

MARITIME PATROL

Japan/USN decision due

The Japan Defence Agency (JDA) and US Navy will decide by December whether to extend their maritime patrol aircraft avionics and mission system study following the completion of key tasks defined under a March 2002 memorandum of understanding (MoU).

At the third meeting of the project's joint working group (JWG) in late August, a report on the potential for co-operative development of a mission system was completed and signed off by the two sides. The collection of avionics and mission system data has also been finished.

The next meeting of the JWG is scheduled before year-end and is due to complete a comparison of the "operational and material requirements" of the two countries and a report on avionics and mission system interoperability, say US government officials.

The USA needs a mission system to equip its proposed Multi-mission Maritime Aircraft (MMA) while Japan is developing the P-X maritime patrol aircraft, based on an indigenous airframe, to be built by Kawasaki Heavy Industries (KHI). Both nations are now aiming to achieve initial operational capability between 2011 and 2012 after the P-X programme slipped by about a year.

The fourth JWG meeting will decide whether to extend the study under the terms of the existing MoU to allow more time to update the data collection report, say officials. A follow-on MoU may be required to cover any co-operative development work after the US MMA project enters system development and demonstration.

Last week Boeing, offering a 737-based solution, and Lockheed Martin proposing a new-build P-3 Orion, were awarded US Navy contracts for the next phase of MMA. KHI was named prime contractor for the Japanese P-X and its sister C-X cargo aircraft late last year.

MAINTENANCE STEWART PENNEY / LONDON

Goodrich adds AEI system to diagnostic package

Aerosystems International (Aei) has been selected by Goodrich to supply its web-based Sapphire asset and maintenance management system as part of the US company's Integrated Mechanical Diagnostic-Health and Usage Management System (IMD-HUMS) for the Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk utility helicopter.

Yeovil, UK-based Aei will supply the system for a two-year field test of IMD-HUMS using eight UH-60s. IMD-HUMS gathers data from the helicopter's systems during flight which will be downloaded to a Goodrich ground station containing Sapphire for analysis and maintenance action identification.

Richard Wilmot, director advanced systems Aei Inc, says the equipment will provide the US Army with up-to-date inventory information "with maintenance cost reduction a key benefit".

Potentially, the system could be extended across the US Army's 1,200-plus UH-60 fleet, although

other products are being considered for the Black Hawk. Sapphire can be provided either off-the-shelf or adapted to meet the customers' requirements, says Wilmot.

Goodrich's selection is the latest success for Aei which is already providing Sapphire to support the US Army's Boeing CH-47 Chinooks at Fort Campbell in Kentucky, and a trial using the system with the Boeing AH-64 Apache is expected to start shortly, says Wilmot. The

requirements driving each helicopter type are different, he adds. One part of the CH-47 programme has been to use Sapphire as part of the US Army's changes to Chinook maintenance procedures.

The CH-47 programme is also about to start using Aei's E-Card system, a version of Sapphire hosted on a laptop which is being developed for handheld computers (*Flight International*, 26 March - 1 April).



Sapphire could be used across the US Army's entire UH-60 fleet

IN-FLIGHT REFUELLING PAUL LEWIS / WASHINGTON DC

USAF-Boeing tanker lease sparks off Australian interest

But project struggles to meet all requirements of US budget watchdogs

The US Air Force's proposed lease of up to 100 Boeing 767 tankers has sparked interest from potential international customers wanting to consider similar arrangements including Australia, says the manufacturer.

Talks between Boeing and the US government are still some way from an agreement that meets the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) criteria.

Royal Australian Air Force sources say the prospect of the USAF leasing 100 tankers and the possibility of leveraging from the resultant economies of scale has attracted attention in Canberra. Australia is due to release a request for proposals by the end of the year to replace its five Boeing 707-320Cs.

A Boeing official says: "Senior

Australian officials have visited to look at this," adding that there are "other nations interested in the tanker". Boeing is also part of one of the two consortia competing for the UK Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft, which Australia also looked at before the UK delayed the programme by 18 months (*Flight International*, 25 June-1 July).

Meanwhile, Boeing is focused on sealing a deal with the USAF that will be acceptable to the OMB and Congress. The company had hoped to have secured a deal by now for a 10-year operating lease, but talks have become waylaid by OMB insistence that the USAF make provision for termination liability early in the lease. The USAF argues this negates the benefit of a lease.

The OMB adds that the lease payments value over the 10-years shall

not exceed 90% of the fair value of the aircraft at the outset; that the term of the lease not exceed 75% of the economic life of the tanker; and that ownership remains with the lessor at the end of the lease. According to one industry supplier the deal has no better than a 50:50 chance of happening.

Boeing says it offered the USAF a deal requiring no payment ahead of delivery, providing for accelerated delivery, with interest rates set at commercially competitive levels and which will meet congressional and OMB requirements. The USAF would be given first refusal of the aircraft at a guaranteed purchase price. Furthermore, says Boeing, leasing 767s rather than re-engineering and maintaining 130 Boeing KC-135Es will save the USAF around \$5.5 billion.