EUROPEAN OPERATORS PREPARE FOR SET-IMC

News / Business aviation

Single-engine turbine commercial operations in instrument meteorological conditions (SET-IMC) could be possible for the first time as a blanket rule across Europe by the end of the year and even sooner in the UK.

The UK CAA has confirmed informally that it is “now a question of when? not if” SET-IMC is passed, an industry panel noted March 10 during the annual meeting of the British Business and General Aviation Association (BBGA). Panel chair Edwin Brenninkmeyer, who recently had a long discussion with CAA flight operations policy lead Geoff Parker, said the UK CAA may exercise its “exemptive powers” to overcome possible months of delays in formalizing the legislation. So this would be “as soon as the [EASA Committee] vote goes through,”likely in October.

Brenninkmeyer added that “operators can already start using the EASA Opinion to draft manuals to prepare for approval.?Eurocontrol already has been developing new low-level routes “to accommodate these operations,” noted AOPA UK CEO Martin Robinson.

The BBGA panel discussed the extent of the possible European market for SET-IMC, which has been permitted in the U.S. and some other countries, such as Australia, for many years. “There is very strong demand for props and pistons–the [Pilatus] PC-12, Socata, Cirrus, with around 2,000

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aircraft active in Europe. There has been a 16 percent compound annual growth rate over the past 10 years, which is really impressive," said Richard Koe, whose company WingX provides statistics on and analysis of the marketWingX figures show that the PC-12 is by far the most common single-engine turbine operating, and is also well ahead of twins for private flights.

This has been in the private market, which suggests they could be popular when available for charter and air taxis/shuttles. James Dillon-Godfray, business development manager of London Oxford Airport, said, "Everyone is very cost-conscious," and added, "We're very interested in ideas for regular shuttles. Many businesses want to go between their bases several times a week." He suggested that they would be suited best to short routes, which can take three-to-four hours by road or rail. "Some city pairs are very poorly connected by rail," he said.

Chris Mace of Norwich-based Saxonair said, "It won't be for everyone. Entry-level jets are really busy, but carry a small number of people. Turboprops work well when you want to carry more people, and the cost per passenger is very good."

"A couple of operators in France and Scandinavia have been operating under limited SET-IMC approvals already and have been very successful," added Koe. "We have been relying on a tiny number of very wealthy people to keep this industry alive."

Brenninkmeyer pointed to opportunities for use in medevac and (non-defense) special missions; while Dillon-Godfray noted that SET aircraft could use far more airfields and grass strips. S?axonair would add them as it aims to be a "one-stop shop offering everything up to Gulfstreams," Mace said, but added, "I think you'll see new AOCstart-ups too." He also said, "It would be foolish to try to compete with them using twins."

BBGA chairman Marwan Khalek, who is also co-founder and group CEO of Farnborough-based Gama Aviation, said that there seem to be many unresolved operational questions still, for example weather criteria and other restrictions. Brenninkmeyer said the current proposals are all outlined on the EASA website and suggested the restrictions "aren't that significant. But you can't use an old banger Cessna Caravan…it probably requires newer ones with the right equipment levels."

16 MARCH 2016

SOURCE: AIN
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