

Most regionals meet FAA safety deadline

ALMOST ALL US regional airlines have met the US Federal Aviation Administration's 20 March deadline for tougher safety rules, with only six out of the 39 affected carriers failing to do so.

The new regulations require regional operators to meet the same standards as those operating large jet-powered airliners, and affect scheduled airlines using aircraft with between ten and 30 seats.

The six "failed" small carriers, operating a total of only 13 aircraft, are either continuing to work with the FAA to reach compliance or have reduced the number of passenger seats to fewer than ten.

Mesa Airlines, commenting on what it has been like making the transition, says that the extra work has caused flight delays, but is not affecting safety. Mesa says: "The strain of handling the carrier's 1,800 daily flights has temporarily overloaded the system." Long-distance telephone lines to the company have been choked by the new procedures for forwarding the dispatch flight-releases to the pilots.

The so-called Commuter Rule is expected to cost affected US regional airlines \$75 million over 15 years. Specific safety enhancements include compliance with dispatch systems and dispatcher certification regulations; better training programmes; duty limits for aircraft maintenance workers; and compulsory crew-resource-management training for pilots. □

Airbus offers extended-range HGW A330-300s

MAX KINGSLEY-JONES/TOULOUSE

AIRBUS INDUSTRIE is actively offering an increased weight, extended range derivative of the A330-300 twinjet, as final assembly of the first A330-200 progresses at Toulouse.

The range of the new high-gross-weight (HGW) version of the -300 would typically be boosted by some 1,300km (700nm) to around 10,200km. The increase, which will be incorporated into the aircraft only if specified by the customer, would extend the twinjet's reach to now cover routes between Europe and Asia or the US West Coast.

The HGW features the strengthened wing and fuselage structure of the shorter, long range, 253-seat A330-200. This enables maximum take-off weight (MTOW) to be boosted by 12t, to give the HGW A330-300 the same 230t (507,000lb) weight as the A330-200. The heavyweight -300 does not, however, feature the centre-section fuel tank of the -200, so fuel capacity remains at the standard 97,290 litres.

The heavier A330-300 will be offered with the same 300kN to 316kN (68,000lb to 71,100lb)-



Fuselage sections of the first A330-200 were mated at Toulouse on March 25

thrust powerplants which are specified on the -200.

The A330-300, which shares the same fuselage dimensions as the four-engined A340-300, typically seats 295 passengers in a three-class layout, or 335 in two classes.

"The A330-200 resulted from from the weight growth first developed for the HGW A340-300," explains Alan Pardoe, A330/A340 product manager for Airbus' marketing division.

"We are now incorporating that weight and structure into the basic A330-300, which entered service at 212t [MTOW], and is now operat-

ing at up to 218t," he says.

The consortium is targeting certification and entry into service in late 1998, depending on customer requirements. Airbus says that, as it has only recently begun actively offering the HGW -300, firm customer commitments have not yet been secured.

Meanwhile, Aerospatiale has begun final assembly of the first A330-200 at Toulouse, with the mating of the forward, centre and aft fuselage sections occurring on 25 March. It will have its first flight in August, and enter service with Canada 3000 in April 1998. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ NORFOLK ISLAND ROUTE
A new Australasian start-up will contest the potentially lucrative tourism route between Australia and Norfolk Island, an Australian territory in the Southwest Pacific recently vacated by Ansett Australia. Norfolk Jet Express (NJE) will operate a British Aerospace BAe146-100 from the island on wet-lease from National Jet Systems (NJS), which runs a fleet of 11 of the regional jets for Qantas Airlink.

Vietnam Airlines revises growth plans

STATE-RUN Vietnam Airlines is revising plans to expand its passenger fleet in the wake of slower-than-expected traffic growth.

In 1996, Vietnam Airlines carried 2.5 million passengers, an 18% increase over 1995. Senior airline officials, however, had been projecting growth of between 25% and 28%. As the result of slower growth in business and tourist traffic, the carrier is now forecasting an increase of only 15% for 1997.

According to industry sources, the airline is carrying out a short-term review of its pending fleet development plan. It had wanted to

expand the existing fleet of 20 Western-built jet and turboprop-powered airliners to between 35 and 40 aircraft by 2000 and 70 to 80 by 2005.

The fleet of Boeing 767-300s has remained static at four aircraft, rather than being increased to the six or seven talked about a year ago. The Vietnamese carrier recently took delivery of a new 767-300ER on a one-year wet lease from Ansett Worldwide (AWAS), but, since October, has returned two leased 767-300ERs to AWAS and a single -200 to Royal Brunei Airlines.

At the same time, ten new A320s

have been delivered on a ten-year operating lease from Aerostar of Singapore. There are no immediate plans to acquire any more A320s, with airline sources now suggesting it has two more than it actually needs.

Plans to add longer-range wide-body aircraft to serve the USA and Europe, with the Boeing 777 and Airbus A340 being considered are still unclear. These require leasing support and, in the absence of any traffic rights to the US West Coast, there is no sign of making a decision before the end of the year at the earliest. □