PILOT REGULATIONS

US crew duty time enforcement pushed back

US airlines have successfully stalled the US Federal Aviation Administration’s enforcement of a 16h maximum crew duty day by winning an action in the US Court of Appeals.

The FAA enforcement date was 17 November, and this action means US carriers will have until at least January to adjust their current schedules.

The Regional Airlines Association (RRA) president Deborah McElroy says that the FAA had recognised that it would take carriers a “significant amount of time to comply” with the 16h crew duty time (CDT) regulation, and that the Court of Appeals had recognised this.

McElroy claims that many of the RAA airlines CDT limits are in their contracts, and that the FAA should examine “fatigue issues that may exist from pilots’ other activities”.

The Air Transport Association’s (ATA) president Carol Hallett agrees that the FAA should rule with a 60-day comment period.

The ATA has recommended a duty limit of 14h, extendable to 16h to accommodate “unusual circumstances beyond the control of the airline”.

The Air Line Pilots Association president, Duane Woerth, says the decision is “incomprehensible and totally unacceptable”, and has asked the FAA to issue an expedited rule with a 60-day comment period.

Woerth alleges that the airlines are trying to kill or at least delay - the 16h enforcement, and blames them for the FAA’s failure to overhaul the fatigue regulations, which have been on the cards for six years.

AIRCRAFT DEVELOPMENT GUY NORRIS / SEATTLE

Airlines beg Boeing for supersonic sonic cruiser

Manufacturers wary of going beyond sound barrier with “supersonic” dash capability

Airlines working with Boeing on the initial configuration of the sonic cruiser high-speed airliner are asking it to design in a supersonic dash capability, despite apparent resistance from the manufacturer to step beyond the sound barrier with its new concept.

Sources among the 15-strong airline group involved in the configuration studies say: “We are asking Boeing to look at a supersonic dash capability because, seeing as it has to be certified beyond Mach 1 for upsets, why not use the capability when over water?”

Boeing sonic cruiser vice president and general manager Walt Gillette says newly completed wind-tunnel tests have been completed up to speeds of Mach 1.08, but insists that the company is not considering cruise speeds in excess of Mach 1.

“This is a sonic cruiser. We are looking at Mach 1, not any faster right now because, frankly, the technology is not here yet for a Mach 1.4, 1.6 to Mach 2 aircraft.”

Individual airlines, like suppliers involved in the sonic cruiser, are reluctant to be identified because of strict security rules laid down by Boeing as part of the development effort. However, several of the group say they have indicated a preference for supersonic capability to Mach 1.02 and Mach 1.05 in answers to a multipart questionnaire issued by Boeing as part of the initial configuration studies.

Should Boeing concede to the airlines’ wishes it now knows that, following the first round of low and high-speed wind-tunnel tests, the basic stability and control characteristics were confirmed through speeds up to Mach 1.08.

“When we looked at the first data we just said ‘wow’,” says Gillette. Speaking at the Aerospace North America exhibition in Seattle, Washington, Gillette says the pitch characteristics of the canard-equipped, swept wing airliner were “steady and level”. The design showed no evidence of Mach tuck, a concern of all new designs operating in the supersonic range, and “showed no sign of buffet onset”, he adds.

The tests mark the first stages of the configuration definition process which Boeing hopes to complete around November. The images of the model, which was tested in the low-speed tunnel at the University of Washington and Boeing’s transonic tunnel, are the first to be released that show the actual shape of the proposed aircraft.

MAINTENANCE NICHOLAS IONIDES / SINGAPORE

ST Aero to expand operations in USA

Singapore Technologies Aerospace (ST Aero) is proceeding with plans to expand its operations in the USA with the signing of a memorandum of understanding which will allow the construction of a third aircraft repair facility in the country.

The ST Engineering subsidiary says its third US facility will be in Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corp (CCREDC), which will construct the facility for ST Aero.

The Singapore-based company says the memorandum also outlines ST Aero’s intent to lease the two-bay hangar to be built by CCREDC as part of ST Aero’s expansion in aircraft maintenance activities in the USA.

ST Aero has been on the lookout for a site for a third US maintenance base for some time. It already has two facilities in the country, one at Mobile, Alabama, known as Mobile Aerospace Engineering, and the other at Dallas, Texas, known as DalFort Aerospace.

ST Aero says negotiations on the third facility are expected to be completed by the end of the year, after which the CCREDC will start the construction which is expected to take around 24 months.