EPISODE 182

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:07] IP: Hello and welcome to Episode 182 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[00:00:16] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Hello, Ian. Welcome to Episode 182.

[00:00:21] IP: Hello, Jason. How are you, sir?

[00:00:23] JR: Good. I'm good. Having a week.

[00:00:25] IP: I'm sorry to hear that, I think.

[00:00:26] JR: Well, it's okay now because I'm officially as of 27 minutes ago on vacation.

[00:00:31] IP: Congratulations.

[00:00:31] JR: Yeah, and I'm done. I closed Teams, I closed Outlook, I turned notifications off, and I opened a beer, so I'm doing okay now.

[00:00:38] IP: There you go. It's the perfect time to record a podcast.

[00:00:41] JR: Mm-hmm.

[00:00:42] IP: Excellent. Well, I'm glad that by default, your week has gotten better.

[00:00:46] JR: It can only get better. Yep.

[00:00:48] IP: And you, sir. are traveling, not as soon as we finished recording but close to it, yeah?

[00:00:53] JR: Yeah, there's at least 15 hours between now and then. But headed out to Seattle, nothing exotic or super interesting. Originally booked on Alaska on a pair of 73 Max 9, which would have been my actual first flights of Max. But I saw a shiny object, and went in a different direction and actually ended up booking a similarly priced fare on Delta, which was for the A321neo, which was interesting, their absolute newest aircraft. But unfortunately, I got a terrifying push notification yesterday saying that it has been swapped out for a 737 900ER. That makes me sad.

[00:01:35] IP: That's a disappointment.

[00:01:37] JR: Yeah, Delta only has –

[00:01:38] IP: For many numbers of reasons.

[00:01:39] JR: Yeah, for a lot of reasons. But Delta only I believe, has six of the 321neos operating its fleet right now. It seems to be having quite a difficult week with that aircraft. I think, one, I was told had a bird strike, I think out in Seattle and had to remain there overnight. Another here at JFK was I guess, pulled from service. Another flight to Seattle, I think on Monday, was swapped out also to a 739, but they took like a seven-hour delay or something to get that aircraft. At least, all the issues seem to have happened before I'm flying. And yeah, I drew the short straw and get the 737 that I don't want. But hopefully, enough time has advanced here that I – at least get out on time, s not the end of the world. Hopefully, the flight back from Seattle will still be the Neo.

[00:02:27] IP: Excellent.

[00:02:29] JR: Fingers crossed.

[00:02:29] IP: I look forward to hearing about that on your return. We've had a busy week, nothing really compared to last week, I want to say. So that's been helpful in catching up on things. But there's still been a lot going on. I think, I guess we start with the new cabin, or new cabins that is coming to American Airlines aircraft near and around you in the next few years. Let's kick it off with new premium cabins and all that good fun stuff.

[00:03:01] JR: Ooh! Yeah. This isn't typically something we really discuss on this podcast, that new cabins and fancy seats. But when it's an airline as large as American, I think we can make an exception. American will be taking delivery of some new aircraft in 2024, specifically another Toronto 787-9s, hopefully, if Boeing can keep to its schedule. Also, the Airbus A321XLR, again, hopefully that Airbus will keep its own act together, and they will introduce a new flagship suite seat. They'll be replacing the business class you probably don't hate on America, unless you're flying that old concept D seat disaster from the 777-200s couple of years ago. Those were not great.

[00:03:49] IP: The worst part about those seats was the connectedness that you felt with the rest of the cabin.

[00:03:55] JR: I mean, that was its fatal flaw. That seat itself I think is actually fine. I actually like rear-facing seats. But yeah –

[00:04:01] IP: I love the rear-facing seats.

[00:04:01] JR: The rocking chair nature of them was a big swing and a miss on the actual execution. But the seats for American, they're nothing outrageous. It's not a cute sweet. It's not an Emirates first class thing with like a fake video window. It's a nice-looking seat. It's a step up. It comes with one of those gimmicky privacy doors. But I think what's most interesting is how premium heavy these aircraft are really going to be. So yes, on the one hand, there are a lot of seats, but it also signals because they are bringing these also to the fleet of 20 777-300ERs. It's also the end of international first class, true first class for any US carrier, and I think that's worth mentioning.

[00:04:49] IP: This is really the reason I wanted to talk about it on the podcast, not because it's a game changing seat, or something we've never seen before. But I felt for two reasons, and you brought both of them up already that it was interesting to mention. One, these aircraft are going to become very premium heavy, huge premium cabins.

[00:05:08] JR: The 777-300ER is going to have 70 flagship suites and 44 premium economy seats. That comes at the expense of first class and some economy seats as well.

[00:05:18] IP: Yeah, and the 787s are going to have 51 of the flagship suites, 32 premium economy seats, and the A321XLR will have 20 flagship suite seats, and 12 premium economy seats. That one interest me, because I thought they would do more than 12 premium economy seats on the A321XLR, but we'll see how that goes.

[00:05:41] JR: Also, the new three cabin is business, premium economy, and economy. These XLRs are going to end up operating almost certainly on transcon routes, because American also announced that it will retire the fleet of A321T, the transcon specific aircraft. Those will just be reconfigured to a regular old, boring Oasis American 321, which if anyone's flown in that, you're probably not in love with it. But those aircraft have gotten long in the tooth, maintenance wise on the interior. So people probably won't be so sad to see those go, but out goes first, business and economy and in comes business, premium economy, and economy. You know what? I think that's fine. It's at least a domestic aircraft. That's absolutely the way to go.

[00:06:29] IP: Oh, yeah. I mean, especially because they're bringing what is a far superior business class product to the aircraft, what appears to be a very adequate premium economy product.

[00:06:42] JR: Yes, adequate is one way to call it. If you look at some of the images that we'll post a link to, they basically look like Delta's new first-class seats that I wonder seeing tomorrow on the 321neo. But it kind of has those winged headrest things, and they're pretty full feature. They're basically what you would see in domestic first class, but they're calling it premium economy.

[00:07:05] IP: I mean, call it whatever you want. It's an interesting reconfiguration of the fleet. And I'm sure at some point, we'll have a chance to try them out. The one thing about the new, I guess we're calling them, the business class seats and things like that is the interesting kind of angled tray for your phone. I thought that was a neat idea.

[00:07:26] JR: Yeah, if they add wireless charging into that too, that'd be really nice.

[00:07:29] IP: Yeah. I mean, that, we don't know. But there's finally a place where you can put your phone where it won't slide around, and you can see it while you're sitting in your seat. If there is wireless charging in there, that's fantastic.

[00:07:44] JR: If you're excited about this, hold on, there'll be delivered in 2024.

[00:07:48] IP: You got some time.

[00:07:48] JR: The 777-300ERs will starting to be reconfigured in the late 2024. But even then, good luck if you're flying the 789, because American is going back the way of a really fragmented fleet where some 787s will have one seat, some will have another, some will have the third seat. There's going to be a lot of variation. It's going to be difficult to know what you're going to get, at least for a good while. But hey, investment in the product is always welcomed for me.

[00:08:19] IP: I'm not going to complain that they're trying to improve. I'll complain about other things.

[00:08:22] JR: Yeah. I'm surprised you didn't mention the one thing I thought you were going to that a couple of people have picked up on. One of the images of the business class seat. There's a QR code on the literature pocket. I don't think the QR code is legible enough to actually scan but it has the old American scissor eagle logo embedded into the QR code. There's like a little Easter egg. I hope that's something we end up seeing in the actual real product a couple years from now, or if that was just maybe, it's something they dropped in for people like you and me to notice today.

[00:08:55] IP: We talked about whenever they release this. It would be fun to see what comes out –

[00:08:58] JR: I'm trying to scan it right now, and yeah, it doesn't work either. It's not a valid QR code, or it's not high resolution enough.

[00:09:05] IP: Or it doesn't work.

[00:09:06] JR: That's a cool little Easter egg they dropped in.

[00:09:08] IP: Yeah. We'll have to see what happens. The other thing before we leave this topic is that, some of the images and we'll put a link to the whole release in the show notes is. If you look at the pillow, for the rendered pillow for the new business class seat, it kind of looks like a pillowcase with no pillow in it. I'm not sure why they thought that that – let's demonstrate that we're not really giving them a pillow.

[00:09:32] JR: But it's a Casper pillow. They made sure to put that tag in the branding to make sure you knew who made the pillow, but yeah, it kind of looks like a plank of wood.

[00:09:41] IP: Yeah. Anyway, we'll find out what happens in 2024. Let's stick with American Airlines and talk about something that the CEO of American Airlines said this week. So American Airlines' CEO, Robert Isom speaking about airspace constrictions, and restrictions and the ability to operate flights, he called it Florida as a specific example, where you have aircraft at every flight level, from general aviation, to commercial aviation, all the way up to rocket launchers. Isom said that other users of the airspace need to pay their fair share, as far as the FAA regulatory aspects and the FAA air traffic control aspects go. Which was I thought really interesting, because I think it might be a bit of blame shifting at this point. But I think it raises a very interesting question, as the national airspace and international airspace becomes even more crowded with additional commercial flights, additional private flights, which have skyrocketed over the past couple years. And the eventual introduction of eVTOLs, and electric aircraft, and larger uncrude vehicles that are doing freight deliveries, or otherwise integrated into the National Airspace System. I think, at least in my mind, there is probably a conversation to be had about how those things pay into the system that they're using.

[00:11:19] JR: Yeah. I think that's a completely legitimate question to ask. Clearly, the system barely works as it is today. It works, but it's hanging on by a thread. The smallest staffing issue at anyone, the in-route centers ripples through the entire country. Not to say that more user fees will fix that situation, but it can't possibly hurt, right?

[00:11:44] IP: Well, yeah, more money can't possibly hurt the situation. Emailed response to Bloomberg, which published an article on this particular topic. The National Business Aviation Association, which represents the interests of business jet owners, operators, managers, things like that said, "Instead of trying to shift their responsibilities on to others, the airline should work with all stakeholders to continue modernizing the aviation system," which I thought was a fantastic quote, because it doesn't say anything.

[00:12:16] JR: Yeah, it doesn't really say a lot. So for business aviation, they have to pay quite hefty landing fees, I'm sure at airports. But to use the National Airspace System, are they paying anything? It's not like Canada. I know flights have to pay NAV Canada some sort of fee, but here in the US with the FAA, or our general aviation aircraft, or specifically business aviation, do they pay anything to actually use the airspace?

[00:12:41] IP: My understanding is that they pay less than an airline pays, but they don't pay nothing.

[00:12:45] JR: Right. I truly don't know the answer. I would like to know more about that situation.

[00:12:51] IP: You know, we do have someone that we know who works for the National Business Aviation Association.

[00:12:56] JR: We do.

[00:12:56] IP: So let's give them a call and see if they'll come on the show. How about that?

[00:13:00] JR: But what's interesting is that whether it's an A380 or a Cessna Citation, it takes the same amount of resources to put that plane in the air, and keep it separated from other aircraft, and safely navigate it. So if I were an airline, I'd be pretty upset that they're paying less or something. To an air traffic controller, it's the same blip on the radar screen, right?

[00:13:21] IP: I don't want to presume that an air traffic controller would treat one blip the same as the other. I'm sure somebody will jump in and email us at podcast@fr24.com, and explain

why Jason's wrong. Those are my favorite kinds of emails. But generally speaking, yes, I think there's definitely a conversation to be had here. I don't think writing it off, especially as we start to think about all of the other different types of aircraft that we're going to start seeing over the next 10, 15, 20 years. How we pay for how the sky is organized seems to be a legitimate conversation as far as I'm concerned.

[00:13:56] JR: Yes. Let's get that particular person on the show. Maybe we can get someone from NAV Canada on and see how they deal with this exact situation.

[00:14:02] IP: All right, let's do it.

[00:14:04] JR: Up to Canada we go.

[00:14:05] IP: Let's continue going past Canada all the way over the arctic circle into Russia. Because this definitely falls under the always an aviation angle moniker that our good friend Jon Ostrower, uses and I think we owe him royalties again.

[00:14:22] JR: Yeah, that's another nickel.

[00:14:22] IP: I got it. Yeah, another nickel. I'll make a note. But Russian president, Vladimir Putin issued an order calling up certain reservists into military service earlier today, Wednesday, September 21. Within minutes of that happening, flights out of Russia to other countries began to sell out and prices skyrocketed. By the end of the day in Russia. What is about 4:00 PM New York time today, there was one ticket out of Moscow to Israel left. That was on Emirates' final flight of the day. You could purchase a first-class ticket for $11,400, flying from Moscow to Dubai, and then on to Istanbul. That is developing at the moment. Prices for flights that aren't sold out have skyrocketed, not quite as high as the Emirates first class, but extremely, extremely expensive. So we're seeing huge demand for flights leaving Russia. There's some talk of military-aged men being banned from leaving the country. I haven't seen that confirmed from any reputable sources just yet. But by Friday, when the podcast comes out, that may have changed. But at the moment, flights are just extremely expensive and/or sold out.

[00:15:52] JR: Yeah. If you have to flee the country at the last minute, Emirates first class is probably the nicest way to do it.

[00:15:59] IP: Yeah, I guess. It will be interesting to take a look in over the next couple of days at the private aircraft manage to leave. Though I assume, if you have the –

[00:16:10] JR: Are there any left?

[00:16:11] IP: – the means. Yeah, there's certainly lots of private jet still operating to and from Russia. But if you have the means to permanently leave, you've probably already done so. Or means to permanently leave via private jet, you've probably already done so. That's one story that we'll be following well into next week. I am sure. Last week, we talked about the comments by Boeing CEO and CFO in Washington about the process of remarketing some of the 737 Max aircraft that have already been built for Chinese customer, originally ordered by Chinese customers, and Boeing is going to try and resell those aircraft to other airlines. This week, news broke that Boeing officials prior to those statements met with China's aviation regulator to review the training criteria for the 737 Max for pilots, and to kind of move things along to get the 737 Max officially able to fly for Chinese airlines and in China's airspace. I thought that was very interesting that those comments about remarketing some of those Chinese 737s or 737s bound for Chinese airlines happened after these meetings in China.

[00:17:33] JR: So did the meetings go really poorly, and they just at that point determined that they were going to sell the aircraft to other airlines or what happened there?

[00:17:42] IP: Here's what I think, though I have no kind of way to confirm this. But my thinking is that the meetings went positively, as far as Boeing is concerned. However, they still need money. The decision kind of came out of saying, "Okay. This is the timeline for this, and then we'll see if we get recertified in China, or officially recertified in China. But in the meantime, we need to sell some of these planes because we need money."

[00:18:11] JR: All right. Well, whatever they need to do, I guess.

[00:18:13] IP: That's my take. I mean, if someone's got another take.

[00:18:16] JR: If they don't get money now, and they don't deliver airplanes, they won't be able to get American 878s in 2024.

[00:18:21] IP: Exactly.

[00:18:22] JR: It's all going according to some sort of plan.

[00:18:25] IP: Some sort of plan. We don't know whose plan, we don't know what plan it is, but it's going to some sort of plan. I think this is positive. The fact that the meeting happened at all.

[00:18:33] JR: Yeah, that can't be bad.

[00:18:35] IP: No, can't be bad at all. I hope to see the 737 Max flying in China soon.

[00:18:42] JR: Yeah. And at the same time, Comac did not as we expect to get certification for its aircraft on what we thought would be the 19th. That has come, and gone, and hasn't happened.

[00:18:42] IP: It has not happened. So we were unfortunately incorrect on that front, but I did see a number of positive comments on social media from Chinese authorities about being able to see the C919 in Beijing. Things seem to be picking up speed, as far as the 919 certification. Hopefully that happens sooner rather than later, because I want to see the thing, you know, in the air.

[00:19:22] JR: I want to see it at an airshow. I want to see it out at like Paris or something.

[00:19:26] IP: Yeah. I would love to see it there, and I would love to see what passengers think of it because I think that's the real test. Let us transition from large aircraft –

[00:19:39] JR: Growing aircraft.

[00:19:40] IP: – to growing aircraft. This is an interesting development; one I think that's really kind of showing where the market is. We'll talk a little bit more about where the market is for different types of aircraft over the next couple minutes. But Hearts Aerospace has been developing – or was developing a 19-seat all electric aircraft. United had placed an order for it.

[00:20:07] JR: Well, I mean, what hasn't United placed an order for? That's not telling us anything useful.

[00:20:13] IP: Fair enough. Swedish company, Heart had been developing a 19-seat all electric aircraft.

[00:20:19] JR: Targeted at the Nordic market, I believe.

[00:20:22] IP: Yes. This was an aircraft that was specifically being designed and built toward – for use in the Nordic market and –

[00:20:31] JR: And United.

[00:20:32] IP: And United. I was, I mean, Newark is very Nordic.

[00:20:36] JR: In the winter, sure. It's in hospitable.

[00:20:39] IP: There you go. See? They this week changed the game, or at least their game, and said, "Instead of building a 19-seat, all electric aircraft, we're going to build a 30-seat hybrid aircraft and market it much more widely than the Nordic Region and United."

[00:20:58] JR: You know what? That's fine and good. It's probably a very good idea to do that, because I can't imagine the market for a 19-seat, all electric, very short-range aircraft is too wide. So this seems like they tried it out, they got through the technical issues of it, or they realized what their technical hurdles were, and they realized at this stage that it would not be commercially viable. And they needed to change the game a little bit and that's exactly what they did.

[00:21:24] IP: Yeah, I appreciate that they went back and said, "Okay. This probably isn't going to work or it's not going to work the way we want it to."

[00:21:31] JR: It won't be commercially viable. It'll work, but to what degree? Not enough.

[00:21:35] IP: Right. Yeah, not technically won't work, but we can't build a company around it. So yeah, I think it'd be really interesting to see what they do with the 30-seat hybrid model. So you'll have an electric component and a fuel component. Basically, the fuel is there to extend the range of the aircraft. And they say, with the 30 seat, hybrid model, the range actually becomes much more extensive and much more usable on a wider variety of route networks.

[00:22:02] JR: Yeah, 200 kilometers and all electric mode, which is probably its maximum usable when you start lopping off things like fuel reserve, and diversion issues, and all that. It's probably quite a bit less, not all that useful. Four hundred kilometer in electric plus hybrid mode, but then, it's quite interesting and confusing that they double the range from 400 kilometers to 800 in the hybrid plus electric and lopping off five passengers. So if you reduce capacity from 30 to 25, you somehow doubled the range of the aircraft. I don't really understand that math.

[00:22:39] IP: Well, then carry the one.

[00:22:42] JR: Yeah, math was never my thing, but this is confusing. But they still expect an entry into service in 2028. Again, I'm a little suspicious of their charging time. They say it's a 30-minute turnaround time with fast charging, while Air Canada itself said 30 to 50 minutes. I don't know at what level of charging that is, and from what charge state of that battery is. I don't believe they've also said the capacity of that battery. But interestingly, they expect the range of the aircraft from the late 2020s, to the late 2030s to double somehow. I guess as batteries evolve, they claim. Okay. I don't really see the capacity of batteries doubling in a decade, because that's certainly not what's happened in the last decade. But yeah, this is, to me, it seems like this is the most realistic of these electric aircrafts that I expect to actually see in service while all of the other, the eVTOL, and the air taxis, and we'll get to that in a minute. But this one just seems to be the most real to me, personally. I am basing that off absolutely nothing other than it just feels like it, but there's so many of these. But this one just seems real for some reason.

[00:23:58] IP: I'll say that it seems the most real because they changed.

[00:24:02] JR: Exactly. Yeah. All the other ones except for one, which we'll talk about in a few moments. They're either too small to be practical, or they're hinging on technology that does not exist like remote operation, or doesn't exist in a way that would be acceptable for commercial aviation, or they're just so farfetched, they don't make any sense. But this one, it gives me confidence that they've changed their model, they've realized that or at least they've been forced to realize that all electric is not really the way to go right now. It's possible, but it's just not feasible for commercial aircraft, that you need to do something else on top of the batteries, whether that's hydrogen, or some sort of hybrid power with SAF, which is problematic. But giving up on the 19-seater all electric aircraft for something more practical seems to me like the right move.

[00:24:50] IP: Yeah, I agree. I think that recognizing that the market is elsewhere, and then designing for that market is probably the best way to go. Rather than saying, "We're going to create this market out of nothing, because we believe in this particular type of technology."

[00:25:08] JR: Right, especially when that particular technology has been shown that it just not – it doesn't have the energy density it needs to really make a dent in commercial aviation.

[00:25:19] IP: At least at those distances. Let's go shorter distances, and smaller aircraft, and talk about the Eve Alice electric prototype, which completed its high-speed taxi tests this weekend in Moses Lake, and is nearing first flight perhaps as early as next week. So you could be listening to the podcast just days before the Alice takes flight. Earlier this week, GlobalX, which is a Miami based charter and Acme airline, signed a letter of intent with aviation for 50 of this particular all electric aircraft. In passenger configuration, it will seat I believe nine passengers. It also comes in a cargo and executive configuration. Smaller, all electric, battery-operated aircraft, carrying passengers not terribly far. Two hundred and fifty knots speed and 440 nautical miles with payloads up to 2500 pounds. GlobalX placing a letter of intent. Other customers for this particular aircraft include DHL Express. They've ordered 12 of the cargo variants, expected to be delivered beginning in 2024. I was about to say next year, but it's still 2022.

[00:26:44] JR: So close.

[00:26:44] IP: I have to remind myself sometimes. Cape Air also has a letter of intent to buy 75 of them, and we'll see how many of those actually go home with all of those operators. But an interesting order, and we stand on the precipice of electric flight as early as next week.

[00:27:03] JR: Yeah, so they did have their high-speed taxi test earlier this week, and they posted a video. The nosewheel did get off the ground, I believe. So maybe next week, it will actually fly. Again, another company that seems to have its stuff together and has plenty of orders for real airlines. I'm not sure what use GlobalX would have for this. They're that charter airline that ran some of the flights in Iraq, right?

[00:27:26] IP: Yes, they are. So they perform. So GlobalX does a lot of charter and Acme work. They have said that they will use this aircraft for network expansion in Florida, the Bahamas, and the Caribbean.

[00:27:26] JR: Okay.

[00:27:42] IP: As well as offering this aircraft to their business clients and tourism operators throughout Florida.

[00:27:51] JR: Alrighty. Not sure I fully understand their plans for it. But okay, we'll see. I understand Cape Air, but GlobalX, sure, whatever. We'll see.

[00:28:00] IP: I mean, it sounds like they're copying to Cape Air.

[00:28:02] JR: Yeah, to a degree, but this is not an airline that you can just like walk up and buy a ticket on right now. Right?

[00:28:08] IP: Not yet.

[00:28:08] JR: They do mostly charter work.

[00:28:10] IP: Yeah.

[00:28:10] JR: And whatever weird stuff. I don't know, the CIA needs them for. But interesting, we'll keep an eye on it.

[00:28:16] IP: Look for that early next week.

[00:28:17] JR: Maybe.

[00:28:19] IP: It would be helpful if I gave everyone the registration. That is November 882 Echo Victor.

[00:28:25] JR: That is at Moses Lake, I believe.

[00:28:28] IP: Yes. So search for that registration and 882 EV, and hopefully your alert catches the first flight for the aircraft. That will be neat. Then our last, what do we call it? Electric vehicle.

[00:28:45] JR: Last aircraft of the future segment.

[00:28:49] IP: There you go. We have this particular aircraft no longer existing, or not even yet existing, and it will never exist.

[00:28:58] JR: Well, it exists in prototype form, but this news is breaking just as we're starting to record. I've actually admittedly never heard of this company, Kitty Hawk which was apparently developing a an eVTOL air taxi flying car thing backed by Google co-founder, Larry Page thrown in the towel and said, "We're done here."

[00:29:22] IP: That's covers that.

[00:29:22] JR: That's pretty much it. That is the statement. They haven't even updated their website yet. They still have jobs listed on their career page, and interestingly on the introduction on their homepage, it ends with, "If anyone can do this, we can." Apparently, they can't and

they're done. They folded, no more. But the technology, and I guess the lesson will live on in Wisk. I'm not totally up to date on what the tie is between Wisk and Kitty Hawk. But apparently, Wisk says they are not impacted by this.

[00:29:57] IP: Yeah, so Wisk came out of the development process at Kitty Hawk. Kitty Hawk had been working on more like personal, more personal mobility things. And then the larger development at Kitty, the larger aircraft under development at Kitty Hawk, then got spun off, and spun away, and eventually turned into what Wisk is working on, which has now teamed up with Boeing. That's like a separate aircraft now. Kitty Hawk was working on a smaller personal lift aircraft that did not – I guess, they weren't successful, and they said they're winding down the company. It sucks to see this happen. But also, I guess, good that they're recognizing that it's not going to happen and winding things down. Rather than just trying to keep plugging along, and plugging along, and plugging along long after it becomes clear that it's not viable.

[00:30:55] JR: Is that it? That's all you've got to say? Because you had a lot more to say before we started recording.

[00:31:00] IP: Well, it wasn't about Kitty Hawk in general. I just think the idea of these personal mobility devices, and eVTOLs in general, I'm still extremely skeptical. Not of the technology. The technology is possible. It will get there. The eVTOL aircraft, they're buildable, they're doable. That's not where my questions come in. I still think, and this goes back to our conversation with Elan Head, we had quite a while ago now, where she came on the program. We ran through all of the challenges, and ins and outs of what eVTOLs are what they promise, and some of the challenges to getting them certified and accepted. I still think that the biggest challenge is not technological. It's personal. People are going to have to live and work near where these things land and take off, and they're not going to want to do that. They're not going to want to be next to an eVTOL Vertiport or whatever branding we eventually come up with these things. I think one is annoying if these things actually become ubiquitous. That's going to be incredibly annoying, and I don't think that people are going to go for it.

[00:32:22] JR: I don't think that's a good way to put it. So yes, helicopters are much louder. No one has to ask me about that, because I'm quite vocal that I hate helicopters, and think we should ban them over major populations. But that's a different story. But these things

individually, they may be quiet. But if you have Uber or Lyft, or Wisk, or whomever operating a fleet of these things, every five minutes out of Vertiport or whatever, off of buildings or next to a sand dune, or in a park or whatever the ridiculous promotional images some of these companies put out, they're going to be everywhere, and they're going to be constant. It doesn't matter how quiet they are. Because Kitty Hawk itself says they are inaudible after the first 30 seconds. But if you have one coming every two minutes, 30 seconds, plus 30 seconds, plus 30 seconds over, and over, and over, you're never going to not hear them. Ian, in you mentioned, even something like a tiny DJI drone is quite loud when it's taking off or when it's hovering around.

[00:33:18] IP: And it's not even the volume of noise.

[00:33:20] JR: The pitch.

[00:33:21] IP: Yeah, exactly. I live under the approach path. I live in between two approach paths for O'Hare. It's constant noise, but it's aircraft noise. Sure, I'm the target market for aircraft noise, I get that. But I've also lived under the approach path for O'Hare on east and west sides my entire life. Those things I think you get used to. You're never 100% okay with it or satisfied with the noise. But having that droning, high pitched whine of those blades all the time, I think is really going to be a hard sell for locating the places where these things take off and land from. Then this isn't Kitty Hawk specific or any – this is writ large. I hope they solve that problem. I hope there is some magical solution that they all come up with that creates silent, or near silent operation here. Or you can give them like funny horns, and things like that to let them know that you're there, like they do for the electric cars to make them have a sound so that they don't run over pedestrians. But that's separate from these specific companies, that's just to enlarge. Not a rant. I thought I'd be going off on.

[00:34:36] JR: No, but you –

[00:34:38] IP: You did. You did. That was an easy one. All right. Let's go off to the FAA and their denial of Republic Airways request for an exemption of the 1500-hour rule. As it stands right now, pilots need to have 1500 hours of flight training before they can begin operations. Republic says, our particular flight training program is so robust that we should be able to issue restricted

licenses to our pilots after 750 hours of training, just as the military can do now. The FAA considered that request and denied it.

[00:35:21] JR: All right, didn't take quite as long as I thought it would to get to this point, but I don't think anybody, including Republic is surprised by the outcome.

[00:35:29] IP: In fact, Republic, he says that they are not surprised by the outcome.

[00:35:33] JR: There you go, see.

[00:35:35] IP: "Disappointed, but not surprised."

[00:35:37] JR: Yeah. I can't imagine there are many people in the industry who are actually disappointed by this outside of Republic.

[00:35:45] IP: I mean, yeah, that's probably accurate. This may be the end of this particular request for exemption, but I certainly don't think it's the end of the conversation about how to address the ability of airlines to fill pilot roles. Over the past, what, three, four months, we've seen regional airlines really increase the pay and incentive packages for pilots. So that's certainly, I think, the easiest or most straightforward way to increase the willingness of pilots to take on those roles. But I think we need to step back and have a much larger conversation about the pipeline of people who, who want to become pilots, being able to afford the process in the time before they can get paid a rather adequate starting salary. You still have to spend all that money, going to school, paying for training, paying for hours. I think that's where the conversation needs to head next.

[00:36:44] JR: Yeah. That's where some of the programs we see like United, Aviate, and I know JetBlue has its own academy type thing. So there are programs in place to work around these issues. But by and large, it's still going to plague the industry for a long time.

[00:36:59] IP: Yeah. And certainly, the increase in pilot pay at the regional airlines has knock-on effects that we'll start seeing over the next few years as things maybe change in how the industry works, where you don't see pilots maybe going up to mainline carriers as quickly,

because they're making more. Or you see people moving through. I don't know exactly how this is going to change the timeline for individual pilots. But I think as these contracts come up, it will start to change a bit. Let's talk about what United Airlines did, or rather didn't do. Yes.

[00:37:42] JR: What didn't they do?

[00:37:45] IP: Well, they didn't do what they were supposed to do, which then meant that they had to do what they didn't want to do. When the United 777 leaving Denver suffered an uncontained engine failure on one of its Pratt & Whitney 4000 engines. The entire fleet was grounded pending the outcome of the investigation.

[00:38:03] JR: For a long time.

[00:38:04] IP: And fix for a long time. Those aircraft have since returned to service, United brought them back and put them back into service as quickly as they could. However, it turns out that in the course of putting them back into service, and then flying them. Then part of fix, or program to make sure that they can stay in service are repetitive inspections of engine components. It turns out that united failed to do that.

[00:38:32] JR: Oh, that's a really bad oversight. These aircraft just came back into service after a very lengthy downtime, after very thorough inspections, really disappointing that United would somehow just simply forget to do the inspections on these aircraft, and have to cancel a bunch of flights at literally the last minute. I heard some of these were already boarded, and they had to deplane the aircraft because they had to cancel these flights. They said they canceled some flights on Monday night and Tuesday morning. But by now, by the time we record and certainly by the time this podcast is actually out to be listened to, the issue should have been resolved. But this is – someone's going to get fired over this. This is not great.

[00:39:16] IP: No, no, not great at all.

[00:39:18] JR: No.

[00:39:19] IP: And that leads us to our last story on this particular episode, not of someone who got fired, but of someone who quit.

[00:39:28] JR: You can't fire him because he fled the country.

[00:39:31] IP: So a few weeks ago, we talked about the Ethiopian Airlines flight that was arriving in Addis Ababa and overflew the airport at 37,000 feet. They came back around and eventually landed about 20 minutes late.

[00:39:48] JR: Only after auto pilot disconnected and the oral alarm woke them up. So who knows how long they would keep going for.

[00:39:56] IP: Yeah, that's fair. The captain and first officer were both asleep. AIN Online reports this week with a headline that reads, Ethiopian Airlines Captain quits during probe into sleep incident. I have to give it to AIN. Their headlines are always accurate.

[00:40:16] JR: But they always bury the lead.

[00:40:18] IP: They always undersell what the story is actually about, because I read on, and I get to the point where we're talking about, they review what had happened with the flight. Then they have a comment from Ethiopian Airlines. They talk about what happened. And then in the one, two, three, four, five, sixth paragraph, they say, "After making a safe landing, the captain returned to Bolivia the same morning."

[00:40:48] JR: Wait. How's that even possible?

[00:40:50] IP: Boarding Ethiopian Airlines connecting flight to Rio de Janeiro. Sources tell AIN that the captain tendered his resignation via email.

[00:41:00] JR: So we were talking about this before we started recording. This guy definitely saw the writing on the wall as soon as the incident happened, didn't want to deal with it, and probably non-rev home as an active Ethiopian employee back to Bolivia, and then tendered his resignation. Maybe over inflight Wi-Fi. I don't know now.

[00:41:19] IP: That would be amazing.

[00:41:20] JR: So he probably used as his last non-rev ever privilege, and fled the country, and went home.

[00:41:27] IP: He didn't flee the country,

[00:41:29] JR: He fled responsibility, let's say.

[00:41:32] IP: He fled. Yeah, he fled responsibility. So the captain is a Bolivian national. The first officer is a Nigerian National, who lives in Ethiopia. The captain and this is – I love the airline industry for a variety of reasons. But I always find it hilarious when you hear about people who live in one place and work in another. That's definitely the norm for a lot of airline employees, especially in US airlines, where you might be based in Los Angeles, but live in Chicago, or you're based in New York and you live in Denver, or what have you. But I really love – that this captain is lives in Bolivia, and flies for Ethiopian Airlines.

[00:42:14] JR: Mm-hmm. Well, I mean, it's got to be the case for a lot of, at least the Middle Eastern Airlines, like nobody lives in Dubai, right, but there are a lot of people that work or fly for Emirates. I guess some pilots do actually uproot their lives and move to Dubai, but I wonder how many don't? And just like this –

[00:42:30] IP: Yeah, that'd be a really interesting question. We had that conversation when we did the tour of the, what was then Hong Kong trader, the Cathay Pacific 747. We were talking with their head pilot about where a lot of their pilots come from and where they live. Yeah, that was true at that point, where not a lot of their pilots lived in Hong Kong. They all commuted either to Hong Kong, or to elsewhere, and then flew through Hong Kong for a week or whatever, and then went home. So yeah, I guess that makes – I just love that, landed the plane and was like, "Well, that's it for me." Gets on a plane to Bolivia.

[00:43:06] JR: Yeah, the writing was apparently on the wall clearly enough that he said, "Well, I'm out of here."

[00:43:12] IP: I guess to his credit; he did talk to the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority. He was questioned by telephone. The first officer was left – left all – I mean, if I'm the first officer, I'm like, "Come on, really? You just leave me here by myself to answer all these questions?"

[00:43:31] JR: What does one do when the – when this guy and this pilot returns to Bolivia, what's he going to do now? I guess he can find Bolivia a Bolivian Airline or, I don't know. But they probably, when anyone's interviewing, they ask for references. He probably won't give them Ethiopian as one.

[00:43:50] IP: Why did you leave your last position?

[00:43:52] JR: You don't want to know.

[00:43:53] IP: You don't want to know. Oh boy! So yeah, there you go. Fell asleep, landed the plane safely, hopped a flight to Bolivia and said, "I no longer work for Ethiopian Airlines."

[00:44:02] JR: Okay.

[00:44:03] IP: That's all I got and that's all episode 182 has. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[00:44:12] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]