

EPISODE 184

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:07] IP: Hello, and welcome to Episode 184 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, here, as always with –

[0:00:15] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Ian, welcome to what is sure to be at least our 184th best episode yet.

[0:00:22] IP: I firmly believe we can get this episode in the top 100.

[0:00:26] JR: We can do it.

[0:00:26] IP: Firmly believe. The only reason I say that is because we have a great interview with Michael Karrels later in the show, who is a dispatcher for a large legacy airline somewhere in the United States. We have a great conversation with him about what it is to be a dispatcher, and some of the things that get him going into work in the morning and keep him up at night. Stick around for that later in the show.

We begin the show with a bunch of FAA-centric news that deals with rules about flight attendants, some letters that the FAA has sent to Boeing and some good news for Malaysia. We'll go with the flight attendants first. The new rule that the FAA has finally finalized, I guess is what I'm saying.

[0:01:18] JR: That's one way to put it. Yeah.

[0:01:20] IP: Yes. They have now finalized rules that are based on the law congress passed in 2018. It was not put into effect. There were two public comment periods in 2019 and 2021. Finally, they have published the final rule, which will change the rest periods for flight attendants, increasing that rest period to 10 hours. It was previously at nine, and then it was able to be modified slightly downward, depending on the situation. This creates a hard and fast

rule for 10 hours of rest in between shifts. This puts the flight attendants now in-line with pilots across the board within the United States.

[0:02:08] JR: That's good news. As we all know, flight attendants are there primarily for the safety of the passengers onboard, so they should probably have as much rest as anyone else working on that aircraft. This is not something that comes as a surprise to the airline industry. Like we said, this was first legislated in 2018, and is only finally being enacted now. Most airlines, I'm sure, at least one of which we know is Delta who is not a unionized airline, but wanted to keep their flight attendants happy already had this rule in effect. I'm sure several, if not all the major airlines have already moved to 10 hours.

When this rule does actually take effect, there should really not be any operational surprises, or hiccups. I guess, theoretically, at some point down the line, there could be some minor delays due to crew rest, or flight attendant rest being mandated at 10 hours, and they're not able to drop that down under any circumstance in this point.

[0:03:05] IP: Yeah. Nothing that the airlines are surprised about at this point. To Jason's point, yeah, when we're waiting for your crew, that could come later down the line, because there's now an extra hour there built in. By then, hopefully, everything, that'll be accounted for in airline scheduling as well. Good news, certainly for flight attendants and I think across the board, good news having a crew that's more well rested, whether they're on the flight deck, or in the cabin. Especially, I just like dealing with people who have had sleep.

[0:03:37] JR: Especially now since airlines have been pushing their aircraft and personnel to the absolute limits, I'm sure everyone will be happy to have a little bit extra sleep.

[0:03:47] IP: Absolutely. Let's move now to the letters that the FAA has sent Boeing, which is to say, the FAA is once again, concerned with Boeing's actions regarding the 737 MAX. This time, in turn for the certification of the 737 MAX 10. The FAA sent a letter to Boeing saying, they need to submit all of their safety system analyses before the FAA can even look at these things. They take a long time to look at and boy, is the clock ticking.

The reporting that we've seen from folks like Jon Ostrower at The Air Current, other reporters at Reuters, **[inaudible 0:04:38]**, is basically that summer 2023 now seems like a reasonable period for the expectation that the 737 MAX 10 will be certified. This would pose a problem for Boeing, or in the current scheme of things does pose a problem for Boeing, because by the end of December, if the aircraft isn't certified, they need to include a crew alerting system, which the 737 does not have. Now, that's based on a law that was passed two years ago.

Last week, a Senator Roger Wicker, the top Republican who is on the Senate Commerce Committee, and has been involved with certification efforts and writing the regulations and laws that govern these things, submitted an amendment proposing extending the deadline for Boeing to win approval, until September of 2024. Wicker wants to attach that amendment to the annual defense spending bill, which is basically, if it gets attached to the defense spending bill, it'll pass. Because no one wants to vote against defense spending in a must pass –

[0:05:54] JR: Just stick it full of support and it will get through.

[0:05:58] IP: Yeah. The idea is to get this in, and then let Boeing certify the aircraft based on the old rules, rather than the rules that were passed two years ago, in order as Congress said, to increase the safety of the aircraft. Boeing has always said that the 737 MAX without the crew learning system is safe. None of the other models of the 737 have them. They say, adding this to specifically just the MAX 10 would cause confusion amongst the crew.

[0:06:25] JR: At least, this gets us beyond the rhetoric that we were hearing from Boeing over this past summer that if they don't get an exception, if they're not certifying this aircraft by the end of the year, they just won't build, or they will scrap the 73 MAX 7 and 10 program. That was never going to happen. At least, we seem to be moving in the direction of extending the period of, I guess, eligible certification for this aircraft. I really hope they meet whatever the next deadline would be. I don't know if we actually know if this is exempting these particular aircraft, or extending the deadline for any aircraft. Whatever it is, I really hope Boeing we can meet whatever is set for them.

[0:07:07] IP: The interesting thing about the, “Oh, we'll just scrap the program.” I don't think anyone ever took that seriously, especially since they started going out and getting new orders for the MAX 10. Multiple orders.

[0:07:19] JR: Significantly number of orders from major airlines, like Delta.

[0:07:23] IP: I think, they tried that. Everyone who is anyone was like, “Okay, sure. That was a bad – No one believes you. Okay, let's go the other route. Let's get so many orders that we have to build the plane and then Congress has to listen to us,” which I think was a more likely –

[0:07:38] JR: That's a much more strong argument.

[0:07:39] IP: Much more. As far as Boeing is concerned, I think that was much more likely in the long run. I think, it was an unforced error to say, “Well, we're not going to build the plane.” I think, the tac that they're taking now is a much more convincing argument, as far as congressional movement is concerned. I mean, we'll see how things go. My take on it is that Wicker's amendment will pass as part of the defense bill, or something else. Boeing will have enough time to certify the aircraft post-2022 into 2023. Then you'll see airlines starting to take delivery near the end of 2023 for the 737 MAX 10. That's what I think is going to happen.

[0:08:14] JR: Unfortunately, any airline that is on the waiting list for these aircraft, they will be missing the precious summer 2023 season, unfortunately, where they would want these aircraft the most.

[0:08:25] IP: Yeah, commercially speaking.

[0:08:26] JR: Maybe summer 2024, you'll get your first flight on one of these on some airline out there. Do we know who would get the first one? Is it United?

[0:08:34] IP: Yeah, I think so. I think their MAX 10, the first MAX 10, or first couple MAX 10.

[0:08:38] JR: They're already painted.

[0:08:39] IP: Are painted and ready to go. Yeah.

[0:08:40] JR: They're waiting. They're waiting. Come on. They got to retire those 757s sometime.

[0:08:45] IP: Eventually, one day. The FAA upgraded Malaysia's safety rating. That's great news for Malaysia. They've returned to category one status, which means that they now comply with all of the ICAO standards. They are authorized to serve the United States, enter into codeshare agreements with US carriers without limitation, and they can begin new routes. Hopefully, that means that we see some increased service from Malaysia in the near future. I think that would be a great thing.

[0:09:18] JR: Yeah. I'm not sure this actually changes anything, because Malaysia would still have been able to operate to the US on whatever existing routes it had, but it didn't have any. I think, they last served LAX quite a while ago. I don't think they had any active routes to the US right now. While it doesn't really change anything, if any airline in Malaysia wants to start operating to the US, now they can. Great.

[0:09:41] IP: Now they can. Sadly, Mexico remains at a category two rating, so they cannot add more service. Even though certainly, airlines in Mexico would want to do at the moment.

[0:09:52] JR: Yeah, that one stuck around for quite a bit longer than, I think, anyone thought it would.

[0:09:57] IP: Yeah. Yeah. Okay, so we've done all of the FAA stuff. Let's take a quick break. When we come back, we'll chat with Michael Karrels, about what it's like to be a dispatcher at a large US airline. Interestingly, we get into some of the differences between being a dispatcher in the US and how airlines outside the US work at a similar level. That was a surprising and very interesting portion of the conversation. Stick around for that. We will be back in just a moment.

[CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL]

[0:10:31] IP: Welcome back. We are now joined, as long promised. It took us a minute or two to get here, but we finally did. Michael Karrels is a dispatcher for a major US legacy carrier. I'm sure that it will take a very, very long time for folks to really dig in and figure out which airline after the conversation, but I have faith in them that somebody will figure it out. Michael, thank you so much for joining us. We're really thrilled to have you on the show.

[0:10:58] MK: I'm really glad to be here. I'm really glad we're finally able to get this put together. Bringing three people together in three schedules is always the fun part of podcasting.

[0:11:12] IP: Absolutely. Absolutely. I'm glad we made it work and I'm glad you're here. Over the past couple of weeks, we've asked people, both listening to the podcast and in our weekly newsletter, we sent out a call for questions. We got a few good questions, but we also got some questions from folks who asked questions that Jason and I would never ask of a dispatcher, because those aren't questions for a dispatcher. Then that got me thinking, well, these folks could stand to get a bit from an aircraft dispatcher on what an aircraft dispatcher does. Let's start there with, what is your job?

[0:11:46] MK: What's my job? An aircraft dispatcher is a certificated airman under the FAA. The basic role of the dispatcher is to plan all of the flights for their air carrier that they get assigned to during the day and during their shift. They plan the flight. They tell the crew what the origin is, what the destination is. This is flight 123 from Chicago to Denver. From Chicago to Denver, they then look at the weather. What's the weather going to be like in Denver? Is an alternate route going to be required for that? If yes, then what alternate is it going to be and how much fuel is it going to take to get there?

The dispatcher works on the route of flight. You got your origin, you got your destination, but how are you going to get there? That's the dispatcher picks the route of flight with the mindset of economics, the mindset of turbulence avoidance and other weather avoidance. The goal of any company is to move our flights in the most economical way. There are situations turbulence and thunderstorms, or any other weather phenomena that's in our way that we have to then fly around and avoid, that dispatchers have to have a first knowledge in the aircraft systems. The aircraft can be "dispatched" with things broken on it under maintenance carry over, under the

minimum equipment list. We have to make sure the airplane that we're using is legal for that route of flight we're going to be putting on for that flight.

Then it doesn't end there. Finally, when you get done all of that, you read your NOTAMs, or read your weather, you got to route a flight, you have the correct payload for passengers and cargo onboard and you have a good fuel number, you hit the release button. That's doesn't end there for a dispatcher. For the dispatcher, we sit there and we watch the flight from origin to destination. Then we're required to update the flight crew of any changes to the plan that they signed for at the gate with their release. Changes in weather, changes in turbulence, any pilot reports that we get along the way that might be effective to their flight, we give them a heads up about it.

On Sundays, it's usually, "Hey, what's the score of the football game in fall?" It's constant communication with the flight crew. If something happens on that flight, i.e. if you have a customer medical, a customer issue, or a mechanical issue, the pilots are going to reach out to the dispatcher first on the ground, and then we're going to help troubleshoot any of the issues along the way. That's the basic gist of the aircraft dispatcher as it is.

[0:15:01] JR: Man, that is quite a lot of responsibility. For a larger airline like you work at, which again, we won't mention specifically, but people will figure out probably, how many flights on a shift would you be assigned? If it's one, two, 10, 15, how many dispatchers are there and how do you divvy up the workload? Is it like, you'll take the northeast, you'll take the southwest, and I'll take Canada, or something like that?

[0:15:27] MK: My airline, we have, I think we're about 2,800 to 3,600 flights a day, somewhere in there based on the day and the season. A dispatcher is limited by the regulations to a 10-hour shift. At our shop, we work either nine hours, or 10 hours on the dispatch desk. Domestically, on the domestic side of the world, they'll be working anywhere between 35 to, I'd go about 45 flights in the 10-hour shift. Over on the international side, the high side is going to be in about the 20 to 25. That's going to be mainly the Latin America, Caribbean flights. Your transoceanic dispatchers are going to be in anywhere between five and maybe up to 10 flights on a shift.

Their workload is a lot less, mainly because it's farther, it's a longer route. Then you have ETOPS, and all of that stuff that you have to put in there. The workload for international flight plan is more than a domestic flight plan. You also asked, okay, how do we divvy it up? My airline is by region. You work a region of flights. You could be working transcons. You're working JFK-San Francisco, JFK-LA, throw some San Diego, some Vegas in there, but you got Kennedy to Vegas, San Diego-LA. That would be your world. Your world is the entire country.

[0:17:10] JR: Is that for a particular day? Or do you repeat the same territory that you get familiar with?

[0:17:17] MK: Line holders, or desk holders will work the same flights every single day that they're working. That's their desk. This is what they become very specialized in those flights. Now, we also have relief dispatchers, which work the desk of the dispatchers when they're on vacation, because unlike most jobs, someone has to do your job for you when you're on vacation. You can't just come back from vacation and have a pile of flights to work up. That doesn't work out very well for many people.

[0:17:52] IP: Sorry, we can't fly to Seattle this week, because Jim's on vacation.

[0:17:55] MK: Exactly. We've had some management tried to suggest that before, but we quickly told them, yeah, that doesn't work that way. There's that region. Your region can be small. You can be working out of Atlanta, Tobacco Road airports. Maybe Dulles is the furthest north you go, but you have Greensboro, Richmond, Charlotte, and maybe Savannah. Now, your world is Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. It's much more compressed.

Internationally, we break things out by ocean. We have a North Atlantic quad, we have a Pacific quad, a quad being four or five dispatchers all in a row that are working the same region, so you have some resource management back and forth with each other, and some support. Like I said, Latin America, we'll have an Atlantic, we'll have a Pacific and then we'll have Africa. Africa is a pseudo-North America desk. It's a unique desk.

[0:19:03] JR: Can you tell us what you typically work on, without giving away the actual secret?

[0:19:10] MK: I have moved on from the actual guy sending flight plans and now I work more in the ops management side of the office in the dispatch profession. What I work on, when I work the floor, is I work a fleet of airplanes and I make the customer delay, cancel, swap airplanes, do a bunch of stuff in the background and make sure we stay on time roll.

[0:19:38] JR: Now that's an important job, too. I just last week actually had – I was flying JFK to Seattle and we had on Delta's 321neos, they had some bad luck with a few of their aircraft. Then they had to swap a few out. I was very thankful that instead of just canceling my flight and say, "Sorry, you're going through, I don't know, Denver now," they were able to swap it out to a 739, instead of the 321. That was, probably took a fair bit of reconfiguring some flight schedules, and I was very happy someone was able to do that. Could have been you. Could have been someone else. I don't know.

[0:20:09] MK: Yeah, it could have been. It's one of those things, especially when you talk about the operation on the fleet side of things, the fleet operations manager is supposed to, really, their whole goal is to make sure there's a pilot crew, a flight attendant crew in an airplane at the gate with the marketing schedule as it got published. If one of those three components is not there on time, we either have to swap, move airplanes and equipment around to make sure we have an airplane that's there on time. We need to reroute crews to make sure it's there for an on-time departure, or we have to delay, which is pretty much usually our first and best option for recovering any situation like that. If delay doesn't work, and you still aren't going to get a piece of the puzzle that you need, well, then cancellation is the pretty much our last resort of what we're going to do.

[0:21:12] IP: How computerized are things these days, as far as using either planning software, or things like that to make – either make the decisions, or help make the decisions? How much of that is built in and computerized, versus how much of it is people sitting down and figuring out, okay, what are we going to do here?

[0:21:33] MK: It's a good mix between the both. Our flight planning system is completely computerized. A dispatcher sits down, pulls up the flight, sees the amount of payload that's going to be on there, they hit the compute button. The dispatcher isn't sitting there with a

calculator, adding up the fuel to get the total fuel bill. Everything is done and automated there. That's all computerized there.

They still need to do the manual, "Hey, let's look up to see what these different MELs are." I have to manually go and take a look at the weather. I'm still using a computer program to read the weather and the NOTAMs, but it's a manual reading of the weather and the NOTAMs to do it. There's no machine learning that we have yet that will read weather and NOTAMs for us and do any critical thinking for a dispatcher. We don't have a machine learning system based on it on the dispatch side.

That's pretty much the same on the operations management side. We have a lot of tools that gives us a lot of good information and a lot of good analytics, about customers and about connections and about high-value customers and value scores for different flights that we can help make a decision. In the end, it's the human sitting at the computer that's taking all the information in to go ahead and actually make a decision. Now, we're working towards a more machine learning, machine analytics type of operation, but we're not there yet.

[0:23:15] IP: You mentioned weather, and we always talk about weather being very, both predicted and still yet, unpredictable. One of the questions we got from a podcast listener was about the dealing with weather that hasn't happened yet. Their question was, how do you dispatch forecasted weather, where there's thunderstorms that could pop up? You're dispatching a transcon flight from San Francisco to New York. Halfway through the flight, you're expected to see thunderstorms, but they haven't materialized yet, so you don't know exactly which way you're going to need to go. How do you deal with that?

[0:23:50] MK: There's a couple of ways we can do that. With your specific example, a line of thunderstorms that are going to pop up, we have a bunch of tools that we can use that, A, know that the thunderstorms will pop up and given their timing that they are going to pop up. We have our own in-house Meteorology Department that writes our own forecasts and does a lot of our weather charts for us. Then they issue forecast areas of, in this case with thunderstorms of convection, and they give a time that it is going to be, "Hey, we expect it to pop up in at this time."

There's also some tools that the dispatcher use from MIT's Lincoln Labs. That's some really, really good high-quality forecasting on there, that is used pretty much throughout the industry, both at the airlines and at the FAA level, to see what forecasted impact there is going to be from that weather. Then you just use other forecasts, written forecasts and that along the way, for you get a good general understanding of where the weather is going to be popping up. It's definitely a little bit more sophisticated than what they show on the weather channel.

Now, you see the future high-res radar guesses from the weather channel of how's this weather going to move through, or here's how it's going to build. You even see on your local news, a lot of it's the same. We see where the weather is going to be. Then we just have to manipulate our route to either avoid that area, or throw on some extra fuel to make sure that we can avoid that that area. I would say that most of the time, if we know a line of thunderstorms is going to pop up in, by the time we are going to be there, it's going to be there, we will route around it, just like it was actually there.

Thunderstorms is one of the most harder things for us to route around, especially summertime convection and all of that. There's no clear true science of timing and all of that, or how much coverage is the line going to be. Is it going to be a broken line? Or is it going to be a solid wall of thunder that's going to be there? Are we going to be able to get through it or not? It's not quite that good of a science yet. Just going back from what's been going on this last week, here in October of 2022, Hurricane Ian came through the United States over the last week. For me in the operations in the airline world, hurricanes and blizzards are so much more preferred weather to forecast and avoid, because they're much more predictable and they're slow-moving. You have time to get a good plan in place, action that plan. Then you also know when you're going to be able to recover and start operating again, once the storm moves through.

[0:27:05] JR: That's funny, that you would actually – and I totally understand that you'd prefer a more widespread, devastating storm, but a little like, a summer popup storm in New York, you don't know if it's going to ruin United's day at Newark, or if it's going to ruin American's day at JFK, since it's that localized. It is pretty funny that a wider, more widespread storm is actually just easier to deal with than a little popup thunderstorm in New York. That's fascinating.

[0:27:30] MK: No, absolutely. I would take a hurricane over a New York swap event any day. We don't want hurricanes ever, and we want to run our flights. From the operational side of things, I'll take the slow-moving storms better. You talk about popup storms, just one cell pops up over LaGuardia –

[0:27:51] JR: That's it. That's it for the day.

[0:27:52] MK: That's it for that airport. Kennedy's running fine and Newark is running fine. Or, you get one thunderstorm that pops up just north of Philly, and it cuts off one of the arrivals to the New York metros. Now, you have say, LaGuardia, and Newark are running fine, but Kennedy's blocked in this holding. Now, you're scattering airplanes and diverting, because there's no other place to go. Everyone else go into the other airports are just flying right by you and see you later.

[0:28:27] IP: Was weather the hardest part of your job?

[0:28:29] MK: I would say, weather is the most impactful part of the airline operation. It definitely is the largest influence of workload at an airline.

[0:28:42] JR: Very few airlines actually have a dedicated weather staff employed, I think. Too. You happen to work at one that does. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that's actually exceptionally rare.

[0:28:54] MK: I think, most of the majors have access to their own meteorologist, or they have a contract with people that are meteorologists that work in their operation center. For us, they're actually airline employees. They have the same skin in the game in it as we do. They're not forecasting for a bunch of other people, or throwing out just broad forecasts. They're definitely airline-specific forecasts. They are a great team that we work with.

[0:29:24] JR: Yeah. Speaking of rare, dispatchers overall, we talked a little about this before we hit the record button. The US airlines are actually in a class of their own when it comes to dispatching, since that we talked a little about that. Most airlines out in Europe, Asia, they

actually have dispatchers. Can you tell us a little bit about why that might be, or how they operate sans dispatching?

[0:29:47] MK: I could talk a little bit about it. Why did the US have dispatchers? That just because it's baked into the Federal Aviation Regulations. It's in there as in part 121 that there has to be a dispatcher sitting on the ground, while the flights are going out and flying and doing all the pre-flight planning. If you think about it from our aspect in the United States, you have someone that has the same knowledge as in airline captain. The dispatcher written exam is pretty much exactly the same as the ATP written exam, minus, I think, a few questions. Otherwise, they're basically identical.

You have a certified airman who understands the exact same knowledge as the pilot does. We stay on the ground and we do all the “paperwork” and the routing stuff for that flight crew. I think, if you gave a pilot and made them in the United States have to flight plan their flight, like a dispatcher does for them, your crew utilization would be incredibly low, because they'd be spending two or three hours in between flights planning the next flight. We don't have that time. Airplane comes in, say the crew was turning with the airplane to head back out, that's a 30 to 90-minute ground time. They don't have that time to sit and prepare to this level that we do for them. We prepare the documents and all of the information for them, so they just have to read the important part. That's how we do it in the United States.

Canada has a similar model. I believe, Australia has a similar model, but that's it. The rest of the world doesn't operate on a model that's similar. There's a new flight planning system out there that's mainly used in Europe, that uses the machine analytics to read the weather and NOTAMs. It goes through and “looks” at the weather and the convection and the thunderstorms in areas that are closed. It auto flight plans for those carriers based on the payload. It's a computer that's doing it. They might have one person there for their whole operation that just manages the exceptions, if the computer can't handle it.

I don't want to say, one way is better than the other way. Because there's no yes, this is the best way or no, this is the best way. Everyone seems to be doing it, and everyone gets it done in the way. It always goes through when we always get our customers to where they want to go in a safe manner. It's just a different way of doing things.

[0:32:54] IP: I mean, do you think that has anything to do with the fact that US legacy carriers and a few other US carriers are just operating a much greater volume of flights per day?

[0:33:03] MK: I think, it's definitely a much greater volume of flights per day. I also think, it's just the fact that when their aviation regulations were written, the aircraft dispatcher was almost a – had a combined role as also being more like the air traffic controller, because the number of airplanes in the sky were a lot lower, and you were actually taking position reports over the radio. They were literally moving little pegs of airplanes across a big map on the table, and that's how they flight followed. You'd be able to see other airlines in all of that. The whole dispatching thing came around, same thing with the air traffic control thing, when two airliners came together over the Grand Canyon. That's where this whole thing started.

[0:33:56] IP: Basically, everything that has ever come out of the airline industry, especially in the United States came about because something terrible happened and then they figured out okay, let's figure out a way to make it safer. I knew about the genesis of the modern air traffic control system, but I didn't realize that it had such a dispatcher-focused portion as well.

[0:34:18] JR: I have two questions for you, since I know we're running out of time. What's your favorite part about being a dispatcher and what's your least favorite part? Is there anything you look forward to at the beginning of the day and anything you really, really don't want to do, but still have to do?

[0:34:31] MK: I like the complexity of the job and how it changes day-to-day. You'll go in, and it changes season-to-season. I love working the operation and the operation floor in October. Late September, October, this is great. This is a great weather. They're easy days at work, because the convection isn't there. Things are cooler. Big high pressure across most of the country. VFR weather everywhere. It's great.

Then, I also enjoy the New York swap events of trying to get airplanes into or out of New York, and then dealing with the diversions and trying to take the operation of the airline and trying to put it back together and piece some semblance of an operation out of that and put it back together. I like that challenge of it.

There isn't anything that are like, "Oh, this is horrible. I don't like this about the job, but I have to do it anyway." Sometimes it's alarm clock. Sometimes it's midnight shifts. Dispatchers are on-call, or in the office 24/7, 365. We always have dispatchers there. We always have an airplane in the air. It doesn't matter if it's Thanksgiving, if it's Christmas, if it's New Year's. It doesn't matter. Someone's there at work, because we have airplanes flying. I guess, that would be the negative and the take away, or the bad part is having to hurry up and have Thanksgiving dinner on Saturday, because you work Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and you didn't have a Thanksgiving like everyone else did. You just shifted the holiday a little bit. Then the occasional midnight shift. When you're junior, you're straight midnights. That's four, or five days of midnights in a row. It's not exactly fun.

[0:36:30] IP: We've had Andrew Poure on the show before and before he became a dispatcher. The last time we talked to him, he had just completed his course. One of the things that he's talked about, especially working for a cargo airline is working so many nights, and continuing to do so. He's just getting started in his career. I will ask one final question that comes from our listener, James. He is excited and enthusiastic to become a dispatcher, and was wondering if you had any advice on how to prepare and move towards becoming an airline dispatcher.

[0:37:09] MK: Some of the basic requirements for being a dispatcher is one is, you have to be over the age of 23 to get your dispatcher certificate and start working as a dispatcher. That doesn't mean you can't go to school and become a dispatcher before you're 23. I definitely fit in that camp. I had all of my written and my practical tests done when I was 21. I just had to wait till I turned 23 to get my certificate. Being a dispatcher and finding a dispatch job, there are a list of schools and I can get you the list from the FAA in for your guys' show notes.

[0:37:48] IP: Perfect.

[0:37:49] MK: Of where you can go through and get your dispatcher training. It's like any other airman certificate from the FAA, there's a minimum number of hours, there's a minimum number of classroom hours and subject hours that you have to go through. Unlike the pilot ratings, you don't have to go out and demonstrate that you can practically do things in the air, or in real life. When you do have your "check ride" with the FAA, you will do a manual flight release with a

good old E6B, or whizz wheel and a plotting chart and that'll be the last time you actually have to use a manual computer to do a flight plan. We go through and do it that way.

Job characteristics to be a dispatcher, I would definitely say, you have to be someone that handles stress and pressure relatively easily, and be able to multitask and keep track of things, especially in – I'll give a scenario. You have a line of weather, or some sort of event that is impacting one of your hub airports. Now, you have five airplanes in that arrival bank coming into that hub. Now, all five of them are in holding. All five of those crews are sending you ACARs messages at once. Now, you are trying to develop a plan and you're trying to communicate to each of these flights, pertinent information for them, which they need to know, and now you're developing a backup plan of, "Hey, if we can't get into Atlanta, well, let's send this one to Birmingham, this one can go to Knoxville, this one can go up to Chattanooga, this one can maybe go to Huntsville," because we can't send all the diversions to one airport.

One, **[inaudible 0:39:44]** and airport customer service at the airport don't like it when 25 extra airplanes show up at their airport and they have to work them all. It's really poor customer service, because someone's going to be on the airplane for a really long time. In a diversion event, we try to spread out the pain and put maybe three or four in a city at a time, so it's better on the customers on the airplane, it's better for employees at the airport that we can get those airplanes turned rather quickly.

It's all of that multitasking that you have there, that you have to keep everything in order in your head, so you can make sure it's logical and keep things in order there. Then finally, you have to be willing to work shifts. You have to be willing to work holidays. You have to work weekends, midnights and all of that. The best part of the job is we don't work a ton. We're not working 40 hours a week. We're working, maybe 30-ish, it's four on, four off is the rotation for the 10-hour shift at my airline. That's four days, on four days off. You take four days of vacation, and now you have 12 days off in a row. It's really good for that.

Finally, the best perk of the job is a dispatcher gets a jump seat privilege privileges with their airline and other airlines, because the regulations say that we have to sit and watch our flight crews fly an airplane for five hours on a route that we would normally dispatch. Each year, we

get a company paid vacation somewhere to go watch the pilots fly the airplane, which means we have to sit in the jump seat, which means we have access to the jump seat year-round.

[0:41:39] JR: Hey, that's not a bad perk.

[0:41:40] MK: I think that's our best perk.

[0:41:41] IP: That would be my top perk, if I was a dispatcher for sure. We have thoroughly enjoyed talking to you. I'm sure we keep going forever and ever and ever and we'll have to have you back, definitely to chat more. I'm going to let you go here, so that we don't keep you forever and that eventually, you can go back to dispatching more planes. Michael Karrels is an aircraft dispatcher for a major US legacy carrier. Email us at podcast@fr24.com if it was very difficult to figure out which one, and we'll go from there. Michael, thank you so much for joining us. Really great to talk to you.

[0:42:15] JR: Yeah, thanks so much.

[0:42:16] MK: Hey, no problem. If you don't mind me throwing in a cheap plug. If you like conversation –

[0:42:21] IP: Absolutely. Yes. Sorry. By all means. Yes. Yes.

[0:42:24] MK: If you like conversation this about, hopefully, usually, about twice a month, me and two other dispatchers get together and do a podcast called Flying and Life. Sometimes I talk about air shows, sometimes I go to – Oh, I usually go to Oshkosh every year and cover Oshkosh. Talk a little bit about personal flying. Most of it is 121 dispatch operations on what we do and how it is we do our thing. We get geeky sometimes and get down into the weeds of things.

[0:42:56] IP: If you want to go from our more general conversation into that conversation, we will absolutely put a link in the show notes to their podcast, Flying and Life. Michael, thank you so much for joining us.

[0:43:06] MK: Hey, no problem. Thanks, guys.

[0:43:07] JR: Thank you.

[BREAK]

[0:43:14] IP: Welcome back. I had fun talking with Michael. You should definitely check out his podcast, Flying and Life, if you want to get more into the weeds on dispatcher stuff. I've been enjoying it. I started listening to some of the episodes, where they get very, very nerdy, and I'm having fun with it. Like I mentioned when we were talking with him, I feel like, if I had to go back and pick a job in aviation, I think I would pick dispatcher.

[0:43:40] JR: Yeah. I'm just thinking about the question and all the things I would do differently. That sounds like a fun job. Stressful at a different degree than air traffic control. Similar, but different level of stress.

[0:43:51] IP: Similar but different. Yeah.

[0:43:53] JR: Yeah, there's still hundreds, or thousands of people relying on whatever you're doing, not in an air traffic control tower, or at an air traffic center, but in an airline headquarter. Anything you do will impact anyone of possibly dozens of flights on a particular day and that's just interesting.

[0:44:09] IP: Yeah. I think it's a fascinating job. The first half of the show was regulatory stuff. Then we talked about dispatching and now we're going to talk about –

[0:44:20] JR: The other stuff.

[0:44:20] IP: Commercial stuff. The other stuff. Commercial stuff. We've got routes, aircraft orders, aircraft utilization, and some good stuff here and some not so good stuff. First reported today, and I will start, I guess, start with the not so good stuff. First reporting today by Danny Lee over at Bloomberg. Virgin Atlantic will pull out of Hong Kong entirely. This coming a week

after Hong Kong announced that they were start opening up again and make it easier for international travel to take place.

[0:44:51] JR: I wouldn't even say make it easier. Make it practical, or doable.

[0:44:54] IP: Possible. Possible Yes, yes. Doable. Virgin Atlantic announced that today, saying that they were going to stop serving Hong Kong entirely. They were closing their offices and base there. They would be done with it. Which is interesting, because it has – the move has less to do with Hong Kong itself, and more so to do with the fact that route is just not economical, given the closure of Russian air space.

[0:45:21] JR: Yeah. At this rate, it really doesn't seem like that issue is going to be less of an issue anytime soon.

[0:45:30] IP: Yeah. I don't think that's going to change anytime soon. Absolutely.

[0:45:32] JR: Not an airline quite as impacted as Finnair is, but still not great. If this route just isn't practical, who can blame them for cutting it?

[0:45:41] IP: Yeah. To try and force things, I think, is almost even worse, because then you end up trying to route yourself around all these complexities. Then the flight just never works for the people that you're trying to carry on the flights. It'll be interesting to see if and when they ever do return in the future, but it's probably going to be a while. A long while, before they even consider going back. Also, cutting service are the pair of Nordic carriers, or a pair of Norwegian carriers really. On the long-haul front, you've got Norse Atlantic polling a Norwegian 2.0, basically –

[0:46:21] JR: I was told, it would be different this time.

[0:46:23] IP: Yes, we were all told it would be different. Even though, the airline is run by the same people, they run on the same routes and they fly the same planes, we were told it would be different. But alas –

[0:46:32] JR: It isn't.

[0:46:34] IP: It isn't different. They are cutting flying over the winter by 31%. Previously, they had said, Orlando to Oslo would be reduced at the middle of this month. New York and Berlin service, and now Los Angeles is also going away. Not great. Norse is down to six routes for the winter season. JFK to Berlin, JFK to Oslo, JFK to London Gatwick, Gatwick to Oslo, which is my favorite route, Fort Lauderdale-Berlin and Fort Lauderdale-Oslo. Let's see, they've got daily routes between JFK and Gatwick and London Gatwick to Oslo. Those are the only daily routes. Everything else is two or three times per week. Not great.

[0:47:30] JR: Not terribly unexpected.

[0:47:32] IP: Entirely unexpected. Yeah. The other airline, Norwegian Airline is Flyr, they're the short-haul 737 operator that has been struggling, but they're cutting a lot of their domestic flights within Norway. They're only keeping Oslo-Bergen and Oslo-Trondheim. They will be keeping a lot of their European Sun destinations. Smaller cities within Norway will not be served, except for right around Christmas time. The airline said that there are a lot of – all airlines are saying this. There are a lot of outside factors affecting the airline business at the moment. Go figure. So they're cutting back.

[0:48:20] JR: All right. Again, none of this unexpected. I wish it was not the case for Norse and Flyr, but past recent history was not proving their case to be particularly strong, especially in the climate we have today.

[0:48:35] IP: No. That's our routes news. Moving on to good news is that Royal Jordanian has selected the A320neo for its fleet refresh, so good for them. More interesting, at least to me, is that Croatia Airlines will replace its short-haul fleet, or its fleet with the A220 over the next couple of years moving to an airBaltic style, all A220 fleet. That'll be great.

[0:49:08] JR: Yeah. Much like airBaltic, they're converting over from a smaller jet-powered aircraft and one of the larger turboprop aircraft. In this case, the A319 CO and the Dash 8 and meeting right in the middle with the A220, which I just find to be interesting. airBaltic and Croatia seem to have some pretty common threads with these fleet moves. That's very interesting. Of course, it brings up both the benefits of having a single fleet type, but also the complexities, or

the risks where if, let's say, forbid that the A220s are grounded, that grounds your entire airline. I don't think they're really thinking about that and that should be a really nice change for an airline that I really admittedly did not know much about at all.

[0:49:53] IP: They've operated some really interesting aircraft in the past. Moving to the A220, I'm excited about. I haven't been to Croatia in a very long time. I really want to go back, because it's such a fascinating and fantastic place. I loved being there. I would love to fly there on an A220. I think that would be fun. This is a fun one, because saying LOT is taking six 737 MAX is okay.

[0:50:20] JR: That's boring. They already have a few.

[0:50:22] IP: But they're going to take all six for this most recent order this month.

[0:50:27] JR: You can't even buy a car that quickly. If you went to a car dealership and said, "I want to get a Toyota Camry this month," you'd probably be laughed out of the dealership and they would say, "Come back when you're serious." Here we are with a LOT Polish Airlines going to ALC, Air Lease Corporation and say, "We will take six 737 MAX 8s, please. We would like them right away." I'm sure ALC came back and said, "Would you like them painted or not? Because this is really quick turnaround."

[0:50:55] IP: Yeah. Are they just going to just slap a sticker on the side, or what? Yeah, six by the end of the month. More planes.

[0:51:03] JR: Good for them. We don't know where they're coming from. Of course, we can make a very safe assumption that these are white tail aircraft, either destined for possibly a Russian airline that is sanctioned out of reality. Maybe it was one of the Chinese airlines that still can't take delivery of the MAX. We don't know. Six MAXs in October alone will more than double the fleet size that they already have operating today, which is five 73 MAX 8s. That's an ambitious growth right there.

[0:51:36] IP: Let's double the fleet size. It'll be fine.

[0:51:38] JR: Yeah, no big deal.

[0:51:39] IP: When I think Lufthansa, I think St. Louis.

[0:51:44] JR: You do?

[0:51:44] IP: I mean, don't you?

[0:51:45] JR: You do now, because I just put this in our show notes 30 seconds ago. I saw this tweeted out from Ethan Clapper and I couldn't – he quote tweeted it from STL Aviation News on Twitter that I couldn't not bring it up, because I find this, it's just mind blowing that not only does St. Louis have a Lufthansa mainline flight to Frankfurt, operating on a rather large A330, but we're all stunned by their load factors, which is how full are these airplanes going out? I'm stunned that in June and July, they were 98% full. 92% in August and in September, 91.2%. That's pretty stunning for a very thin route that I would assume would always have a few extra seats, at least, for some non-revs. But going out 98% full for an entire month is impressive for any route, right alone St. Louis to Frankfurt.

[0:52:44] IP: I mean, I don't know. I haven't flown this summer. I'm only a little surprised.

[0:52:49] JR: I would expect like, 85%, 90%, 91%. But 98%, I mean, that plane went out nearly, or completely full almost every day. I think it's a daily flight? It's not quite daily. It's every other day, or every third day, but still, that's impressive. Hats off to whoever was behind developing and rolling out the St. Louis to Frankfurt Lufthansa route.

[0:53:13] IP: Good job, development in St. Louis.

[0:53:15] JR: You did your math right, as long as you're actually turning a profit. Because as we all know, just because the plane is full, doesn't mean anyone's making any money off it.

[0:53:21] IP: Well, hopefully somebody's making money. Hopefully, everyone's making money, and everyone's happy and enjoying the flight. I want to close the show a lot differently today. My wife's grandmother passed away at the age of 99.

[0:53:32] JR: Sorry to hear that. Wow.

[0:53:36] IP: She lived an incredible life. It's sad, but it wasn't unexpected. It wasn't shocking, but certainly, sad nonetheless. Almost 10 years ago, for her 90th birthday, the whole family flew out to Boston. Basically, she took us on a tour of where she grew up in Boston, and told us a bunch of stories about her life beginning in the late 1920s Boston. She told us one story about volunteering during World War II. There's always an aviation angle, as Jon Ostrower says. This is the one. I think it's a fascinating story. I want to play that now.

[CLIP]

[0:54:18] GRANDMA: The first army headquarters was here. I would volunteer on Saturday night. I'd go downtown, and I'd work at their air control. They had no radar. We used to track the planes. New England. It would be a one big room with a map, all of New England. Take your shoes off, you climb up on this map. They give me a phone, they give you a dummy. As the plane came in, it was a P-38, you have a little flag and say P-38. Then you put – if it was going southeast, you put another thing. You put it down on the ground. The tracker, the FO tag will tell you where the plane is moving, and you move the new dummy. That's how they tracked the airplanes before radar.

[END OF CLIP]

[0:55:04] IP: I think that anybody who has grandparents, or parents who were not necessarily fighting in the war, but were serving in different ways, probably has similar stories about bomb shelter captains and things like that. If anyone has any other stories about family members who were doing some of these kinds of early air traffic control things, I just think it's so fascinating that as a young woman, she was walking all over a map and moving little flags that has squadrons of P-38s, flew up and down the East Coast. I mean, it's just a thing to think back. Of course, there was – I mean, radar was in its infancy.

[0:55:50] JR: You had to do it somehow.

[0:55:51] IP: They phoned home.

[0:55:53] JR: I always felt like, you saw that as almost hyperbole in movies, where there'd be a general in the middle of a giant room size map on the floor, pushing little models of airplanes around. Yeah, that does make sense. That's how they actually did it, doesn't it?

[0:56:08] IP: I guess, one of the most famous ones would be the Indiana Jones scene.

[0:56:10] JR: Yes.

[0:56:11] IP: Where he sneaks into the castle. Yeah. No, I just thought it was fascinating that she go volunteer and move planes around. I thought that was really cool. She was a very, very interesting woman throughout her life, and got up to all sorts of things in a similar vein. But that was the aviation one.

[0:56:32] JR: Well, thank you for sharing that. That was nice.

[0:56:34] IP: If anybody has any other stories about that, by all means, podcast@fr24.com. We would love to share some more of those, either emails with the stories, or emails – a voicemail, so that we can put it on the show and learn about some of the other really cool stories that are out there.

This has been Episode 184 of AvTalk. Jason, we started the show saying that it would be in the top 100. I'm going to go out on a limb and say, top 50.

[0:57:00] JR: I was going to say, top 50 as well. Yup. The rest of it was pretty mundane, but the interview and that last bit at the end really, really put it over the top.

[0:57:07] IP: We're working our way up. Let's see. Episode 184, and we are done. I am Ian Petchenik, and I'm here as always with –

[0:57:15] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]