

FLEET DEVELOPMENT JUSTIN WASTNAGE / BAKU

# Azerbaijan goes on upgrade trail

Airbus and Boeing asked to provide proposals for four narrowbodies, while flag carrier also seeks turboprops

Azerbaijan Airlines has invited Airbus and Boeing to submit proposals to supply four narrowbody aircraft for its fleet modernisation. The flag carrier is also looking at acquiring five turboprops for domestic and regional services.

Azerbaijan Airlines' fleet comprises two Boeing 727-200s and two 757-200s in addition to five Tupolev Tu-134Bs, three Tu-154Bs, three Tu-154Ms and two Yakovlev Yak-40s.

The airline has been undertaking a "slow phasing out" of Soviet-era aircraft since 1996, having already retired eight Yak-40s and four Tupolevs. Jahangir Askerov, director general of state-owned aviation holding company Azal, says that after negotiations with Boeing the carrier has sent the US manufacturer a letter of intent to purchase four 737-700 or -800 aircraft. The

airline has not discounted an Airbus purchase, however. "If Airbus came to us with a better offer for the A321, we could buy that instead," he says. Askerov says that the carrier plans to finalise an order by year-end.

The aircraft would be used to increase frequencies to Dubai, Istanbul and Paris, and support its present 727 and 757 services. The narrowbodies could also be deployed on new short-haul routes from Baku to points in Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, says Askerov.

Askerov adds that the airline is studying smaller oil exploration destinations around the Caspian sea, but not all airports in the region have the infrastructure to handle jets. The airline will acquire five turboprops for this role and has had preliminary talks with ATR



The new aircraft will support Azerbaijan's Boeing 757 and 727 operations

and Bombardier for 50-seat aircraft. The airline will also expand services from the country's second city, Gyangzha.

The Azerbaijan government has approved a \$200 million investment in the airline, partly due to the intervention of the country's

president, Heyday Aliev, who is an aviation enthusiast. The country has also received \$30 million from the Export Credit Guarantee Development bank to upgrade Baku's cargo terminal to support Lufthansa Cargo's plans to use it as a regional hub.

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## EXPANSION

### Bolivia's LAB takes step forward

After successfully renegotiating its debt, Bolivia's flag carrier Lóide Aéreo Boliviano (LAB) has finalised the lease of two Boeing 767-300ERs and three Stage 3 hush-kitted Boeing 727-200s from Pegasus Aviation.

The aircraft will be delivered in the fourth quarter. The airline plans to use the 767s on North American routes, while two 727-200s will operate domestic and cross-border routes to neighbouring countries, with the remaining 727 to be a standby aircraft. LAB plans to convert one of its 727-200s locally into freighter configuration. The carrier has increased frequencies on domestic and international routes and is planning to expand its international route network.

## SAFETY

### ANZ 747-400 loses flap

Air New Zealand (ANZ) has suffered its third structural failure incident in just over a year. Part of the right inboard flap of one of its Boeing 747s fell into the Manukau Harbour shortly after take off from Auckland, New Zealand, on 30 August.

The 747-400's horizontal stabiliser and other sections of the flap were slightly damaged, but the pilots were unaware of the separation until landing at Los Angeles with 355 passengers and 17 crew on board. On the aircraft's first approach, the flaps would not

extend fully, and the crew landed from the second approach using less than full flap. The airline is investigating the incident.

The 13-year-old airframe is the oldest in ANZ's eight-strong 747-400 fleet. The other seven have since undergone emergency checks. On 24 August a 747-400 flight to Tokyo lost a composite wing fairing inspection panel above an engine.

In 2001 one of ANZ's Boeing 767s lost part of a wing. The Transport Accident Investigation Commission report blamed metal fatigue.