

Boeing prepares to offer 747-500/600MD

GUY NORRIS/SEATTLE

BOEING IS to seek board authority to offer the "Major Derivative" (MD) 747-500/600 in July, but may be forced to extend the development timescale by more than a year to incorporate more advanced technology, at the insistence of its airline advisory group.

Boeing originally planned to request authority to offer (ATO) at a board meeting scheduled to be held in China in the last week in June. Continuing debate over configuration definition is expected to delay the formal request for ATO by a further week or more. The China meeting is now likely to be used to give the board a detailed briefing on the 747MD effort, and a special board meeting could be convened early in July in the USA, at which approval will be sought.

If Boeing receives the go-ahead and sufficient orders are taken, then both re-winged versions of the updated 747 would be launched simultaneously, possibly at the Farnborough air show in

September. Boeing president and chief executive officer Phil Condit confirms that debate still surrounds configuration definition, but suggests that preparations are being finalised for programme launch before the end of the third quarter of 1996.

"There's been a lot to give and take on the details, and I expect that will continue. But we have been working towards a point where it makes sense to proceed. We have arrived at that point," he says.

Condit says that a launch decision will depend on which airlines order the aircraft, rather than on how many orders are received. "If that 'who' is a respected airline like Singapore Airlines or British Airways, then you've got it," he adds.

Much of the debate over final configuration centres on the introduction of new-technology systems such as fly-by-wire flight controls into the aircraft. Boeing has warned members of its 15-strong airline advisory group that the full introduction of every system on the group's "wish-list" could extend the



Condit: finalising definitive design

development timescale by up to two years. "Boeing was really surprised when most of us told them we'd be willing to wait another year or two than have a 'new' airliner with 15-year old technology in it at entry-into-service," says one advisory board member.

"Most want to assess how successful many of these technologies have been on the 777. They include things like fly-by-wire, aircraft

information-management systems, electrical-load management and automated check lists," the board member adds.

Boeing believes that a launch in the third quarter of 1996 would enable it to commence deliveries by December 2000, without the delay.

Both versions will be centred around a new 73m-span wing based heavily on the advanced design of the 777. The wing has a high degree of inverted camber over the root and is highly aft loaded and thinly tapered with no winglets.

The wingtip will rise between 7.6m and 9m above the ground depending on the amount of fuel aboard, while the fin will rise to a height of over 21m.

Aircraft gross weight for both versions will be almost the same at around 545,000kg. The -600 will carry up to 515 passengers in a typical three-class arrangement over ranges of up to 13,700km (7,400nm).

The smaller -500 will carry around 490 passengers over ranges of up to 15,725km. □

BA courts JAL as world tie-ups spread

PAUL LEWIS/SINGAPORE

BRITISH AIRWAYS is now focusing attention on Japan Airlines (JAL) as a possible strategic partner in Asia, following the UK carrier's recently announced tie-up with American Airlines.

BA executive chairman Sir Colin Marshall travelled to Tokyo to meet JAL chairman Susumu Yamaji

shortly after unveiling a code-sharing deal with American (*Flight International*, 19-25 June). "It was more than a courtesy call," says an airline source.

Discussions are understood to centre on areas of possible future co-operation between the two flag carriers. BA has long been looking for a partner in Asia, to complement its existing alliances with Qantas and USAir. The UK airline declines to comment.

BA had previously held talks with Japan's second international carrier All Nippon Airways (ANA). Co-operation between the two has progressed no further than a shared frequent-flyer programme. One BA source says that trying to reach agreement with the Japanese is like "...trying to nail jelly to a wall".

BA and JAL already have a high degree of synergy through their co-operative tie-ups with other foreign airlines. JAL has been engaged in on-off discussions with Qantas on code-sharing services between

Japan and Australia. Qantas chief executive James Strong is understood to have privately prompted JAL to widen its talks to include BA.

American and JAL, in the meantime, have been looking to further develop their co-operation. They hold stakes in each other's computer-reservation systems, they operate a shared frequent-flyer programme and provide reciprocal cargo representation.

A full partnership between JAL and American faces a similar hurdle to BA's proposed tie-up with American, however, the US Department of Transportation (DoT) is demanding new open-skies agreements, before approving any code-sharing arrangement.

The DoT has blocked plans by ANA and Delta Air Lines code-share flight between Tokyo and Los Angeles from 1 September, until all outstanding disputes are resolved. United Airlines is understood to be holding talks with Japan Airlines over cargo co-operation. □



BA tails JAL for alliance

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ ARISE, SIR RICHARD

British Aerospace chief executive Dick Evans has received a knighthood in the UK Queen's birthday honours list, for "contributions to aerospace and defence industries".

■ FRENCH TIE-UP

French independent airlines Air Liberté and AOM have agreed on a codesharing deal which is seen as the initial phase of a merger, forming France's biggest independent carrier. The agreement, due to be signed on 24 June, will bring to an end rivalry on hotly contested domestic routes within France, such as Paris Orly-Nice and Orly-Montpellier, and prepares the way for the creation of an airline big enough to compete with Air France and its domestic arm, Air France Europe (formerly Air Inter).