AMERICAN COULD TAKE SIMILAR APPROACH AS DELTA WITH DOMESTIC 2KU

News / Airlines

Classic air-to-ground (ATG)-supported connectivity is not enough, at least not in the current implementation. That seems to be the conclusion that airlines, passengers (and even Gogo) are drawing these days in the United States.

Virgin **America** is obviously the most recent carrier to indicate as much, both through its signing for 10 planes with Ka-band and hybrid Ka/Ku satellite connectivity and **in comments from CEO David Cush stating outright** that, "Even with ATG-4 we know that our network gets overwhelmed" on some flights. Delta has a plan to address this challenge, with 200+ aircraft committed to Gogo's next generation **2Ku** satellite solution. United is mostly relying on satellite, too, with a mix of options from Thales/ViaSat, Panasonic Avionics and Gogo queued up. Southwest is keen on getting more bandwidth by working with partner Global Eagle Entertainment, and JetBlue is quickly approaching completion of its A320 fleet equipage with the Thales/ViaSat solution as well.

But what about American Airlines?

The carrier has been impressively quiet about wifi planning for its newly enlarged and combined fleet since the US Airways merger closed. And with more than 600 planes flying in domestic service, it has a lot of #paxex decisions to make. RGN has learned that American is nearing a decision on at least one major item – equipping a portion of its domestic fleet with Gogo 2Ku.

At present, American flies a mix of ATG and ATG-4 **domestic**ally, while its international aircraft

carry Panasonic Ku. Switching the ATG portion over to traditional Ku or regional Ka is always possible, but those offerings include several drawbacks. Many of the planes leave the CONUS region somewhat frequently and the exact launch date of ViaSat-2 is currently unclear pending SpaceX's return to launch operations following the Falcon 9 failure. Traditional Ku is good for global coverage but performance in the US is akin to a current generation product than a next generation solution.

Which leaves 2Ku as a viable option for American. RGN can reveal that a number of 2Ku STC projects have already begun at American. And while a deal has not yet been inked to our knowing, the carrier's reasoning is understood to be similar to Delta: it wants to be able to move aircraft around its system and carry a broadband connectivity system that can leave CONUS.

With a growing roster of 2Ku clients, it's not clear if Gogo has been holding back some 2Ku delivery slots in hopes of scoring a major conversion from American. Gogo declined to comment for this piece, and American only commented broadly about eyeing its options.

Interestingly, American **chose to deploy the older ATG solution for its larger RJs which are being equipped this year.** The move raised questions about whether the company was planning for the long-term and what it really sees as the demand for bandwidth on board. Then again, as some of the heaviest consumption planes convert to 2Ku the ATG spectrum will become less congested.

2Ku will transmit via broadbeam Ku initially, and later Ku HTS as well

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