involve residents anyway ---

One could ask: why involve residents anyway? There are good reasons not to neglect them. The residents living around an airport pay a high price for a public interest. The quality of their living conditions is harmed due to sound nuisance, the health risks they fear from air pollution and dealing with safety risks. These are real risks as has been proven by the disaster with an airplane from Israel in Bijlmermeer Amsterdam in 1992, killing 40 people in their homes and 3 crew members, and recently by the crash of a Turkish airplane very close to the village of Zwanenburg. In addition to these problems a construction ban blocks the building of houses in a wide area around the airport. For some communities this means a standstill of development.

It is obviously better to come to an understanding with residents that have a reasonable point of view than to drive them to a more extreme standpoint and action. Apart from that: residents have no professional or political blockades and might say sensible things in the benefit all parties involved.

## VGP United Platform of Residents against Airport Nuisance

Some say: residents should be represented by the local authorities. They overlook the fact that local authorities have a partly different agenda: they also have to defend the interests of the local businesses. What's more: cities have the ambition to make building of houses possible in areas where it is not allowed today, by a maximum concentration of routes and consequently of nuisance. Both can be conflicting with inhabitants interests.

### --- contribution residents delegations ---

What did, so far, the residents delegation contribute to the discussion on the future of Schiphol? I think that friend and foe will agree that the residents have contributed much to the notion that the reservation of scarce capacity for hub tied flights is inevitable. The national airport should go for selective growth and growth in quality and sustainability. The residents introduced the principle of maximum protection against airport noise by strictly preferential use of runways and routes. Many suggestions for improvement of existing routes were made. Finally, the residents delegation made an inventory of the information needs of residents and local authorities in the Schiphol area.

### --- principles for maximum protection of residents ---

A few words on the principles I mentioned. They are very straightforward: always use the runway and the route that cause the least hindrance. It is however not easy to define the set of rules for maintaining these basic principles, since there are restrictions. The airport has five runways and a sixth that can only be used by small airplanes. Which combination of runways should be preferred, depends on the weather (mainly the wind). Runways can be temporarily unavailable. Safety, need of capacity, and punctuality can complicate matters. Air Traffic Control does not want to change the combination of runways in use too often. There are a few reasons for deviation of the principles that the residents do not accept. Just convenience of operation for air traffic controllers, negligence of pilots and (too) early turning away to save fuel or time are not accepted as reasons to produce more nuisance than necessary.

This leads me to the topic in the discussions at the Table of Alders today: the new system to control and maintain the rules on limiting noise nuisance. The difficulty in reaching an agreement on the details of the system, is the position of the air traffic controllers that want more freedom of operation than the residents, and possibly also the local authorities, want them to have. However in this issue the residents are not on their own. The law says that a new system has to protect the residents equally well as or better than the system in place. In this case to find a balance in the interests of both sides is quite a challenge.

### ---threads and opportunities---

Looking at the chance, that the dialogue between airport and environment will be a continuous one, we see threats and opportunities. The "table of Alders" may fail, the test

## VGP United Platform of Residents against Airport Nuisance

with the new rules may fail, the ranks of the residents may be broken and the expertise may be lost. But the opportunities make it worthwhile for all parties involved to prevent this. A more effective system for the maximum protection of the residents and improved information about where planes fly and why, could lead to a better understanding and, in the end, more acceptance of the realities of living close to an airport.

### ---comments on statements---

The reason I skipped dinner last night for changing my speech is, that I wanted to comment upon statements that were made yesterday. The advantage of being the next speaker. You will remember the claim of Joop Krul of Schiphol that the noise nuisance was reduced by 50%. Joop is always telling the truth, so he did this time. But what he did not say is, that this kind of reduction is a thing of the past. And we all know: results of the past are in no way a guarantee for the future. For the period till 2021 the reduction will be about 5%, which is on average 0,4% per year. Not very impressive, is it? New airplane engines are designed to use less fuel and cause less air pollution, not to produce less sound. Experts told us that the new technology might even be counterproductive in terms of sound reduction. Keep this in mind for a moment.

Schiphol, the Ministry of Transportation, as well as the Province have stated that they accept responsibility for the negative sides of the airport for the residents. But what does that mean moneywise? The more you want something the more you are willing to pay, I would think. Well here it is: together they spend 30 mln. now and conditionally 30 mln. later in the period to 2021. This means that at the most each of them contributes 1.7 mln. a year for all wards and villages in the most hampered area together.

Am I a party spoiler, I think not! We have agreed on Mr. Alders' advice including these facts without making reservations. We appreciated what has been decided by Schiphol, by the Ministry and by the Province as courageous, as a breakthrough and unique. It takes courage to publicly admit "Yes, we are also responsible for the negative side of the airport for residents. It's never been said so clear before and it means crossing a line that was feared in the past. It is a brake trough, because, for the first time we could bring another message to the inhabitants of our cities and villages. We had to repeat a familiar phrase "Yes, you will have to accept more noise nuisance and more safety and health risks than today", but for those who are the most effected we could add for the first time "Yes, they will also spend money on improvement of our living conditions". We think it's unique because, as far as we know, a similar program does not exist in other European countries.

## VGP United Platform of Residents against Airport Nuisance

I wanted to make these remarks for two reasons. The statements that have been made should be seen in perspective. Secondly I want to point out to the parties involved, there is still a lot of room for improvement and certainly for excelling.

Remember I said that after 2020 airport nuisance will grow again? Well, every time we hear that the Sesar project aims at tripling the capacity of airports, it makes us shiver.

### **Finally**

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, in a globalizing world, one wants to move fast and conveniently. In the future more airplanes will fill the sky. If, for the period after 2020, no other long term solution is found, this area will experience more sound nuisance and pollution than ever before. Residents are prepared to live with the reality of today but will, at the same time, fight for healthy and safe living conditions for their children and, in my case, grandchildren, for the time after 2020. We believe that nowadays, as citizens have become mature and do not accept what is told without questioning its truth and reason, it would be wise for authorities and the aviation industry to stay on speaking terms with airport area residents and take their living environment into account when making decisions.

**---environment is the home of residents ----**

After all, the environment is the home of residents.

Thank you.