

**FAA proposes to extend ETOPS**

**T**HE US FEDERAL Aviation Administration has proposed granting permission for a 15% increase in the maximum allowable extended-range twin-engined operations (ETOPS) to 207min from the nearest diversion airport. The proposal follows a request from the US Air Transport Association (ATA).

An FAA policy document calls for a 15% extension on the current 180min limit. The agency says that would allow 207min flight time for twin-engined airliners from an "adequate en-route alternate airport". The Administration says: "It is intended that this extension would be provided on a flight-by-flight exception basis." Comments on the proposal have to be submitted by 11 June.

Additional equipment or procedural requirements to those stipulated for 180min ETOPS would be demanded, says the FAA, including:

- operators having to apply for 207min authority;
- the aircraft being forced to have satellite communications and datalinks to airline operations and dispatch to allow updating of flight plan and diversion information before entry to the extended sector;
- single engine automated flight capability;
- a more stringent minimum equipment list;
- operators with 207min authority advising the FAA monthly of all ETOPS, with justification for each exceedance of the 180min limit.

Meanwhile, the FAA says it proposes to review all the requirements for en route requirements including the diversion airports, given that "such operations operate over increasingly remote and demanding areas of operation". □

**City Bird deal angers Sabena**

HERMAN DE WULF/BRUSSELS

**A**ROW HAS broken out between Belgian national airline Sabena and local associate City Bird over an agreement with fledgling Congolese national airline Lignes Aeriennes Congolaises (LAC) allowing City Bird to operate the Brussels-Kinshasa route on the African carrier's behalf.

Sabena is demanding BFr350 million (\$9.2 million) in damages and is seeking to terminate extensive links between the two carriers.

It has asked a local arbitration

court to rule on whether City Bird's action constitutes a breach of contract on the grounds that the national airline should have been informed of the move.

Sabena says that under its deal, City Bird had to inform it of any initiatives that might directly or indirectly have an impact on the national carrier's operations.

LAC, which recently took over from the defunct Air Zaire, has agreed a five-year contract with City Bird to fly passengers and cargo between Brussels and the former Belgian colony in competi-

tion with Sabena. Under bilateral agreements between Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo, both national carriers are allowed to link the two capitals.

Sabena has an 11.2% interest in City Bird, and contracts the low-cost airline to operate services to North and South America on its behalf. City Bird says it is merely wet-leasing a Boeing 767 to LAC in a similar arrangement to the one it has with Luxair to fly the 767 between Luxembourg and New York on the days it is not used on the Congo route. □

**United joins PETAL II datalink trials**

EMMA KELLY/LONDON

**U**NITED AIRLINES has committed its Boeing 777s to Europe's Preliminary Eurocontrol Test of Air/Ground Data Link (PETAL II) programme.

PETAL II is Europe's groundbreaking datalink programme aimed at validating air-ground datalinks in an operational air traffic control environment. The three-phase programme involves air traffic controllers and aircraft crew communicating by digital datalink rather than voice messages, with voice communications as back-up.

The PETAL II programme is being conducted during routine flights handled by Eurocontrol's Maastricht Upper Area Control Centre (MUAC). The first stage of PETAL II involved the use of the VHF datalink-4 (VDL-4) infrastructure. The latest phase of the programme will see 41 United 777s using FANS-1, the second air-ground infrastructure to be activated



United's 777 involvement should help PETAL programme to flower

on the MUAC PETAL II multi-stack architecture.

United completed check flights using the FANS-1 infrastructure this year and decided to commit its 777s to the programme last month, says Rob Mead, Eurocontrol's PETAL II trials manager.

Air New Zealand and Lufthansa are also conducting test flights. The former is expected to decide soon on whether to take part in the programme. Lufthansa, with SAS, has been participating in the VDL-4 phase of PETAL II since it started

in April 1998 (*Flight International*, 29 April-5 May 1998).

Eight flights a day operated by SAS McDonnell Douglas DC-9s and Lufthansa Boeing 747s are using datalink communications.

United's 777 fleet will bring a significant new source of operational data to the trials. The additional aircraft will give the project a new type of aircrew interface, another airline's cockpit culture and a significant increase in the number of flights using air-ground datalinks on a daily basis, says Mead. □

**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**■ NEW MD-11 AD**

The US Federal Aviation Administration has issued four extra emergency airworthiness directives (AD) aimed at preventing wire-related fires on the Boeing MD-11.

**FAA cracks the whip on US Classic 737 bulkheads**

**T**HE US Federal Aviation Administration has ordered US operators to inspect 500 of their Classic Boeing 737s for fatigue cracks in aft pressure bulkheads.

An airworthiness directive (AD) requires operators of early model 737s to perform either electronic

or visual inspections. The emergency order stems from the discovery of fatigue cracks on the aft pressure bulkhead of some 737-200s. Such cracks could cause rapid decompression.

Aircraft that have performed more than 40,000 cycles must be

inspected within the next 375 take-offs and landings or 60 days from the effective date of the AD, whichever is later. More time is given to younger 737s. Operators must then repeat the inspections.

The AD is an interim action pending a final solution. □