

## RECORD OF DECISION

### *ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) T-7A RECAPITALIZATION AT VANCE AFB, OK*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) will replace the existing T-38C aircraft with the beddown of the T-7A aircraft at Main Operating Base (MOB) 4, Vance Air Force Base (AFB), Oklahoma. DAF considered the information, analyses, and public comments on and contained in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for T-7A Recapitalization at Vance Air Force Base, Oklahoma*, along with other matters, to make its decision.

This Record of Decision (ROD) is issued per the Department of Defense National Environmental Policy Act Implementing (NEPA) Procedures Part 4.1, *Decision documents* and the DAF NEPA Implementing Procedures Part 4.1, *Decision documents*. DAF is the lead agency for this EIS.

This ROD documents:

- DAF's decision;
- Alternatives considered;
- Factors considered in the decision; and
- Mitigations.

#### **DECISION SYNOPSIS**

The Air Education and Training Command (AETC) operates the T-38C from five pilot training installations: Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA)-Randolph in Texas, Columbus AFB in Mississippi, Laughlin AFB in Texas, Vance AFB in Oklahoma, and Sheppard AFB in Texas. DAF expects to procure approximately 350 T-7A aircraft from Boeing and deliver these aircraft to the five T-38C pilot training installations. Following AETC recommendations, the Secretary of the Air Force approved Vance AFB to be the fourth installation to undergo recapitalization.

Recapitalization will take place over an approximate 2-year period and will replace all T-38C aircraft assigned to Vance AFB with T-7A aircraft; transition aircraft operations at Vance AFB and associated special use airspace (SUA) from the T-38C to the T-7A; temporarily change number of personnel and dependents in the Vance AFB region; and construct and upgrade facilities to support pilot training and aircraft operation and maintenance.

#### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The EIS analyzed three action alternatives (i.e., Alternatives 1, 2, and 3) and the No Action Alternative. The three action alternatives considered different numbers of T-7A aircraft and associated numbers of T-7A operations at Vance AFB and associated SUA. Under Alternative 1, which is described in detail in the FEIS (*FEIS, Pgs. 2-1 to 2-8, Section 2.2.2.1*), Vance AFB would receive up to 68 aircraft. For Alternative 2, fully described in the FEIS (*FEIS, Pgs. 2-8 to 2-9, Section 2.2.2.2, Tables 2-6 and 2-7*), Vance AFB would also receive up to 68 T-7A aircraft but with a higher number of operations than Alternative 1. The No Action Alternative serves as a baseline against which the impacts of the action alternatives are evaluated and is described in the FEIS (*FEIS, Pg. 2-12, Section 2.3*). The DAF has selected Alternative 3 for implementation which is described in detail below.

***Alternative 3.*** Vance AFB will receive up to 99 T-7A aircraft with each aircraft to perform the same number of operations per aircraft as the current T-38C. The higher number of operations

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associated with Alternative 3, compared to the other two action alternatives, is intended to provide DAF with operational flexibility.

The FEIS provides the annual number of T-38C and T-7A aircraft (*FEIS, Pg. 2-10, Section 2.2.2.3, Table 2-8*) and T-38C and T-7A aircraft operations for Alternative 3 (*FEIS, Pgs. 2-10 to 2-11, Section 2.2.2.3, Tables 2-9 and 2-10*).

T-7A aircraft are scheduled to be delivered to Vance AFB from the manufacturer beginning in 2032 and continuing through 2033. As T-7A aircraft are delivered and placed into service, T-38C aircraft will be withdrawn from service between 2032 and 2033.

In flight T-7A pilot training will occur in the vicinity of the Vance AFB airfield and within the same SUA currently used by the T-38C. That SUA consists of Military Operating Areas Vance 1A, Vance 1C, and Vance 1E and Military Training Routes Instrument Route (IR)-145, IR-171, IR-175, IR-181, and IR-185. No changes to SUA configurations (i.e., size, shape, or location) or their active times are proposed for T-7A recapitalization. The T-7A will be limited to sub-sonic speeds in all phases of pilot training.

Aircraft operations include evening and nighttime T-7A operations. Evening operations are performed from dusk until 10 p.m., and nighttime operations occur between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., as defined for aircraft noise modeling. The T-38C currently operates during both periods at Vance AFB.

An increase of approximately 100 personnel and 190 dependents (e.g., spouses, children, other family members), who would accompany the personnel, is projected during the aircraft transition period when DAF will train pilots with and maintain two types of aircraft. After the aircraft transition period, numbers of personnel and their dependents will be approximately the same as that for the current T-38C flight training program because of physical space limitations to support additional maintenance and training staff (*FEIS, Pg. 2-5, Section 2.2.2.1.3*).

Several construction and renovation projects will provide modern facilities and infrastructure to support T 7A aircraft maintenance, training, and operational requirements. Construction and renovation are scheduled to begin in 2028 and 2029 and complete prior to the arrival of the first T-7A aircraft, scheduled for 2032. The proposed construction and renovation projects are as follows (*FEIS, Pgs. 2-5 to 2-6, Section 2.2.2.1.4, Table 2-4*):

- Construct a new hush house pad.
- Replace shelters, construction of additional shelters, remove/repaint taxi lines, and install electrical for proper lighting and tie-down grounding points for each shelter.
- Construct an addition to the egress shop (Building 542).
- Install jet blast deflectors.
- Paint new markings to reconfigure the airfield and install new mooring and anchor rods to accommodate the T-7A's larger dimensions. Slightly move the compass rose and trim pad to accommodate the new hush house.
- Renovate interior of squadron operations buildings (Buildings 179, 183, 541, or 690).
- Modify hangar doors at Building 199.

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- Provide an additional antenna-yard area near Building 199 to assist with sending signals between the facility and airfield.
- Remove Centralized Aircraft Support Systems (CASS) service modules. CASS lines will be cut, capped, and vaults will be filled with concrete.
- Construct a concrete pad and provide utilities for a storage container to store T-7A ejection system explosive components.
- Renovate interior of current Ground-Based Training System facility (Building 672) to accommodate T-7A training devices.
- Renovate interior of Building 199 to accommodate the proposed Unit Maintenance Trainer facility.

### **MITIGATION**

The operational characteristics of the T-7A aircraft are still in a preliminary stage. Adaptive management approaches for addressing noise impacts (e.g., reduced power settings, anticipated afterburner requirements, etc.) may be implemented to reduce the ultimate noise contours and associated land use effects at Vance AFB. DAF will continue to evaluate flight characteristics for T-7A training to determine the safest, most efficient, and least intrusive operations considering both mission requirements and airspace effects (*FEIS, Pg. 2-18, Section 2.6 and Pg. 3-62, Section 3.2.3, and Pg. 3-76, Section 3.3*).

Furthermore, the following mitigation measures will be implemented to mitigate significant noise and land use impacts:

- Updating the Air Installations Compatible Use Zones (AICUZ) Study at an appropriate time to be determined and coordinating the results with local planners.
- Continued use of noise complaint procedures to track and respond to such complaints.
- Monitoring noise complaint locations and times and potentially adjusting flight tracks as feasible.
- Evaluating and reducing power settings as feasible to decrease noise contours around Vance AFB.

DAF will continue to partner with local governments to perform the following tasks:

- Prepare an AICUZ update at an appropriate time to be determined to address any changes in land area within the greater than 65 dB DNL noise contours for Vance AFB.
- Coordinate with state and local agencies on compatible land use and potential encroachment concerns inside and outside of the DNL footprint and/or the Airfield Environs Overlay District, as applicable.
- Encourage municipalities to promote the most compatible land use by updating local zoning ordinances and building construction standards, especially for high-noise areas (*FEIS, Pg. 2-18, Section 2.6, and Pg. 3-62, Section 3.2.3, and Pg. 3-76, Section 3.3.3*).

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The AICUZ Program and Joint Land Use Study, including existing noise abatement procedures for Vance AFB, are discussed in detail in the FEIS (*FEIS Pgs. 3-28 to 3-29, Section 3.2.1.1.2.1, and Pg. 3-63, Section 3.3*).

Other DAF mitigation measures include best management practices and those requirements to comply with required revisions to Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (*FEIS, Pgs. 3-10, 3-111, Sections 3.8, 3.8.2.1*); Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure Plan; Hazardous Waste Management Plan (*FEIS, Pgs. 3-95, 3-98 to 3.101, Sections 3.6.1, 3.6.2.1 and Pg. 3-111, Section 3.8.2.1*); the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction General Permit (*FEIS Pgs. 3-107, 3-111, Sections 3.8, 3.8.2.1*); and updates to and compliance with the Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard Plan (*FEIS, Pgs. 3-81 to 3.84, Section 3.4.2.10*).

### **DECISION**

Alternative 3 is selected to provide DAF with operational flexibility after considering the potential environmental consequences provided in the EIS for T-7A recapitalization at Vance AFB, the comments and concerns of the public and other key stakeholders, as well as other factors related to national defense, including current military operational needs and costs.

DAF will, by this decision, recapitalize all T-38C aircraft at Vance AFB with up to 99 T-7A aircraft, limiting initial delivery to 46 per the Secretary of the Air Force Strategic Basing Decision approving Vance AFB as the fourth T-7A MOB. DAF will execute all portions of T-7A recapitalization at Vance AFB including the operations and changes to the number of personnel and dependents as defined for Alternative 3. The final facilities implementation (construction or renovation) will depend on the funding level and priorities in the overall T-7A program.

No actions inducing effect are allowed until relevant mitigations are in place. To track mitigations, AETC will develop a Mitigation Plan within 90-days of this ROD that identifies specific mitigative actions, identifies principal and subordinate organizations with responsibility for oversight and execution of specific mitigations, and documents timelines for implementation and completion of mitigations.

MICHAEL E. SAUNDERS, P.E., SES, DAF  
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force  
(Energy, Installations, and Environment)

Date