West Air drives ATP cargo plan

BAE SYSTEMS is to launch a freighter conversion for the ATP twin turboprop later this month, in partnership with Scandinavian regional operator West Air Sweden, which may take up to nine ex-United Feeder Service aircraft.

Conversion will introduce a sliding cargo door similar to that offered for the BAe 748, from which the ATP was developed in the 1980s.

A cargo ATP should accommodate around 8.5t of cargo, compared with between 6t and 6.3t for the 748, according to West Air production manager Colin Kearney. He says BAE would design the door for West Air to fabricate and convert the aircraft – although a third party could be used for the work. BAE Systems' Asset Management arm owns 42 of the 62 ATPs built.

West Air hopes to begin an initial conversion early next year under a schedule that could see a certificated ATP freighter entering service about 12 months later.

The airline has recently taken delivery of the first three United Feeder Service aircraft in a deal brokered by BAE's Asset Management arm.

Two of the three aircraft are being used to transport mail – a task which does not require a cargo door – and the other is configured for passenger service.

West Air, which operates 11 of the earlier 748s, has put deposits on a further three United ATPs, and is in talks on three more aircraft owned by a leasing company.

The manufacturer initially proposed a basic 748-type door modified to European JAR25 standards, but West Air has suggested a simpler design, placed two frames further forward within the parallel section of the fuselage.

This permits use of the full diameter for loading and maintains centre of gravity stability for loading cargo into the longer aircraft, avoiding the need for a tail prop.

There will also be greater external clearance around the tailplane for loading.

BAe will also offer enhanced operating weights for the ATP, essentially matching those of the later Jetstream 61 variant. ❑

MAS poised to name its choice of alliance

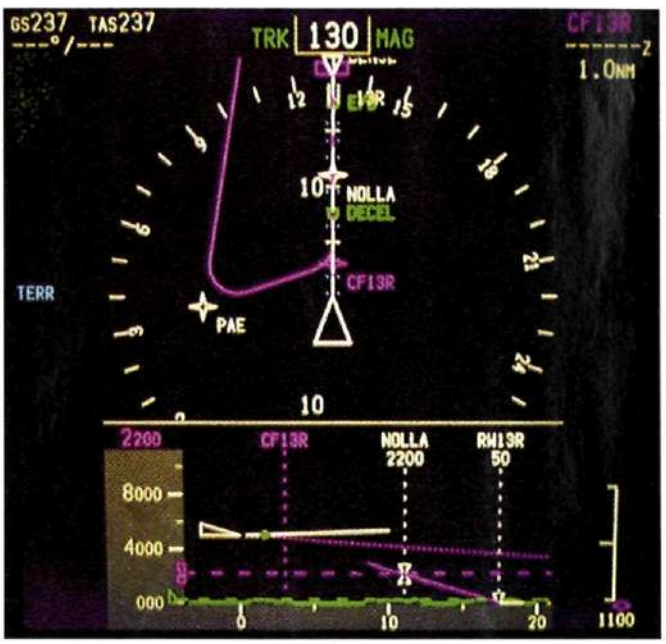
MALAYSIA Airlines (MAS) is set to name the airline alliance it intends to join, as analysts confirm it is considering oneworld as a leading contender. A decision is expected this month.

The South-East Asian carrier has been most closely associated to date with the KLM-Northwest Airlines Wings alliance, having formed codeshare links with both leading Wings carriers over the last two years. However, oneworld partners British Airways and Qantas are known to be wooing MAS to boost an Asian presence which includes Cathay Pacific.

The addition of MAS to oneworld would open the possibility of Qantas moving its South-East Asian hub for flights between Europe and Australia from Singapore's Changi Airport to Kuala Lumpur International Airport. It suspended its operations to Malaysia in 1997 as a result of the region's economic collapse.

The alliance move by MAS comes against a background of continuing lacklustre financial performance as the airline failed to meet its targeted return to profit for the financial year ended 31 March, posting a 248.57 million ringgit ($65.4 million) net loss. This is despite a 949.6 million ringgit gain from aircraft and engine sales. The carrier lost 700.05 million ringgit the previous year. ❑

Boeing aims to improve safety with new display



Boeing hopes its new display will cut down landing and other accidents

GUY NORRIS/**SEATTLE**

BOEING IS in the final stages of developing a new flightdeck display which it hopes will help prevent controlled flight into terrain and crashes during landing – the two leading causes of accidents.

The vertical situation display (VSD) is designed to "give the crew the same sort of intuitive view as the primary flight display [PFD] lateral display, but from the side," says Boeing safety technology development programme manager, Bob Myers.

The VSD occupies the lower portion of the PFD and provides a side elevation of the flight from approach to landing.

The VSD is designed to be linked to the conventional PFD format and uses the same altitude reference and longitudinal distance scales, as well as identical trend vectors, vertical speed indicators and way points.

"We've tried to make the displays as configurable as possible," says Myers, who says the VSD is expected to promote the increasing trend away from "step down" approach procedures to smoother and safer instrument landing system-like approaches.

Combined with terrain data from the now standard Enhanced Ground Proximity Warning System (EGPWS), the VSD is expected to increase situational awareness and improve crew reaction times. "A terrain awareness warning system can provide some warning, but the VSD will show continuous contours of the terrain ahead and the flightpath, and will help pilots plot corrective action".

The company says the long-sought concept has become possible because of the combined availability of EGPWS, advanced flight management systems, navigation displays and the global positioning system.

Boeing is developing the VSD "in part" with Honeywell, but stresses the programme will be open to Rockwell Collins. Myers also says Airbus is studying a VSD concept for its A3XX. Boeing has started "detailed integration" of the display into its 737 line.

It also plans to get a commitment to configure the VSD for all other production models by year-end and intends to offer it as a retrofit with a dedicated display for earlier aircraft. ❑