

CARGO BRENDAN SOBIE / WASHINGTON DC AND MAX KINGSLEY-JONES / LONDON

IAI eyes own 747-400 conversion

However, Boeing does not plan to start its own passenger-to-freighter modifications on the aircraft until 2005

After going head-to-head with Boeing on cargo conversion programmes for the 737 Classic and 767, Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) is now studying the launch of its own modification for the 747-400.

In 1990, the Bedek division of IAI developed and certificated a side cargo-door conversion for the 747-100/200 for which it holds its own supplemental type certificate. The firm says it is now looking at offering a conversion for the -400. "At this point we are exploring the 747-400 by ourselves," says IAI.

Boeing has been studying an in-house conversion programme for the latest 747 model for several years, and, according to Sandra Nossaman, marketing manager of the manufacturer's Airplane Services Conversions division, it is now in preliminary design. She

says that the timetable as it stands does not envisage deliveries starting until 2005 given current residual values. IAI says it has a similar timeframe in mind for its -400F programme.

Some observers believe Boeing is delaying the launch of a 747-400 conversion to protect sales of new 747-400F freighters, which now make up a significant proportion of production. With a number of 747-400 passenger aircraft being parked or offered for sale following 11 September, analysts believe the market for a conversion programme may emerge earlier than the manufacturer wants.

While the production -400F has the smaller upper-deck cabin of the 747-100/200, the stretched upper deck (SUD) cabin floor of the passenger model requires modification



Boeing already offers a conversion for the stretched upper deck 747-300

for freighter conversion to provide full pallet height on the main deck. Boeing has already developed and certificated a conversion for the SUD-equipped 747-300.

Nossaman says Boeing is not about to do the 747-400 without a partner, and says the company has

reversed its strategy of carrying out a conversion programme on its own. "Our programmes are under-going evaluation now," she says, acknowledging Boeing cannot offer a competitive product unless the conversions are performed by a lower cost overseas partner.

ENGINES

P&W poised to win Vietnam 777 contract

Pratt & Whitney (P&W) seems set to win the battle to power the four Boeing 777-200ERs recently ordered by Vietnam Airlines. Industry sources say the carrier's internal evaluation has come out in favour of P&W, but the final decision rests with the board in Hanoi, which is expected to approve the plan in the next few days.

The Rolls-Royce Trent 800 and General Electric's GE90 have also been in the bidding for the 85,000lb- (378kN) thrust engines for use on regional routes. The airline is understood to be negotiating to take up to four more P&W-powered 777s on lease from International Lease Finance before the aircraft are delivered directly from Boeing in September. Vietnam Airlines is also aiming to conclude an order with Airbus for five A321 narrowbodies before March.

ALLIANCES NICHOLAS IONIDES / SINGAPORE

KAL close to restoring SkyTeam codeshares

Korean Air (KAL) is finally going to see benefits from its SkyTeam Alliance membership, with a wide-ranging codeshare deal with partners Air France and Delta Air Lines. It is also planning to seek US antitrust immunity for the tie-up with Delta.

KAL says it will sign the agreement on 15 February, reinstating arrangements suspended in 1999 after a series of major accidents.

SkyTeam was created in 2000, and the revival of codesharing with Delta, in particular, has been repeatedly delayed, including last year, after the US Federal Aviation Administration downgraded South Korea's safety oversight rating to Category 2. Category 1 status was restored late last year.

The Korean carrier has been aggressively working to improve its operations in recent years, and says Air France and Delta were satisfied with its efforts after carrying out a joint audit in late 2001.

KAL says codesharing is due to resume in April or May, after which it will seek antitrust immunity with Delta from the US Department of Transportation (DOT).

The DOT recently granted approval for antitrust immunity to KAL's fellow SkyTeam partners Air France, Alitalia, Delta and CSA Czech Airlines.

Codesharing with Air France will cover Seoul-Paris services, while the arrangement with Delta will initially cover co-operation on KAL-operated transpacific flights.

It is expected to later be expanded to cover domestic flights in the USA.

Correction: In our 22-28 January issue, we said that the crew of the Air France Concorde which crashed on 25 July 2000 "rotated the aircraft for take-off at 15kt (28km/h) before reaching the planned 183kt". This should read: "The crew rotated the aircraft for take-off at 183kt, when the planned rotate speed was 199kt, according to the report."

ROUTES

■ Delta Air Lines will shift its New York-Frankfurt-Mumbai flight to New York-Paris-Mumbai on 30 March to connect with codeshare partner Air France's flights from its Charles de Gaulle hub. The flight uses a Boeing 767-300ER. ■ British Airways and KLM have finalised plans for a short-term network and frequent-flyer arrangement on certain Middle Eastern flights with effect from 31 March.

■ Continental Airlines plans to launch the USA's first air/rail codeshare in mid-March, placing its code on Amtrak services connecting its New York/Newark hub with Philadelphia, Wilmington, Stamford and New Haven in the north-east USA. ■ China Southern Airlines has reinstated its service between Beijing and Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, via Urumqi. ■ Belgian charter start-up Thomas Cook Airlines is considering starting services to the African capitals Dakar in Senegal and Banjul in Gambia. The destinations were previously served by Sabena.