

EPISODE 289

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[0:00:08] IP: Hello and welcome to episode 289 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[0:00:17] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Hello, Ian. How's it going?

[0:00:19] IP: Hello, Jason. It's going well. The weather here is much nicer than the weather in Florida, as I closely look at the radar. By the time the podcast comes out on Friday, Hurricane Milton will have moved through from Tampa, clear across Florida, and I hope that the damage is nowhere near what they are predicting so far.

[0:00:39] JR: Yes. It is also nice here. We'll eventually get, probably, the remnants of a hurricane. We usually do. Maybe not this time, but I'm just happy. It's cool out. I was in Seattle with our good friend, Jeremy Dwyer-Lindgren over the weekend, so we did some non-aviation related stuff, which was nice for a change of pace. Would you have guessed that this weekend was my first ever flight on a 737 MAX 8? Two of them.

[0:01:03] IP: Well, how about that?

[0:01:04] JR: Yeah. Been on a nine before, but never an eight.

[0:01:08] IP: I would not have guessed that. That one surprised me. How did you find the MAX 8?

[0:01:14] JR: It was like the 800, but you take two of the zeros off, and bam, you got a MAX.

[0:01:20] IP: New plane.

[0:01:21] JR: Yeah. I mean, it was fine. It was United's MAX 8. It's got all their new stuff.

[0:01:25] IP: Which has the nice –

[0:01:26] JR: It's got the nice interior. It's got the Wi-Fi that doesn't work. It's got the seat back screens, which have movies, which is nice. I survived Newark, which is great. Got in and out early, which is miraculous. All in all –

[0:01:38] IP: That's after the terminal caught on fire.

[0:01:40] JR: That's true. It caught on fire after we left, and the fire was extinguished before we returned. Amazingly, you almost wouldn't have even known there was a quite sizable fire at the Starbucks in Newark Terminal A. I expected it to be like, char marks all over the place and smoke damage, but either modern materials are really smoke resistant, or they cleaned up really quickly, which isn't Newark's thing cleaning up quickly.

[0:02:07] IP: I'm glad you made that joke and saved me from having to make it, and then we get –

[0:02:11] JR: Someone had to make it.

[0:02:12] IP: - all sorts of emails that the Chicago guy doesn't like New York, or whatever.

[0:02:17] JR: I mean, it's Newark.

[0:02:17] IP: But I'm glad you stepped into that one.

[0:02:19] JR: Yes, but it was good. Good flight. I will say, seriously, the MAX is a very quiet airplane, even sitting behind the wing. It's quite something.

[0:02:27] IP: Yeah. No. I was on it on the way to Dorkfest a few weeks ago, and I thoroughly enjoyed that flight. Quite the different experience as far as acoustics compared to the old 757 still kicking around.

[0:02:40] JR: Oh, yeah. What I did not enjoy is only having two lavs in the economy in the back of the aircraft. It was a scene back there. Really not great that the MAX 8 is really too small of an aircraft to be doing long transcons like that in that configuration. The flight attendants confirm they don't like it either, because it's just always a line. The last five rows of the aircraft, it's unpleasant for everyone. Overall, it was good, but I assume United would have normally been operating at this point a Dash 9, or maybe even a Dash 10, but they ain't got any of those. So, they put in what they have, which is fine.

[0:03:18] IP: Yeah. Well, I'm glad it all worked out. It doesn't look like Boeing is going to be building additional 737 MAX, or a bunch of other aircraft for a while, because the strike is ongoing and talks again have broken down.

[0:03:35] JR: Things are going poorly. I believe Jon Ostrower has offered to have everyone over to his house over some pizzas, to cool down and open dialogue, because –

[0:03:45] IP: Whatever works.

[0:03:46] JR: It's not going well.

[0:03:48] IP: Whatever works. I mean, I'm all for pizza at Jon's house. I would be fine strapping them on a roller coaster together. I think that would be a good way to do things. There are a variety of things that we could do to get the parties closer together, but it doesn't sound like, we're even close to talking about an actual contract yet. Boeing has withdrawn the latest offer that it made to the union, which the union says it made via the media. This was the one announced, I believe it was the end of September, that was an improvement on the initial offer that was voted down. The union says –

[0:04:29] JR: This was the last and final offer.

[0:04:31] IP: Yes. The union says that it stands ready to resume mediated, or direct negotiations. Boeing says, "There's not really anything that we need to talk about right now." Yeah.

[0:04:45] JR: Okay.

[0:04:46] IP: Not a good update. Not a good update. But we'll keep you posted. Who knows? We could be surprised by miraculous progress. Right, Jason?

[0:04:56] JR: Sure. I mean, you often see that happen. We saw it with Air Canada's pilots. We saw it with the longshoremen that sometimes deals just happen, and you only know about them when they happen. In this case, I don't think I'm going to be waking up tomorrow morning to a deal in principle.

[0:05:11] IP: No. Certainly not. Speaking of Boeing, the New York Times is out today, Wednesday, October 9th, with a report on, we're going back to MCAS. The report from the New York Times is about an Ethiopian Airline's request for information following the first MAX crash. After Lionair 610 happens, Boeing sends out updated information, telling airlines, "This is what you should do if you notice MCAS is firing when it shouldn't be." Ethiopian's chief pilot emailed Boeing and said, "Okay. But what if this happens?" The situation that they laid out was rather prescient, because the situation they laid out for Boeing was what happens if there are multiple failures, including a failure with the angle of attack on the aircraft? What do we do then? Boeing's response was, "Here's the memo we sent everybody. We can't talk about it, because we're providing information to the Indonesian investigators." There's a big but here.

[0:06:34] JR: Yeah. This is where it gets really concerning. I really can't believe we haven't heard about this till now that here in October 2024, we're still learning new and particularly distressing things about Boeing's behavior, leading up to and after the MAX crashes. Apparently, Boeing was more than willing to discuss exactly the situation and what to do with US-based pilot organizations. Apparently, the rules that Boeing thought were in place because of investigations including the NTSB that prohibited them from talking to Ethiopian and directly answering those questions. It was just super cool to give that information to American airline pilots, which is just, I don't understand any of this. Apparently, the NTSB also says, this mischaracterizes the rule. There would have been nothing preventing Boeing from directly answering the Ethiopian pilot's question. That's really the gist of it here. It's extremely distressing to read about the past behaviors of Boeing and just not answering direct questions from the chief pilot of the airline that eventually led to the crash is just – it just hurts to read this.

[0:07:51] IP: I mean, I don't think we'll ever learn why Boeing thought that this was an appropriate response. But I would love to hear the rationale here, why they believed. Because if nothing else, it should be fixed if this were to ever happen again. If an airline comes with direct questions about how to increase the safety of its operations, because one of your airplanes experienced a catastrophic failure and they lay out a scenario and say, "Okay. What do we do if this happens?" And you say, "We can't tell you"?

[0:08:25] JR: Yeah, not great. There's a quote here from a spokesperson from the Allied Pilots Association, which also expresses the same concern here, who says, that spokesperson who attended the meeting Boeing held with American pilots and who put several questions to Boeing representatives himself said, and I quote, "Our meeting with Boeing covered the same questions that the Ethiopian pilots were asking. It's clear that they had the same questions we had, but did not get the answers that we got from Boeing." This is just all sorts of concerning, especially since obviously, Ethiopian airlines had nothing to do with the first crash. There was nothing that should have been preventing Boeing from providing all of that information. Why would they be providing it to American airlines, but not a foreign airline? Really, really concerning.

All of this comes to light, because apparently, the New York Times, I think they submitted maybe a Freedom of Information Request for documents that are being used against Boeing by the families of the ET302 crash in regards to the Justice Department investigation into Boeing's role in both the crashes. They hope to, I believe the end goal here is to invalidate the plea agreement that Boeing was given.

[0:09:40] IP: Yes, that's the goal of the families at this point is to force the government to basically, get the judge to say, "No, that plea agreement is not going to work out for us." Then, the government will have to come up with a different plan from there. Let's talk about more 737 stuff. The FAA has finally issued its notices regarding the rudder assembly that was assembled incorrectly and installed on a few hundred 737 aircraft. They issued a safety alert for operators and a continuing airworthiness notice for international customers.

[0:10:23] JR: Operators, whatever.

[0:10:24] IP: Operators. Morale of the story, one for the US, one for international.

[0:10:28] JR: Yeah, you might remember this topic from last week when the NTSB issued a scolding memo to the FAA saying, “What do you guys even do here anymore? Our preliminary report has been out for months, and you haven't done a damn thing with it.” Well, the FAA has finally done a thing with it, haven't they?

[0:10:44] IP: They have. They've basically issued continued airworthiness notification to the international community is what I was looking for earlier. What they've done is issued these notices saying, “This is the problem. This is the set of solutions that you can perform and go from there.” This comes two weeks after the NTSB said, “Hey, you should do something about this, because these things are still flying around.”

[0:11:14] JR: Yeah. That's probably too long at this point. The memo doesn't exactly require much effort to put out and it probably should have been ready to go, but better late than never.

[0:11:25] IP: Yeah. I guess, we'll go there. The FAA has also issued an airworthiness directive regarding 787 pilot seats. Jason, you flagged this one.

[0:11:37] JR: This one's fun.

[0:11:39] IP: I'm going to let you explain this, because it took a minute for me to understand what was going on here. Let's preface it, because I don't want anybody listening to make the same mistake I did. If you listen to the podcast in the past few months, we've talked a few times about the 787 pilot seats in relation to the 787, where the seat was inadvertently moved and that resulted in an accidental descent, because the pilot was pushed into the controls. That's not what this airworthiness directive is about. This is different.

[0:12:12] JR: Yeah. The 787 pilot seats is just a really hot topic right now. This story comes to us from Flight Global as many things do, and we'll, again, later in this episode. The US regulators, which I assume to mean the FAA is ordering Boeing 787 operators to modify cockpit seats to prevent, and I quote, “possible serious injury to the captain in the event of rapid

decompression.” What basically happens here is 787s from a lot of carriers, or maybe all of them have armored cockpit doors to prevent any shenanigans from getting from the cabin inside the cockpit. However, as we learn from the Alaska door blowout, the cockpit door has a mechanism where part of it will basically blow out, so there isn't a pressure equalization issue that the cockpit also needs to depressurize.

A part of the armored cockpit door blows out. But there is a very unlikely situation where if the captain is in the full controlled rest recline mode of that seat, which is basically, imagine you're in a car and you move your seat back all the way back and you want to take a nap, that's essentially what is the case on the 787. But there is the case, extremely rare, that if a pilot is doing controlled rest with the seat reclined all the way back and there is a rapid decompression, there's a very small chance that a armored piece of door could fly off the door and strike a pilot in the head, or face and cause and I quote, “serious, even potentially fatal injury,” which is bad.

What's worse here is the debate between the airlines and the regulators with the airlines saying, “There is such a small chance of this happening. Let's just pretend like it's not going to happen and go on with our lives. Because if we do what the regulators want, which is limit the seat's ability to go into this full recline controlled rest mode, pilot fatigue could increase and that could mean we have to supplement additional crews on board, which costs money. Instead of having two pilots onboard, they could potentially have to have a third, or they would have to change the route network, so a 787 wouldn't operate a particular flight and maybe another aircraft that doesn't have potentially deadly flying pieces of armored door at hits.”

We're in this interesting place where airlines, particularly the article states, British Airways, Air France and KLM argue that the modification would limit the seat recline and prohibit pilots from achieving sufficient rest, while you have the regulators saying, “Yeah. Well, we don't want them to die.” Then the airline saying, “That's probably not going to happen.” Interesting stalemate here.

[0:14:57] IP: I have some questions here about the design of this particular door piece, because I'm thinking through, and we will put a picture of the 787 flight deck in the show notes just to give visual reference to this. Here's what I'm wondering about. If there's a piece of the door that blows into the flight deck and could hit the pilot if the seats reclined all the way, it seems to me

that if the seat's not reclined all the way, there's a decent chance that it can fly into the middle of the flight deck and I don't know, hit stuff that the pilots need to not be broken. This just seems like a poor design. In the event of a rapid decompression, would you not want all of the cockpit to be roughly where it's supposed to be and not damaged by flying –

[0:15:46] JR: Yeah. That seems like a good idea. I guess, I'm not sure how you design around that. Maybe go back and look at the 767, or the 777, because apparently, this issue is only specific to the 787, but maybe that's because only the seats on the 787 recline in that particular fashion, or to that degree, or lined up with the door. I don't know. Maybe let's fix the door, instead of making pilots not rest anymore. Apparently, the FAA is not buying it. The article goes on to say, that following analysis and evaluation of the fleet data, it is determined the risk to pilots is, quote, "unacceptable," and is not revised. It's directive. Air France and KLM suggested using aid for accurate seat positioning, or procedures, and placards to limit seat recline. The FAA said, "No. And we want to limit the ability for that seat to recline at all."

This is a weird situation. I really would love to know what prompted this. I can't imagine this happened, because we would have heard about it. What study was run to say, in this weird situation where a pilot fully reclined, taking a break, and there's rapid decompression and the door blows open like this, it could hit him in the head and kill them. How did this come up?

[0:16:58] IP: Yeah, that's a really good question. This one, we'll do some follow up on, because I have so many questions about the design of this particular door. Why does this condition even exist? Okay. Yeah. Yesterday, well, I suppose early this morning on the 9th, the flight took off on the 8th. Early this morning on the 9th, a Turkish Airlines flight diverted to JFK, because one of the pilots became incapacitated. Unfortunately, he did not survive his medical incident. The aircraft was traveling from Seattle to Istanbul when it was nearing the eastern coast of Canada up by Bath and Bay ready to cross over Greenland when the flight turned south and diverted to JFK. It sounds like, there was a relief captain and a first officer onboard. There were two pilots on the flight deck during the whole of the flight, but the captain of the flight experienced a medical episode and sadly, did not survive.

[0:18:01] JR: I hate to hear that.

[0:18:03] IP: There was an incident earlier this week, or late last week on October 4th, when a King Air was landed by the passenger after that pilot experienced a medical event.

[0:18:19] JR: We've heard this story before, haven't we?

[0:18:22] IP: We have. In the not-too-distant past, there was a flight by, I think it was a charter flight that was coming from the Bahamas and the passenger had to land that aircraft as well. This was a case of, they were flying from Henderson near Las Vegas to Monterey in California, and they turned back to Bakersfield and landed safely. You can see based on the flight path and we'll put a link to that in the show notes, where the medical episode happens and then where the passenger begins piloting the aircraft, because the lines go from straight to not so straight.

[0:19:06] JR: It gets a bit wiggly.

[0:19:08] IP: But they did a fantastic job piloting the aircraft and bringing it down. The aircraft overran the runway slightly, ended up pretty much right at the end of the runway in the grass, didn't look like there was much damage to the aircraft, but again, sadly, that pilot did not survive the flight either. Not a great week for pilots and medical episodes onboard.

[0:19:31] JR: No. But glad to hear that the passenger was able to get that aircraft down, because that's no small feat. Hat's off to them.

[0:19:39] IP: The NTSB has issued multiple preliminary reports this week that are, I think, worthy of discussion. Jason, do we want to start with Nashville, or Atlanta? Where should we go?

[0:19:49] JR: Let's start with Nashville.

[0:19:50] IP: Nashville it is. This is the rejected takeoff by an Alaskan airline, Alaska Airlines 737.

[0:20:00] JR: Oh, you would have gotten so much hate email if you went with Alaskan Airlines. Man.

[0:20:04] IP: No. Alaska Airlines, Hawaiian Airlines. Alaska Airlines, Hawaiian Airlines.

[0:20:10] JR: Bingo. There you go.

[0:20:11] IP: I've been working on my drills for airline naming conventions. This was an Alaska Airlines 737 departing Nashville on runway 13, a Southwest Airlines 737 crossing runway 13 for a runway 20 center departure. The preliminary report lays out a timeline of events in which, what the NTSB terms the local controller, which I'm pretty sure is the tower controller, because they were clearing Alaska to line up and wait on the runway. The ground controller was contacted by Southwest. The ground controller at 9:13.05 clears Southwest to proceed to runway 20 center and to cross runway 13 at taxiway T5.

Southwest is doing what they were told to do. 9:13.13 flight crew of the Southwest reads back the taxi instructions correctly to the ground controller. At 9:13.28, the local controller clears the Alaska flight for takeoff on runway 13. The crew at 9:14.30, the crew of Alaska at 9:14.30, so about a minute after being cleared for takeoff says that they're boarding the takeoff and the controller cancels their takeoff clearance, because Southwest was crossing in front of them. It looks like, we've seen this story before.

[0:21:45] JR: Yeah, and at least we have a report rather quickly to tell us what happened. Speaking of reports to tell us what happened rather quickly, you might recall just a couple weeks ago, the very bizarre photos and video coming out of Atlanta, where a CRJ-700's tail wasn't there anymore, as it was clipped off quite cleanly by another Delta A350 that was taxiing out to Tokyo, Haneda. When I opened this report, unfortunately, my computer exploded and I haven't had the chance to actually go back and read the whole thing. Ian, I believe there was a photo, or basically, a diagram that showed where each aircraft was. One of them wasn't really totally where it should have been, was it?

[0:22:32] IP: Yeah. What the NTSB diagram shows, and we'll put this into the show notes, obviously, so that you can all follow along at home. What the diagram shows is scale figures of both the CRJ-900 and the –

[0:22:48] JR: Oh, it was a 900. Not 700. My mistake. I was thinking way back when the Air France versus Delta, whatever.

[0:22:55] IP: There's been so many opportunities of CRJs losing their tail.

[0:22:59] JR: Man, the CRJs are such a punching bag. Poor things

[0:23:02] IP: It's terrible. The CRJ-900 was on the taxi away, not all the way up to the hold short line as the A350 was taxiing behind it. They helpfully lay out where the wing tip clearance was and where the CRJ was. Well, we all know what happened to the CRJ's tail, thanks to the A350's wing. We'll put a link to that in the show notes. This is just a preliminary report. They haven't said everything that went into why they were there, where they were and things like that. The graphic lays out exactly how it happened. Not necessarily –

[0:23:36] JR: There was one interesting thing that I read before my computer exploded. We know that not everything happens for one particular reason. In this case, it was not just the CRJ not top being, I think it was 56 feet back from the stop bar, but the A350 was never supposed to be in the position to clip the tail of the CRJ in the first place. However, taxiing out to the runway, they had some notification about, I think, a navigation system issue and they had to go elsewhere to go troubleshoot that. That is only when they clip the tail of the CRJ. If it weren't for that error message and having to go troubleshoot that, they never would have been in that position. It's always something.

Also, on top of that, the other runway that they typically would have used was closed. They shouldn't have been using that runway in the first place, or they don't normally use that runway. Then they don't normally taxi beyond where they went. Then that other aircraft wasn't pulled up all the way. At least three factors leading up to that big whoopsy.

[0:24:42] IP: Yeah. It's always something.

[0:24:44] JR: In this case, at least three, some things.

[0:24:47] IP: At least three some things. This, I think, puts an end to the ongoing saga of Qantas' selling flights that were never actually going to operate, or that had already decided to cancel. They've been ordered to pay 100 million Australian dollars, which is 67 million US dollars for advertising and selling tickets on flights that were pretty much already canceled. They had been sued by Australia's competition watchdog, which said, "This is absolutely misleading." The two parties have agreed to settle for a 100 million dollars. This has been the ghost flight controversy, which sounds cool, given the fact that it's October. I think that would be fun.

[0:25:37] JR: Yeah, spooky.

[0:25:40] IP: At first, Qantas was very up in arms that they would ever be accused of such things, although by, well, now, they're just happy to be done with it.

[0:25:50] JR: Yeah. Only one CEO earlier retirement later. They're all right.

[0:25:56] IP: Let's shift things around, Jason, and stick in Australia, because this one, it's not quite Baltia level.

[0:26:03] JR: Whoa. That is a massive accusation, if you call something on the level of Baltia.

[0:26:08] IP: Which is why I'm saying it's not quite above their level.

[0:26:10] JR: This airline actually had airplanes and passengers and flights.

[0:26:13] IP: Yeah. For a minute.

[0:26:15] JR: And diet cokes being served. Baltia did not – Tell me what happened.

[0:26:19] IP: This is the Australian government probing, as well as now the United States Department of Justice investigating whether 777 Partners and its main funder, the insurance organization, ACAP, used money that was earmarked for other things, namely the soccer teams owned by 777 Partners for Bonza in Australia, to keep them afloat.

[0:26:53] JR: There are some particularly spicy quotes here from the ABC Australia news article about this. I should just read this.

[0:27:02] IP: You should. They're very good.

[0:27:04] JR: This is from Virgin co-founder, Brett Godfrey, who the article goes on to say, is among those who thought it was a doomed idea from the start. The quote is, "If Qantas, or Virgin thought it was a great idea to fly 180 seat airplanes between, oh, God, Maro –" Two random places in Australia that you don't see a lot of flights. Picking up the quote again. "Well, they probably would have done it." There just wasn't the market there. Then the really spicy bit at the end of the quote is, it was economic suicide from the outset.

[0:27:35] IP: To be fair, the only reason I wanted you to read that quote is because I thought you were going to do the pronunciation of the names.

[0:27:42] JR: Maroochydore. I got nothing. I can't even pronounce it. I've never heard of this place before. I think that's the point that why are you flying between these two cities? There's no demand for it, especially operating 180 seat ultra-low-cost airline. None of it made any sense. Yeah, that was proved pretty quickly, wasn't it?

[0:28:04] IP: Their initial route network seemed to do okay. Then they said, "Oh. Well, we have a couple of successes, so let's just expand as much as we possibly can." That didn't work out. Then they ended up with Flair covering their aircraft and then they couldn't get the aircraft. It all got very messy. It seems that 777 Partners kept dumping money that now the US government is probing whether or not they had or not, into this airline to try and keep it afloat. The whole thing is very, very interesting. Because first of all, you have a soccer team and an airline and you're mixing money between the two and you shouldn't be is what the US DOJ is alleging here. This all just seems like, why are you involved in businesses like this? What is going on? Are you trying to not run either of them well? What is this here? I'm very confused.

[0:29:05] JR: I think, it is actually Maroochydore. Okay. That's what Wikipedia tells me.

[0:29:12] IP: All right.

[0:29:13] JR: If you're from this Queensland, Australia city with 62,673 people and would like to be in the podcast, pronouncing the name of this city, reach out to podcast@fr24.com, because we'd love to know.

[0:29:25] IP: Please do.

[0:29:26] JR: We'd love to know.

[0:29:28] IP: Going to keep following this one up, because it sounds like, there's no shortage of stories coming out of 777 Partners.

[0:29:38] JR: It's not Baltia level scam, but it sounds like, they were doing some pretty shady dealings to keep things afloat.

[0:29:43] IP: Yeah. We'll keep on this one. Jason?

[0:29:47] JR: Yo.

[0:29:48] IP: Well, I'm supposed to be at a party tomorrow that I'm not actually going to, because I'm not flying to New York. But I hear there's a reason that United's throwing a party. Tell me more.

[0:29:59] JR: United is throwing a party. It's actually embargoed information right now. But for you, dear podcast listeners, I'm going to break that embargo, because this podcast doesn't come out until after the embargo lifts, but it'll be our little secret until then. United announced its summer 2025 international expansion plans. We don't ordinarily cover things like that, like airlines fly to new places. That's what they do and we don't normally cover that. But the list of new cities that United is flying to in 2025 is surprising, let's say. There are some bangers on this list that I would not have ever – if you had given me 5,000 guesses, I probably wouldn't have guessed these cities. Ian, have you had a chance to look at it yet?

[0:30:46] IP: I haven't had a chance to go through the list.

[0:30:48] JR: Oh, good. We can play some trivia then.

[0:30:51] IP: That, we can.

[0:30:52] JR: Okay. I haven't prepared for this, so I don't have trivia for you. I'm just going to list off these exceptionally unexpected destinations United is going to be flying to next year. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. I'm just going to let that one sink in.

[0:31:09] IP: That was at the top of my list. I mean, I, for years, anyone who's listened to this podcast more than zero times knows that every episode I say, United should fly to Mongolia.

[0:31:20] JR: Well, good news. They're going to be doing that next year. Next up, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Somewhere I actually went last year. That's unexpected. Kind of surprising. Here's another one. Nuuk, Greenland.

[0:31:34] IP: Yes.

[0:31:35] JR: Yeah. It gets a little less interesting from here. Dakar, Senegal. That one is already served by Delta from JFK. Palermo, Italy, other destinations in Spain, Madeira Island and Faro, Portugal. Just a really surprising list of cities, especially Kaohsiung, Ulaanbaatar, and Nuuk, Greenland, and how they're doing some of these, especially the Mongolia and Taiwan routes is they are making use of their Guam-based 737 fleet through Tokyo, Narita, just like it's 1995 all over again.

[0:32:11] IP: Wow.

[0:32:12] JR: Yeah. We're in this weird situation, where you could fly to Mongolia, or Taiwan on a United aircraft after flying ANA to Tokyo, Narita. It's just a really weird situation, where you would think it'd be the opposite. You'd fly United to Tokyo and then ANA, or another airline would connect you onward to a place like Mongolia or Taiwan. But in this case, you could fly an ANA 777-300ER to Tokyo and then connect to a United 737-700 to Mongolia. That's bizarre.

[0:32:47] IP: Yeah.

[0:32:47] JR: Uh-huh. United says, there is a lot of demand. There is a lot of to Mongolia. The kicker is that their data shows that there's demand to these cities, but people do not want to transit through mainland China right now. There was a lot of connecting from US destinations through Beijing onward to places like Mongolia, or Taiwan, but people just aren't doing that anymore. They swear, there is still demand for it. But if they want to fly through Tokyo, people are much more likely to do that. That is the bet. Man, United flying a 737 to Mongolia wasn't on my bingo card. I don't know about you.

[0:33:25] IP: No. If you gave me a hundred guesses, I would not have gotten that. Not even close.

[0:33:34] JR: No.

[0:33:35] IP: Cool.

[0:33:36] JR: Yeah. Taiwan and Mongolia will be 73700, or 737s based out of Guam, which I believe are all NGs. No MAXs there. Dakar, Senegal is nonstop out of Washington Dulles. Nuuk, Greenland is out of Newark. I believe that's on a 737 MAX of some sort. No announcement of the 321neo XLR routes to anywhere. But interestingly, I believe these are all narrowbody routes, except for when you get down to the Spain routes, or Portugal. Those are also out of Newark, of course, but they did not specify what aircraft those will be on. Interestingly, they didn't eliminate any routes for next year. They're just adding some real interesting stuff.

[0:34:22] IP: Cool.

[0:34:23] JR: Yeah.

[0:34:24] IP: All right. Yeah. I mean, I think we have to go to Mongolia now.

[0:34:27] JR: You should come to the party tomorrow, where I believe and hope now, Mongolian food.

[0:34:31] IP: They're taking people to Mongolia?

[0:34:32] JR: Not until next year.

[0:34:33] IP: Yeah. Okay. Fine. Well, you know who's not adding routes, Jason? In fact, removing many of them. Spirit Airlines is on a tear of taking away routes and the Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg both reported late last week that Spirit is considering bankruptcy, considering restructuring the airline, given its increasingly tenuous financial situation. The failed merger with JetBlue, the introduction of bundling of all kinds, the elimination of fees, cutting routes by double digit percentages, 10% this month, nearly 20% in August and September, deferring deliveries, not good news all around.

[0:35:24] JR: No. You alluded to it, but I do think that personally, Frontier, I guess, unbundling, or rebundling and removing –

[0:35:32] IP: Rebundling.

[0:35:33] JR: - change in cancel fees is really what drove the dagger through the heart of Spirit here. They probably could have survived not going through with the merger with JetBlue. But once their main competitor got rid of basically, all the change and cancel fee and bundled everything together in these fares, Spirit had to follow, and that is a massive amount of ancillary revenue. They're just, they have to give up. Potentially, that is what might not kill Spirit, but force of restructuring of some sort, which may change the very foundation of the airline. We don't know. I don't think Spirit is going to go away, but hey, bankruptcy happens.

[0:36:12] IP: It does, indeed. It's ironic that the Frontier, "Hey, let's merge," or JetBlue stepped in with a counter offer. Spirit said, "Well, JetBlue's offers." Frontier said, fine. Then Frontier is the one that puts the nail in the bankruptcy coffin, if that is to happen.

[0:36:30] JR: I was going to say, if you can't beat them, join them. But in this case, it was if you can't join him, beat them.

[0:36:34] IP: Beat them. There you go.

[0:36:37] JR: It sure looks like that's what's going to happen here.

[0:36:39] IP: In Russia, S7 Airlines is now the first airline to sign up for Russia's homegrown ACARS service. ACARS, which is basically text messaging between aircraft and dispatchers, which allows them to send messages of a variety of extremely important things, such as weather updates, fuel updates, important messages about onboard emergencies, or anything like that, and also, sports scores. That system has been unavailable to Russian Airlines since March of 2022, because of sanctions imposed after the invasion of Ukraine. They've spent this time developing their own system. S7 says that, "Hey, sure. We'll sign up for that."

[0:37:31] JR: Yeah. Apparently, the story is here that although, of course, there were receivers and a whole network in Russia, the actual data transmission in exchange was handled by international companies. Way back in March 2022, the handling of those messages stopped and it has taken over two, two and a half years at this point for Russia to bake its own system and fully test it and get it deployed here with S7. It's not something that is a nationwide network. Yet again, Flight Global comes to us with the details that so far, it's only 10 receivers along the primary S7 flight routes and each receiver covers about 300 kilometers, which isn't huge, but they hope to expand that network to 55 stations by 2026.

On the one hand, it's neat and interesting to see Russian Airlines be so scrappy and put together homegrown things, but it's also distressing to see this very thing happen, because as time goes on and they develop their own things and systems and procedures, it will become that much harder eventually, one day, hopefully, to reintegrate Russian Airlines and to international airspace if they suddenly have their own ACARS system and their own ADS-B. I don't know. Their own everything. They're getting farther and farther separated from international standards and international systems, but they don't have a choice.

[0:38:58] IP: Yeah. I mean, I think you're right. I think the longer and further down this road we go, the more difficult it becomes to reintegrate, eventually, into a global system. I think that's a very real concern. This was an interesting argument, exchange, I'm not sure what to call this exactly. But current Breeze Airways CEO, David Neeleman, and IATA CEO, Willie Walsh, had

passionate conversation, shall we say, about sustainable aviation fuel. Our good friend, Seth Miller was there to capture the audio, and what they had to say is, I mean, comes down to where, I think, a lot of people on either side of this debate fit in.

[0:39:43] JR: Yeah. Seth, who published the article in Paxex.aero calls out that neither of them convince the other that they are right, or they are wrong, because of course, not. That's never going to happen. On the one hand, you have Willie Walsh, who he is the head of IATA, he is the CEO of the airline lobbying group, really publishing, SAF is the thing that will save the aviation industry from the whole climate debate and emissions and all of that. You have David Neeleman, Breeze Airways CEO, Azul founder, JetBlue founder, saying, "Hey, SAF is BS. It's a stopgap. It's extremely expensive. You have to truck it to the airport. It's not the end all, be all. This is barely a temporary band-aid at best."

It was just really interesting to hear at a major airline industry conference to extremely well-regarded CEOs have such a heated debate on two very opposite ends of the spectrum here. What I thought was particularly interesting was David Neeleman saying, "Well, at Breeze we operate the Airbus A220 with the newest, latest, greatest engines. We're ahead of the curve. We're good here." then Willie Walsh coming back and saying, "Well, all airlines are doing that. You're not doing anything different than anyone else's at this point." I'm glad someone is saying that you are not a green, clean airline, because you operate the A220, or the 737 MAX. Because at some point, that will just be the norm. Every airline will be operating a geared turbo-fend engine, hopefully successfully. Once that comes to norm, they're going to be in service for 50 years and they will still be running on some liquid petroleum fuel, be it SAF, or not SAF, or something else. This problem isn't going away tomorrow. Just because you're operating an A220 with the GTF engine doesn't really make you any better than anyone else. I thought it was very interesting to see Willie Walsh call that out, because that is often a large talking point on the industry.

[0:41:48] IP: If nothing else, I think it's helpful to see this out in the open between two people of their stature.

[0:41:55] JR: Here's the exact quote. Willie Walsh says, "An airline like yours, if you want to say, I'm not going to do anything to address my environmental impact, I wish you well." David

Neeleman says, "I am doing stuff. I've got the most efficient engines." Willie Walsh counters by saying, "Everybody has the most fuel-efficient engines, because we all have the same engines as you have, you know. So, you know. Therefore, the one that sets out, I'm the greenest airline out there, you're not. You're going to be, as we say, the cream of the crap. Not the cream of the crop. You have no choice. You have no choice." I paused there to make sure that wasn't a transcription error as I read the words, the cream of the crap. Apparently, that is the quote, because the cream of the crap was followed by cream of the crop. We will link to Seth's article, which has a video, or audio recording of it, because an airline CEO, or industry lobbying CEO now saying, cream of the crap, is something you've just got to hear for yourself.

[0:42:58] IP: There you go.

[0:42:59] JR: Wow.

[0:43:00] IP: We will end the show with a mystery, Jason, and our favorite airline.

[0:43:03] JR: I love a mystery. Who? Is it Petchmo Air?

[0:43:07] IP: Our second favorite airline.

[0:43:08] JR: Oh, you must be talking about undisclosed.

[0:43:12] IP: I am.

[0:43:13] JR: The world leader in new aircraft orders.

[0:43:17] IP: Indeed. Delivery and order figures for September from Airbus are in. They delivered 50 jets last month, including 41 A320neo family aircraft. They had taken in orders for 235 aircraft in September.

[0:43:36] JR: That's a lot.

[0:43:38] IP: Of those 235 aircraft, I think, well, a lot of these were firming orders. I'm using orders very loosely. However, a new order for 85 aircraft, including 10 A350s and 75 A320neo family aircraft joined the backlog. That was placed by undisclosed airlines.

[0:44:05] JR: Significant. It was 20 A320neo, 55 A321neo, 5 350-900s, and five of the big boys, the A350-1000. That is a massive order from, presumably, a single airline who wants a wide-ranging regional, short-haul, and long-haul, possibly ultra-long-haul network. There are few airlines in the world that would place an order of this size. Rumors swirling around, perhaps this is Riyadh Air's big introductory order with Airbus. Perhaps, it's not. We have no idea. Perhaps, it's two or multiple airlines placing undisclosed orders on the same day. Unlikely. This is probably one airline. This is pretty massive. Not many airlines out there ordering such a wide range of aircraft this. Are you sure it wasn't Petchmo Air?

[0:44:57] IP: We can't afford those planes.

[0:45:00] JR: You only took the A318neo. I get it. Someone had to do it.

[0:45:05] IP: Yeah. We're the sole operator there.

[0:45:07] JR: Once we learn who undisclosed, at least for this particular order, is, we will update you, because I am extremely interested.

[0:45:15] IP: I would love to know. I'm sure we'll know soon, because there will be a giant party announcing this large of an order at some point. Until then, I guess, we'll just have to leave it there. This has been Episode 289 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[0:45:34] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]