

EPISODE 260

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[0:00:07] IP: Hello and welcome to episode 260 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[0:00:17] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Hello, Ian. How are you?

[0:00:19] IP: Hello, Jason. I'm well, sir. How are you? Welcome from, I believe you're in the Dulles area today?

[0:00:26] JR: Yes. Unfortunately, I have transitioned directly from vacation in Vancouver, changed planes in Newark. First time I've ever changed planes in a New York airport, actually, and then went straight to Dulles for three days of meetings, so pretty dramatic fall from grace there.

[0:00:46] IP: But you made it back, which was not without some uncertainty.

[0:00:51] JR: Yeah. I flew out to Vancouver from Newark last week on Air Canada, a 787-9. Thankfully, it wasn't during most of the schedule time, where the flight is operated by a 73 MAX. I much prefer, obviously, the wide body experience was much better. Great pair of flights on Air Canada. Then on the way down back, I had scheduled a three-something-hour layover at Newark, connecting on a separate ticket down to here at Dulles, since that's where my office is.

Freaking out three hours. That's plenty of time. No big deal, and I was right. Unfortunately, three hours turned into something like, eight hours. I was thankfully able to avoid that due to the creative skills of one of United's gate agents at Newark and was able to get to my ultimate destination more than an hour ahead of my originally intended schedule, which is much better, instead of arriving here at 12.30 a.m. the following day.

[0:01:56] IP: Yeah. I'm glad you made it. I'm honestly surprised that the original flight actually operated.

[0:02:01] JR: Yeah. It was supposed to depart at something like, 7.30 p.m. and didn't end up going out until like, 11.20 p.m. There was practically nobody left on the flight at that point. They had re-booked almost everyone, because very few passengers are actually just flying Newark to Dulles. Most people are connecting onward. Yeah. I was surprised, too, that they bothered to operate it. They had to bring a 75 up from Dulles to then turn around at Newark to go back down to Dulles. I figured they would just cancel the flight, because there was already a flight scheduled to leave at 9 something. I guess, they really wanted to hit that 100% operation mark for the day.

I already know they didn't, because the flight was so late, because our inbound aircraft had already canceled earlier that day. United is having a bit of a rough patch with its 757s right now. But I made it. Thanks again to the creativity of one of their gate agents, which was great.

[0:02:56] IP: Well done. There is no substitute for a compassionate agent, whether it's the gate, or the desk, or wherever. There really is no better person you want to be on your side when things go sideways.

[0:03:10] JR: No. But gate agents, if they are well trained and experienced, there is no replacement for them. As good as United's passenger-facing technology and capabilities are, it fell flat on its face in this case. I had a paid first-class ticket since the upgrade from economy to first was \$40 and it was on a 75. I figured, why not? I'll take it. But the stupidest reason prevented me from rebooking my flight from Dulles to the DCA flight that I actually ended up on, and it's this whole complicated thing of RBDs and fair classes that I was booked in not being available. The other flight, and it's nonsense that shouldn't have any bearing on rebooking a flight if you're delayed. But the gate agent I spoke to identified the issue, found a creative solution to fix it and got it fixed.

It should never have been in that position where I had to find someone to fix it. Since the app never provided this flight as an option for me, I called a phone agent who was utterly, utterly helpless and useless. Couldn't even find the flight that I wanted to move to, let alone move into it.

[0:04:18] IP: Couldn't even find the city.

[0:04:19] JR: Couldn't even find the flight. I'm like, "How about the 6 p.m. from EWR to DCA?" "I don't see it." "Okay, how about UA6422? How about that flight?" "No, don't see it." I just hung up and walked to the gate. That's just frustrating to me. There really is no substitute for a seasoned gate agent. They have magical powers.

[0:04:39] IP: This is true. We jump into the show this week with a bit of a different twist, because we normally don't talk a whole lot about FlightRadar24 on the podcast. But this week, we've released something that I think is worth talking about. It's something that we've been working on for a considerable amount of time. I'm really proud to talk about the release of our new GPS jamming map. This is something that comes – the map is based on data that comes from the ADS-B signals from the aircraft. The ADS-B signals encode the certainty of the position information. If the aircraft is getting a GPS signal, and I'm using GPS as shorthand for all global satellite navigation systems, whether it's US GPS, Russian GLONASS, Europe's Galileo, whatever, it sends a signal that says, this is where I am as the aircraft. It also sends a value that says, this is how sure I am where I am.

[0:05:48] JR: There's a surprising amount of data hidden away in that ADS-B signal, that you'd never know unless you dug into it. That's impressive.

[0:05:56] IP: The surface has just been scratched. We're constantly thinking of ways to display, visualize, provide more data. It's one of those things where each good idea requires so much work to bring it to market. But it's a lot of fun to dig into and understand. What we do is display this – we take the value that it's called the navigation integrity category, or the NIC. We display the map based on the NIC values that aircraft are broadcasting in certain areas. Two, I think, no one surprise, the most degraded signal, or the most interfered with signal is around the Black Sea, currently the Eastern Mediterranean. It just shows in a very quick visual way what's happening and where it's happening. Really excited to demonstrate this out. We'll put a link in the show notes to it, or you can just go into the data pages on FlightRadar24.

It's on the web right now in our data pages. We're working on ways to bring it forward elsewhere on the site. I say all that to say that this has been a long time coming and it's a really great first

step towards displaying even more of the data that we're getting. On the other side of things, we're going to talk with Matt Thurber, who is the editor at AIN Online, the industry publication next week for an operational perspective.

The map shows where GPS jamming, or spoofing, or interference is happening. Matt's written a fantastic article that we're going to expand on and talk with him next week on the podcast about what pilots are experiencing when there is GPS jamming encountered, or even spoofing. I think that's going to be a very, very fascinating conversation. Do tune in next week for that.

[0:08:00] JR: Looking forward to it.

[0:08:02] IP: Last week, we had a classic case of record the podcast. We talk about something. We say, we'll revisit it when there's more information. Then there's more information, as soon as we stopped.

[0:08:20] JR: But discussing this on the day of, which we usually record on Wednesday, we, or at least I, I think we both said this, we were covering this topic with a heaping portion of salt that we caveat in saying, everything we heard so far is third-hand reporting. We don't actually know what happened. I don't quite believe what happened is what is being described to us. It turns out, there's some pretty clear reporting that maybe the plane was actually fine. What do we know?

[0:08:51] IP: What we know now is that the investigation is focusing on automatic seats. By that, I mean, accidentally activated automatic seats. On the Boeing 787, the pilot seats are shell seats that have a button lever maneuvering device on the top rear of the seat, that allows the pilot to maneuver the seat out, or in, so that they can either move into the seat as they're entering the aircraft. Or, if they're exiting the aircraft and they're done for the day, or maintenance needs to come in and needs access to the rear of the flight deck, they can move the seat all the way forward, so that there's more space to work. That is what we know so far.

We also understand that there may have been a flight attendant on the flight deck who inadvertently pressed the seat movement button on the back of the seat, and that pushed the

captain seat forward, which meant the control column got pushed forward, which meant the plane experienced in-flight upset.

[0:10:08] JR: Ooh, not great, if that is indeed what happened. It sure seems like, all the initial indications are pointing that way. Apparently, this has been a known condition on 787s for as long as 787s have really been a thing. I think we read that Boeing had sent a memo to operators as far back as 2017 saying, "Hey, check the cover on the back of the seat to make sure these buttons that move the seat aren't exposed, or inadvertently operated." We don't know if it was actually something like that, or maybe something hit the button, or the cover was loose or something. It'd be a very interesting outcome if this is indeed what happened and for whatever reason, the messaging from the flight deck to the passengers onboard was that the displays blanked out, or there was some technical issue with flight controls, or something. The initial reporting just didn't really pass muster to me. It seemed like, indeed, initial word was not at all correct.

[0:11:05] IP: I mean, the initial reporting was hearsay from one source. Yeah, at best. It just didn't –

[0:11:14] JR: Put that with the story that went mainstream and that's –

[0:11:16] IP: Of course. Of course.

[0:11:17] JR: - everyone picked up. If there is a 787 out there that just randomly decides to throw passengers into the ceiling out of nowhere, that would be a major, major, major problem for every investigative body to look into. That is almost certainly not the case here. Something far stupider happened. Accidents happen. Things like this happen, but really, really like to get to the bottom of what was actually told to passengers onboard that aircraft. Indeed, the investigators will know that, because they pulled the boxes. Whatever was said in the flight deck over the PA, certainly would have been picked up by the cockpit voice recorders.

[0:11:57] IP: Yeah, it'll be interesting to see if the investigation details that. I would hope that it would, because that would be very interesting to know whether or not the communication even to passengers were accurate.

[0:12:11] JR: Maybe. I mean, it would just be embarrassing for the flight crew to have to say, “Folks, you're never going to believe this. But the seat started moving and my leg hit the yoke and plane go down.” That's embarrassing. Making up a story if that's actually what happened.

[0:12:27] IP: Yeah. So, don't say anything.

[0:12:29] JR: Just don't say anything and say – make it sure everyone's okay. If the flight crew actually legitimately made up a story, I would be concerned about that. That's not great. We have to wait to see what exactly happened, because again, you cannot trust the hearsay from one passenger onboard. Because half the time, you can't even hear the announcements onboard anyway, even when you're trying to pay attention.

[0:12:55] IP: It's trying to speak conductor on a subway.

[0:12:58] JR: Yeah. You got to be trained in that art.

[0:13:00] IP: Let's stick with aviation safety and talk about something that we visit on a new regular basis, when there's either a singular major event, or we get into, I don't want to call it a spiral. It's kind of a spiral, where each new event is reported, because the last event was reported.

[0:13:24] JR: A spat of hyper focus on the –

[0:13:27] IP: Right. We spend a lot of time looking at these things. We like to be on top of as many as possible. That doesn't mean that most people do the same thing, or even many people do the same thing and we wouldn't expect them –

[0:13:44] JR: Or should do that.

[0:13:46] IP: Or should do the same thing. I think, we've swung the pendulum a little bit far. This week, Jennifer Homendy came out with a tweet that basically said, “Hey.” Jennifer Homendy being the chair of the NTSB here in the US, said, “Hey, we operate the safest aviation industry

in the world. It's safer than it's ever been.” Pointed to the relative lack of safety in other modes of transportation, particularly in road transport. There was a particular example this week where I believe, a United aircraft in San Francisco returned to the gate.

[0:14:27] JR: Oh, no.

[0:14:28] IP: It was a splash. United plane returns to the gate with maintenance issue. I've been thinking about this for a while. By the time the podcast comes out on Friday, this post will be up. But the data that we have that we can look at is how often do aircraft squawk 7700, which indicates a general emergency? We've talked in the past about the fact that aircraft can squawk 7700 as a way to get the attention of air traffic controllers. That's what it's designed to do. To say that, “Hey, something is happening on board the aircraft. We need priority.” Because it's either a mechanical issue. We have a passenger that needs medical attention. But it's a way to get the attention of air traffic control, so that they can begin a conversation about how to safely navigate through the airspace and get what they need from air traffic controllers.

The squawk code comes out as part of the Mode S data and the ADS-B data that we get, and so we're able to alert on that, which we do. Over the past few months, we've noticed an increase in people saying, “Oh, this is happening more and more and more. It's happening more often. It's leading to, we're less safe.” I said, okay, let's look at the data. What I did is I took as much of the easily accessible data that I could about how often an aircraft squawks 7700, and it's recorded in our systems. That data goes back to the end of December 2022.

I looked at how often aircraft squawks 7700. I compared that to how many flights there are. On a weekly basis, we're looking at somewhere in the 1 to 2 dozen 7700 events. Jason, how many flights do you think there are, completed flights in that same time period?

[0:16:23] JR: A lot more than that. Such a number that makes the number of aircraft that squawks 7700 seem almost insignificant.

[0:16:31] IP: I would argue that it is statistically insignificant.

[0:16:35] JR: Oh, that's right.

[0:16:37] IP: Because there are more than 16 million flights in the last week. We track an average between 10 and 17 million flights, 18 million flights throughout the year, depending on the time of the year, more in the northern summer, obviously. The incidents ranges from 0.001 to 0.0045 on a weekly basis.

[0:16:58] JR: That's not a lot.

[0:17:00] IP: It's not a lot.

[0:17:01] JR: That is very, very little.

[0:17:02] IP: I think to the important point, it's not increasing. The percentage of inflight incidents is not increasing. Now, this is not a perfect science, because it is possible and very often happens at flights that have an issue, don't squawk 7700. Like the Alaska 1282 did not squawk 7700, because they were already speaking to air traffic control. They were easily able to get the aircraft back on the ground, without needing to get their new attention. I think the point still stands that the number of incidences is not necessarily increasing. We talked about this in the context of runway incursions. It's not necessarily the number of incidences. It's just they're being reported more. That's fine. I think we should be paying attention to this. I think what gets lost is that lack of context, or the lack of context becomes a bigger part of the story than understanding the numbers.

[0:17:58] JR: Yeah. There are legitimate stories to cover. A wheel falling off a United 777. That is a legitimate story to cover. It's a thing that should not happen. There was video of it, so of course, it's going to get a lot of coverage. In aircraft, pushing back from the gate and then returning to the gate to some mechanical issue is so far beyond the norm for what should be coverage of the industry. It's preposterous. It should not happen. It's not even scaremongering. It's just stupid. It's a waste of time.

There is no real analog to this in other industries that I can think of that were such a mundane thing would be covered on mainstream news like that. Ian, can you think of anything like that, that such an insignificant nothing that would get picked up?

[0:18:45] IP: No. I mean, the aviation industry is special. Because if something goes wrong, I mean, something goes very, very wrong. I get that. I completely understand that, which is why every little thing – of course, reporting builds on reporting builds on reporting. To me, it's the lack of context. The point about the going back to it, yes, I agree with you Jason. That's just, it's lazy. I mean, to say, okay, is this this historic?

[0:19:12] JR: It's not even **[inaudible 0:19:12]**. It's opportunistic and stupid and manipulative. It is a non-story that's published. I'm not going to call it a smear campaign against the industry, because it's not. It's journalists and outlets really, maybe not journalists because journalists might be covering it, because their editor whomever told them to. It's news organizations looking for easy clicks, because this will get easy clicks, even though it's not a story. Readers may not interpret it that way. They're going to go, "Oh, geez. Another United flight with an issue." This became a big enough problem, and we'll talk about that in a second, where United had to publicly address it.

[0:19:48] IP: Well, let's talk about it now. I mean, United had a string of incidents, whether serious or not, that were covered in such a way and continue to be covered in such a way. I watched, I think it was a CBS Houston, where United has a hub, where it talked about the engine caught on fire. Well, I hate to break it to everybody, but jet engines are on fire all the time. That's their job.

[0:20:11] JR: it's when they're not creating fire, that's the problem.

[0:20:15] IP: There was compressor stall. It looks scary. This is not to minimize the things where when things don't look the way they're supposed to, it can be scary. That's absolutely true. But then, the reporting needs to be accurate. The engine did not catch on fire. That's not what happened. Let's be accurate. Anyway, we get to the point where Scott Kirby has come out and said, "We've got a plan to reassure our customers that everything's okay."

[0:20:41] JR: That's a good plan. I could have used that plan yesterday when my flight was so delayed. I don't know. It's never a good thing when an airline has to proactively reach out to customers with an email, an email that I also received saying, "Hey, things are a little sideways

right now, but we promise we're on it." Some of that is earned. United did have a spat of actual legitimate issues, but most of this I feel is spurred by absolutely nonsensical reporting that hopefully at this point, the media will have moved on to a new topic. There are more fascinating, more interesting things than the SFO to Osaka flight returning to the gate. I promise you.

[0:21:19] IP: There you go. You know what's interesting?

[0:21:21] JR: What? This podcast?

[0:21:23] IP: This podcast, I hope. I hope. I hope it's interesting. This story is one that we've been waiting on and now we have the story and we have the waypoint. I'm referring to the NATS computer failure that happened on August 28th, 2023. This was where UK airspace basically shut down for a bunch of hours, because their flight plan processing system stopped working. We learned that information pretty much right away. Then we learned, and this was after a preliminary report, I think a few weeks later, that it was because there were two same named waypoints as part of the flight plan that caused the computer system to throw an error and just shut down. Then the backup one did the exact same thing, and then they had to process flight plans manually. Not great.

Now, there's been an independent review of what actually happened and an explanation of how the system works, such that it created its own problem. We had been under the impression, at least I had, that this was an airline thing, where they chose two waypoints that had the same name as part of the flight plan. But it turns out that that's actually not the case. What we know now is that a French bee flight was flying from Los Angeles to Paris, and they filed their flight plan. That flight plan went to Eurocontrol, and then the Eurocontrol processing adds supplemental waypoints.

Then what happens is it gets processed further and gets sent on to NATS, because NATS needs to know when is the aircraft going to enter UK airspace? When is the aircraft going to exit UK airspace? Where is it going to do those two things, so that we can safely route the aircraft when we expect it to be there? The problem here is that the waypoints that it tried to use as the exit points were not in the original flight plan, so the UK system discarded those points.

It identified one point, said, "No, that's not the original flight plan." That got dismissed. It found another one that was closed, it said, "No, that's not in the original flight plan." That got dismissed. Then it found a third, which is DVL. It's one of the few waypoints that has a three-letter abbreviation, DVL. It also happens that DVL was included in the original flight plan, but that's a fix for Devil's Lake North Dakota.

[0:24:18] JR: That is definitely not in that airspace last time I checked.

[0:24:23] IP: What happened was the system said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa." There's no way it can go through that point well after the flight is supposed to be in UK airspace. There's no way that an A350 can jump 4,000 miles in eight seconds.

[0:24:44] JR: That's good, the part of the logic that determined that the flight plan it was looking at is impossible. That's good. Not great.

[0:24:52] IP: Yeah. The system disconnected itself saying, "Whoa, this is bad data. We can't do this." Then the secondary system, so that the primary system is down. The secondary system presented itself with the same error, and this took about 20 seconds. Then all of the automatic processing of the flight plan data into NATS stopped.

[0:25:19] JR: Not great. Good that they figured it out. I hope the French bee flight crew that filed this flight plan give each other some high fives from breaking the entire UK airspace. Maybe they do anything wrong.

[0:25:29] IP: The French bee dispatchers are going, "Wait. What happened?"

[0:25:31] JR: "What happened? What did we do? Oh, we didn't do anything wrong. I don't know. Let's celebrate. We broke the airspace." How often is that going to happen, where you break an entire continent's airspace, but you didn't do anything wrong? That's nice.

[0:25:45] IP: Yeah, not bad. The full report, which we've linked to in the show notes is actually really interesting, because it gets really, really into how the system broke and what conditions needed to be. It's one of those things where classic aviation story of not one thing went wrong,

but a whole bunch of things went wrong. They all went wrong in the span of about 20 seconds. Interesting reading from the review of the NATS situation.

We move to China now, where we're coming up on the second anniversary of the crash of China Eastern Airlines flight 5735. ICAO rules dictate that a final report be issued within 12 months of an incident, or an accident. If that's not possible, a yearly update around the anniversary is given on the progress of the accident investigation. China's CAAC issued such an update this week that gives us almost no information. The Chinese said that the pilots were licensed and certified. They passed their health checks prior to the flight, and the plane was fine when it took off.

[0:26:57] JR: Okay. All of that is investigatory information you would expect to be revealed by authorities within hours of a crash, not years. Thanks. Real helpful.

[0:27:11] IP: At some point, there will be a final report. Maybe.

[0:27:17] JR: Okay. I don't think the Chinese authorities will ever actually come out and say what we all think and know in our heads what happened here. That's never going to happen. I don't know what they're going to say, but at this rate, it doesn't really seem like they're going to say anything at all, does it?

[0:27:35] IP: I think we're going to get another update on the next anniversary of the crash. I think that's what's going to happen. Let's talk about Air Transat, which is also among the airlines experiencing Pratt & Whitney engine issues. They currently have four A321neos grounded, and they're going to have up to six on the ground by October. They, however, are solving this problem by leasing A330s.

[0:28:05] JR: From who? Is it Hi Fly?

[0:28:09] IP: I did not see who they're taking them from, but I would not be surprised.

[0:28:14] JR: It just feels like, these leasing operators, like Hi Fly, euroAtlantic, they have for at least the last decade, just it has been a non-stop parade of filling in for other aircraft with engine

issues. I think I really became aware of this 10 years ago, when Norwegian long haul couldn't start operations, because the Rolls Royce 787 engines did not work, and they couldn't get delivery of aircraft, so they called on Hi Fly to operate their operation for years.

Then we have the Pratt & Whitney issue with the 321neos. It seems like, this is such a niche business that is at this rate, it shows no sign of slowing down. It's a really niche, but really lucrative business for these companies. But Air Transat, man, they're – it hurts.

[0:29:04] IP: Then there's JetBlue.

[0:29:06] JR: Ai.

[0:29:08] IP: Ai.

[0:29:10] JR: They're doing what needs to be done.

[0:29:11] IP: They are absolutely doing what needs to be done. And what needs to be done is cutting the network.

[0:29:17] JR: Read the words you put in the show note. I want you to read this line that you typed back here.

[0:29:23] IP: This section of the podcast is called JetBlue wasting no time trying to right the ship after sailing headfirst into an iceberg.

[0:29:30] JR: Yeah, that's a great way of putting it. As we know, JetBlue had gone through an awkward phase of doing some weird things that probably shouldn't have, trying to buy airlines probably shouldn't have, expanding in ways they shouldn't have.

[0:29:42] IP: Their teenage years.

[0:29:43] JR: Yeah, the teenage years. We've talked about this recently. Now, they're in their mid-20s, they got to figure out what they want to do when they want to be a big airline, and that

is apparently, you got to trim the fat to bulk up. I don't know. They got to get rid of some routes that aren't making sense, and it's centering mainly around LAX, some longer haul flying Bogota, Columbia, Quito, Ecuador, Lima, Peru, that I guess, just isn't making much sense. It's very high aircraft utilization intensive, so those flights from JFK to Lima and down to Columbia, that's utilizing an aircraft for quite a number of hours per day.

Among those, LA to Cancun, Vegas, Miami, Reno, San Francisco, Seattle, some of these routes were actually moved over originally from Long Beach. When JetBlue pulled out of Long Beach, they moved some of these to LAX, and now they're being removed from LAX entirely, because it just never really made any sense. Also, on the chopping block, New York JFK to Detroit, Orlando to Salt Lake City, Kansas City, Missouri, and Newburgh, New York are being cut out entirely. They will be removed from the network. I think, the Burlington, Vermont as well, but that was previously announced.

Fort Lauderdale to Atlanta, Austin, Nashville, New Orleans, Salt Lake City. These are probably mostly low frequency, low profit. But it doesn't matter, because it takes an aircraft away, and as we know, since we just talked about with Air Transat, JetBlue is also hurting for aircraft, so if these routes are not profitable, they are going to be the first to go. But that Los Angeles focus city, that was just logical at this point.

[0:31:22] IP: Yeah. Then there's Frontier.

[0:31:25] JR: Yeah. This one was super, super surprising. Seemingly, I don't know where Frontier announced an expansion to a rather unlikely airport, on an unlikely route, but it makes total tactical sense, and that would be JFK to San Juan, Puerto Rico. A few years ago, a few had told me that Frontier would be flying to JFK, I would have called you crazy and just get out of my face, because that's nonsense. It doesn't make any sense. But here we have Frontier starting up JFK to San Juan, two times daily starting June 6. Also, adding Newark up to 11 times a week.

Both of these airports are obviously highly sought after to get into JFK requires slots, so I thought, oh, these are going to be trash times. They're going to be in the middle of the night. They're not going to need slots. Gate space won't be an issue. But the flight times aren't that

bad. Departing JFK 6 a.m. and 11.08 a.m. Departing San Juan 6.07 a.m. and 8.15 p.m. It actually makes a decent day trip if you're really looking to go to Puerto Rico for a day. These are not bad flight times. They're really, really coming after JetBlue here. This is JetBlue's bread and butter, profitable route almost. I wouldn't say, monopolistic on this route, since every American used to be huge on the San Juan route. Now, it doesn't serve it at all. This is JetBlue's bread and butter and Frontier is coming for it. I'm here to see it.

[0:32:55] IP: It's going to be interesting to watch.

[0:32:57] JR: Let's see how long it lasts for.

[0:32:59] IP: Yeah. Well, there's that. Let's talk about some upcoming aircraft orders that have been teased this week. Some interesting ones. We've seen some rumblings about –

[0:33:12] JR: I love a good rumbling.

[0:33:14] IP: Yeah, exactly. Atlas Air is looking at a new freighter order. For the first time, it sounds like, they're looking at some Airbus aircraft. Atlas is looking at whether or not they're going to go with the A350 freighter, or the 777X freighter, which will be interesting to see. Their current fleet is Boeing. Sure, it would make sense to stick with them, but maybe they can get the A350 freighters faster. Maybe they want to diversify. I don't know. It'll be interesting to see.

[0:33:42] JR: Yeah, which not yet certified freighter would you like to order now?

[0:33:47] IP: Get your answers in now. Qatar Airways is also in the process of a large aircraft order from Airbus, Boeing, both, we don't know. The new-ish CEO of Qatar Airways this week speaking in his first US television interview, I believe, with CNBC said that they are preparing a large aircraft order from Airbus, or Boeing, or both. We don't know. That'll be interesting to see what they do there. Then when we finally find that out, we can talk about what they're going to put inside the aircraft, because that's almost more interesting to me. Then we've got Korean air, which is close to an A350 order, as they hopefully move towards the final approval process for their merger with Asiana.

[0:34:34] JR: All right. Seems like that merger is just taking an eternity to go through. Every now and then, you see a headline saying, this random other country that isn't South Korea approves Asiana-Korean merger.

[0:34:47] IP: So close.

[0:34:47] JR: So close. So close.

[0:34:49] IP: Working on the US approval, which is really, really what they need. Let's round out the show with some interesting things that have happened in the past week. Jason, let's get some sun.

[0:35:01] JR: All right, let's get exactly, let's say, 960 kilowatt hours per day worth of sun is what Thales approximates it will generate for the world's first air traffic control radar station, 100% powered by solar energy. Not something I knew could be done, or needed to be done, but apparently, they needed to do that in Northern Chile's Atacama Desert. Can't say I've heard of that one before, but DGAC –

[0:35:34] IP: It's one of the best deserts, Jason. Come on. It's the desert all the cool kids go to.

[0:35:39] JR: It is a very nice-looking desert in this one image provided by Thales of the, unfortunately, not symmetrically fenced off radar station, but it is very interesting. Obviously, a desert is not a very hospitable place for many things to go to happen. In this case, there was nothing there. But it's interesting that they're able to now, I guess, make the equipment efficient enough that it's able to be solar powered and provide radar coverage for air traffic control in what is essentially the middle of nowhere. If they're powering this solely by solar power, it has got to be an absolute last resort and there is no other means to get electrical power there, but a world's first, apparently. It's an at an altitude of 3,500 meters and uses 350 solar powers to generate the necessary energy to keep it going. I thought that was just a fun one. Not your typical news.

[0:36:33] IP: No, but we'll take it. I like these stories. They're fun.

[0:36:36] JR: Yeah. They're fun.

[0:36:36] IP: Exactly.

[0:36:38] IP: Not so much fun is the A220 worker slowdown that's currently taking place at the Mirabel plant outside of Montreal, as the contract has expired that the workers were operating under. That contract has expired and negotiations continue between Airbus and manufacturing workers there in Canada that build the A220. Airbus wants to ramp up production. The workers want Airbus to ramp up their pay.

[0:37:09] JR: Hey, that seems like a fair trade.

[0:37:12] IP: That'll be one to watch as Airbus navigates a turn to profitability for the A220 lines, something that they're rather focused on, also increasing the rate at which they are produced. Two things which probably won't happen without a contract with the workers, who are now working more slowly than they otherwise would and are negotiating with Airbus. Good luck to both of them.

[0:37:39] JR: I love this one quote. Flight Global has from one of the labor unions, since we just said that Airbus wants to increase production, their response to that is, and I quote, "To build 14 planes a month, Airbus needs to focus on engaging existing workers. At this stage, the employer is unfortunately losing that commitment, and that's priceless." That's just a real nice way of saying, "If you pay us a little more, given to our demands, which are apparently work schedules, holidays, job guarantees, the usual things. You don't meet those demands, you have a possibly incalculable financial hit."

Since, as we know, late aircraft are very problematic for every airline in the world right now, and we wouldn't want something silly like this, delay deliveries. This is an actual controllable thing. Let's not let that happen. I thought that was just a great, great line.

[0:38:37] IP: That's a good line. Let's celebrate the fact that Embraer's E2s are now certified ETOPS-120. That opens up a lot more airspace for the E2s. ETOPS 120, meaning that they can operate for 120 minutes on a single engine, away from a diversion airport. Prior, I believe they

were ETOPS 60. Basically, it gives them another hour of flying time, which opens up the route network for the E2. Good for them. Congratulations, Embraer, for that achievement.

[0:39:13] JR: Yeah. I hope the E2 family of aircraft gets a little more support here in the U.S. This seems like, this would be a pretty nice aircraft. A nice option if it were operated by a mainline airline, but we'll see you one day.

[0:39:29] IP: One day.

[0:39:30] JR: Maybe.

[0:39:32] IP: We close the show with one of those things that sounds like it shouldn't have happened, but did. Now, there's a whole bunch of people going, "That should not have happened, but did."

[0:39:45] JR: What happened?

[0:39:47] IP: I'm talking about the 757 being too big for an airport and a whole bunch of folks going, "But we thought we figured this out." It turns out, they didn't.

[0:39:57] JR: Uh-oh.

[0:39:58] IP: The Faroe Islands is not large. And so, the airport, also, not that large. The airport is currently certified, basically, up to 737-A320 size. It's not certified for 757s. The Faroe Island Airline began far cargo with the 757, and it's basically, a fish plane. They put fish on the plane, they fly the fish to New York.

[0:40:28] JR: I love –

[0:40:28] IP: The plane comes back, it brings stuff to Denmark. This stuff from Denmark comes to the Faroe Islands, then they put more fish on the plane, lather, rinse repeat. They filed for the first flight, they filed for an exemption. Then, they didn't file for an exemption for the next couple flights, because they thought they were fine, but they weren't. There was a lot of paperwork to

fill out, because they were operating without an exemption for a minute. The permanent exemption that they filed to operate the 757 is working its way through all of the approval processes, but it was one of those things where maybe they should have double-checked the paperwork. I do want to mention that this story came to us by way of a regular podcast listener. Thank you very much for sending that one in. I got a chuckle out of it, and then wanted some fish.

[0:41:20] JR: This isn't quite the oddest paperwork story we've seen come up in recent episodes. That definitely still goes to the United grounding of the 321neo, because of the no smoking sign. But this one's up there a little bit, too.

[0:41:34] IP: I guess, this seems far more likely to happen than being told, "No, you can't have permanently lit signs."

[0:41:44] JR: Yes.

[0:41:44] IP: You can't be safer than you otherwise would. How dare you? In any case, that's all we've got for this episode. Like I said, next week, we're going to have Matt Thurber on, who's going to talk to us about what pilots are encountering and how they're mitigating that when they're experiencing GPS jamming and spoofing, and we'll have more on whatever happens in the next week to come. We'll keep an eye on that.

If you want to send us story ideas, comments, criticisms, by all means, our email is podcast@fr24.com. This has been Episode 260 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[0:42:25] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]