



# **The Nuisance of Tourist Choppers**

New York State Senator Brad Hoylman

December 2022

## Introduction

Manhattan is no stranger to noise pollution. Walking around my district, one is likely to hear emergency vehicles, hear and feel the rumble of the subway, and contend with horns and other noise generated by vehicle traffic. While much of the noise pollution we contend with on a day-to-day basis is a fact of life for Manhattanites, and to varying degrees an evil we must tolerate, there is one source of noise pollution that is truly in a league of its own: tourist helicopters.

*“How can we ban helicopters flying over Central Park and the UWS?”*

*Julia Vitullo-Martin, UWS*

Frustration with recreational helicopter trips has been mounting. As tourist helicopters increase in popularity, those of us on the ground feel disregarded. I have heard from a variety of my constituents that this situation is reaching a breaking point. Complaints about helicopter noise have soared 678% from 3,332 in 2019 to nearly 26,000 in 2021 (Korte).

*“The helicopter noise permeates every corner, although its worse around The Lake, where they occasionally hover”*

*Bradford Neil, Lincoln Square*

Constituents living near my district’s heliports must cope with helicopters taking off and landing every 5 to 10 minutes. Those seeking a quiet day of rest in our treasured Central Park find themselves disturbed by tourist choppers that hover over our limited greenspace. Apartments along the Hudson River hear and feel the constant noise created by low-flying helicopters traversing the Hudson River Estuary. My office, using data graciously provided by Zhi Keng He of Beta.nyc, has compiled this report to better understand the scale of this issue and provide insights to constituents and policymakers alike.

*“Endless helicopter noise... Endless... what can we do?”*

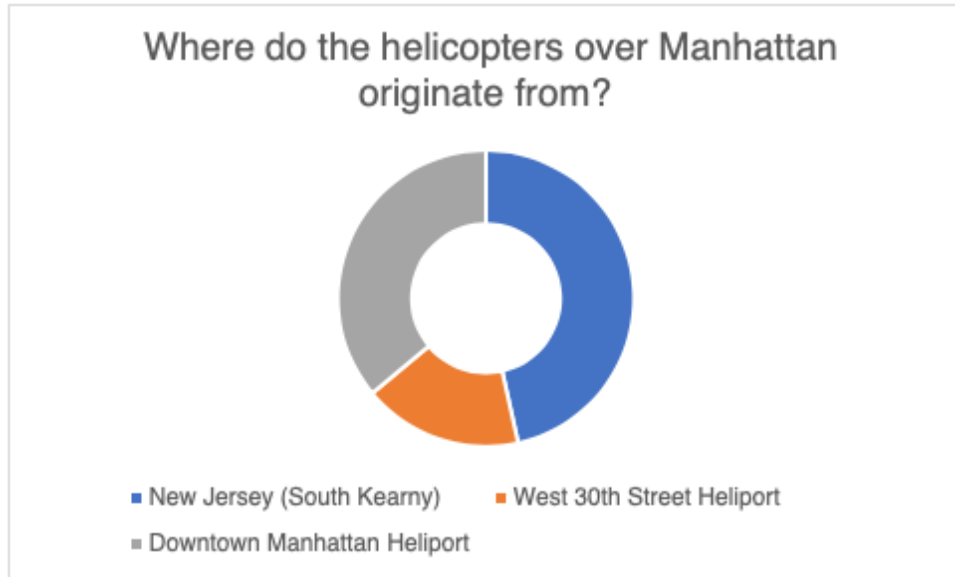
*Bruce Reznik, UWS*

## Data Insights

Beta.nyc compiled data from flight trackers to calculate the average number of rotorcraft trips that fly over Manhattan on weekdays and the weekend. This data also revealed where these flights originate from. The results are startling and offer new insights into how we as policymakers and Manhattanites can address this issue.

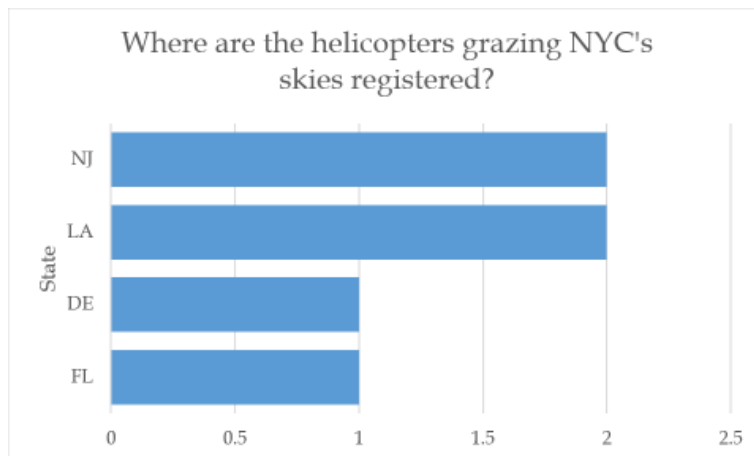
Nearly half of rotorcraft trips takeoff and land in New Jersey

Nearly half of the helicopters overhead take off and land in New Jersey. These trips capitalize upon our city's world-renowned beauty but being based in New Jersey, offer no economic benefit to New York City or State.



None of the top six helicopter charter companies are registered in New York State

It makes sense that helicopter charter providers don't care about New Yorkers because they themselves are not New Yorkers. We cannot allow those who do not set foot in our city to dominate our skies.

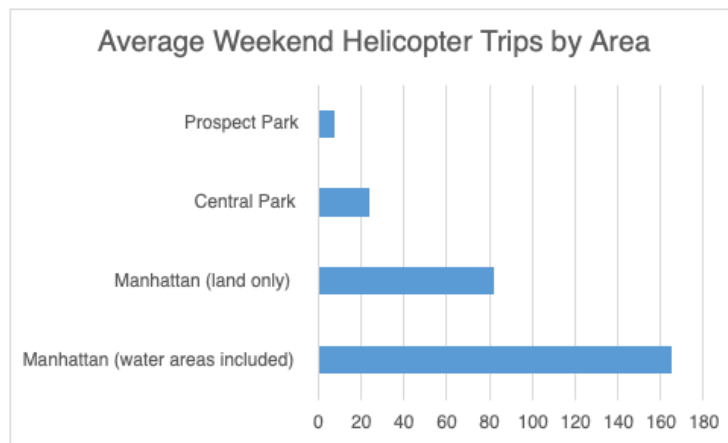


NAME	STREET	CITY	STATE
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GM LEASING CO LLC	1318 SMEDE HWY # 92	BROUSSARD	LA
MERIDIAN HELICOPTERS LLC	210 STANTON ST	BROUSSARD	LA
GOTHAM HELICOPTERS LLC	1101 W EDGAR RD	LINDEN	NJ
CNW HOLDINGS LLC	300 DELAWARE AVE STE 220-A	WILMINGTON	DE
HELICOPTER SERVICES LLC	1101 W EDGAR RD	LINDEN	NJ
HATZ AVIATION LLC	PO BOX 214	POMPANO BEACH	FL

Over 168 helicopters fly over Manhattan on an average weekend, approximately one every nine minutes during peak hours

My constituents have consistently stated that non-essential helicopters are a constant presence in their lives, this data confirms that. On an average weekend, 165.8 helicopters graze our skies. Fourteen percent of these trips fly over Central Park (He).

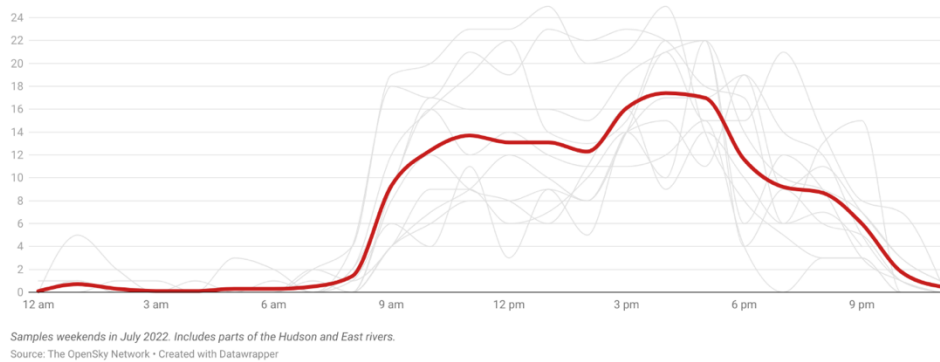


*"I worked... by the Heliport in West Chelsea and... [helicopters] were literally coming and going every five to ten minutes"*

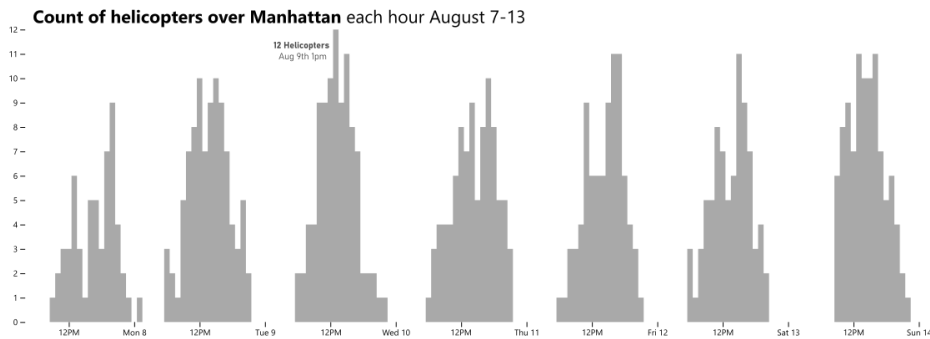
*Rosemary Abendroth, Lincoln Square*

The data shows that the vast majority of helicopter charters are from 8:30am to 9:00pm, peaking between 3:00PM and 6:00PM (He). This confirms what many of my constituents already knew to be true, helicopters are disturbing our neighborhoods at a constant clip all throughout the day.

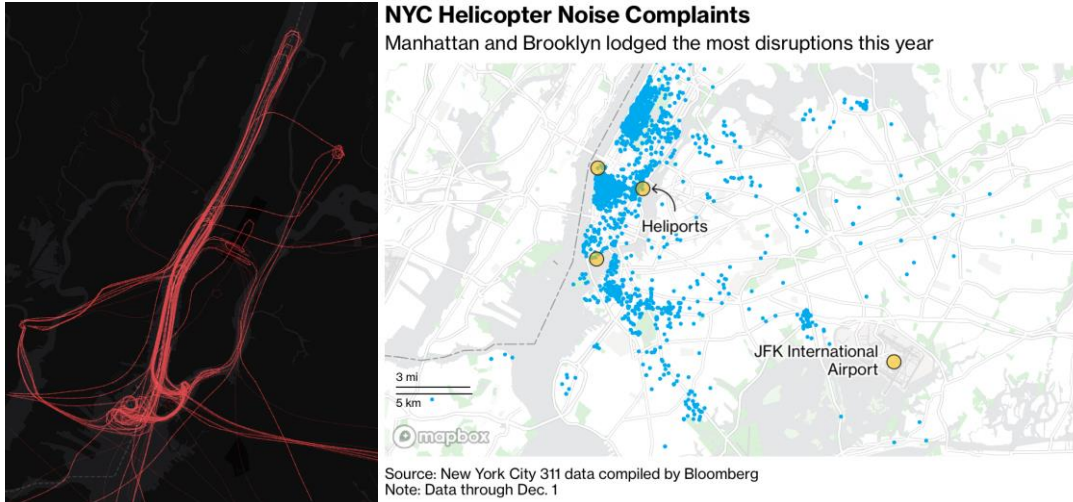
### How many helicopter trips occur over Manhattan during the weekend?



At peak hours during this past summer, as many as 12 helicopters an hour were flying above Manhattan. With trips at this frequency, it's no mystery why noise complaints have risen by 678% since 2019 (He).



Heat maps provided by Beta.NYC also reveal that residents of my district, particularly those living along the Hudson River, shoulder the burden of the noise these flights generate (He). It is fundamentally unfair to force my constituents to cope with a diminished quality of life to serve an industry that benefits a small minority of tourists. This is especially true given that the businesses that offer chartered trips to tourists are registered out of state and therefore offer no contribution to New York's economy.



This heat map adds further context to Bloomberg’s map that compiled 311 noise complaint data through the first of this month (Korte), bolstering feedback I have received from my constituents who feel tormented by helicopters. The inference here is clear: the West Side is the source of a disproportionate number of noise complaints because it sees a disproportionate portion of these flights. Unfortunately, today my constituents have no legal recourse to correct this injustice; I aim to change that.

## Policy Recommendations

In the previous legislative session, my colleagues and I overwhelmingly passed S7493A, the ‘Stop the Chop’ Act, which I sponsored with Assembly Member Gottfried. This bill allows a person who has suffered interference with the use and enjoyment of private property or public parkland by a rotorcraft used in a manner that creates an unreasonable level of noise at ground level to have a right of action against a person who caused or contributed to the use of such rotorcraft in such manner. This bill is crucial to giving my constituents recourse against out-of-state rotorcraft operators who are unaccountable to New Yorkers and their elected officials. I strongly urge Governor Hochul to sign this legislation.

*“FINALLY! Some relief from the constant noise of helicopters! (In reference to our ‘Stop the Chop’ Act)”*

*Valerie B., Lincoln Square*

At the federal level, I am extremely supportive of the legislation Representatives Nadler, Maloney, and Velazquez have introduced, the Helicopter Safety and Noise Management Act. This would create a commission comprised of the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), helicopter noise and safety advocates who

have been adversely affected by helicopter noise, and elected officials. This commission would be tasked with producing a helicopter usage management plan to reduce the number of non-essential civil rotorcraft operating at any given time (Reps. Announce Legislation to Reduce Helicopter Flights).

At the city level, City Council Member Restler introduced a bill that would ban non-essential helicopter flights from New York City's city-owned heliports. Councilor Rester estimates that this legislation would chop 4,000 helicopter trips a month from our skies (Duggan).

**Conclusion** Protecting New Yorkers from this not-so-silent minority of helicopter users is a practical and moral imperative. It is outrageous that we are subjecting millions of New Yorkers to constant noise pollution for an activity that offers utility to so few. This is a unique issue that requires a multipronged approach at the city, state, and federal level. I look forward to continuing to work with our expanding coalition of concerned residents and officials to #StopTheChop once and for all.

## **Endnotes and Citations**

Duggan, Kevin. "First on Amny: Council Bill Would Ban Non-Essential Helicopter Flights from NYC Heliports." *AmNewYork*, AmNewYork, 14 Sept. 2022, <https://www.amny.com/news/council-ban-non-essential-helicopter-flights/>.

He, Zhi Keng. "Helicopter Analysis." *FAA Data*, Beta.NYC, 15 Dec. 2022.

Korte, Gregory. "NYC Complaints about Helicopter Noise Top Rat Complaints in Some Parts of City." *Bloomberg.com*, Bloomberg, 14 Dec. 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-12-14/nyc-complaints-about-helicopter-noise-top-rat-complaints-in-some-parts-of-city>.

"Reps. Maloney, Nadler, and Velazquez Announce Legislation to Substantially Reduce Non-Essential Helicopter Flights Over NYC." *Maloney.House.gov*, Office of Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney, 16 May 2022, <https://maloney.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rebs-maloney-nadler-and-velazquez-announce-legislation-to-substantially>. Accessed 12 Dec. 2022.

