

Canada wary on in-flight mobile use

Transport agency unlikely to extend amendment to communications in the air, citing safety concerns and lack of demand

Canadian rules that prohibit passengers making mobile phone calls after the aircraft has landed and is taxiing to the gate are poised to change, but regulators remain unconvinced that in-flight usage of mobile phones is safe.

A notice of proposed amendment is currently being drafted, which will look specifically at mobile phones and "lean towards" permitting voice calls during taxiing, Transport Canada confirms. The notice will be released in the coming months, likely this summer, allowing industry stakeholders to weigh in.

Transport Canada adds that it is "premature" to speculate on whether the in-flight use of mobile phones or BlackBerry-like devices will eventually be permitted. Flight safety remains a huge concern for Canadian regulators. "There is always a risk of potential interference" to aircraft avionics, the agency says.

Lack of demand is also cited by Transport Canada, adding that "even business travellers" have expressed little interest in mobile phone use in Canada.

Canada's reluctance to significantly alter its regulations on this front is in deep contrast to Europe

and the Middle East, which are clearing paths for airlines to adopt services on offer from rivals AeroMobile and OnAir.

In the USA, however, both the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Aviation Administration continue to maintain the ban on the airborne use of mobile technology.

Instead, the USA is moving forward with trials of WiFi-based services. Colorado-based Aircell recently became the first communications operator to receive approval from the FAA to provide air-to-ground in-flight mobile broadband for US domestic

flights. American Airlines is slated to launch Aircell's service – branded Gogo – by mid-year and Virgin America has signed up to offer the service across its fleet of Airbus A320 family aircraft.

The likelihood of Canada following the WiFi trend remains unclear, but the pending proposed notice is likely to prompt this discussion, according to Transport Canada.

Aircell previously said it expected to extend coverage to Canada, the Caribbean and Mexico within a year of introducing its ATG broadband service in the continental USA. ■



Xsight's FODetect system may help improve runway safety

SAFETY ARIE EGOZI TEL AVIV

Runway debris detection system takes aim at human error

An advanced foreign object damage (FOD) detection system developed by Israeli company Xsight is being tested at Boston's Logan airport and will soon be installed for evaluation in a major European airport.

Xsight chief executive Alon Nitzan says FODetect could improve on international airport safety standards, which stipulate two to four visual inspections per day on the active runways. "This task is time-consuming, restricts runway availability, is subject to human error and does not offer any solution to FODs deposited between scheduled runway checks."

FODetect is a distributed system consisting of Surface Detection Units (SDUs) located on the edge-light bases along the travel surfaces. Each SDU consists of a small, 77GHz millimetre-wave radar system combined with a digital camera with zoom. It scans a runway section in less than 30s with detection resolution down to the size of an aircraft rivet.

Each SDU is also equipped with a near-infrared illumination unit for night-time digital camera use. "The camera does most of the job, with the radar serving as an additional sensor mainly for poor visibility conditions," says Nitzan. ■

FUNDING LEITHEN FRANCIS SINGAPORE

Mitsubishi bankrolls MRJ with \$675m share sale

Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) this month will raise hundreds of millions of dollars for development of its Mitsubishi Regional Jet by selling new shares in the newly established Mitsubishi Aircraft company to Toyota, Mitsubishi Corporation, Sumitomo and Mitsui.

"Mitsubishi Aircraft raised its equity and the total will be ¥70 billion (\$675 million)," says Mitsubishi.

Mitsubishi Aircraft was established earlier this year with capital of ¥3 billion and headquarters in Nagoya.

The sale of new shares in the aircraft company means MHI will be reducing its stake to 67.5%, says the company.

Shareholdings of the new equity holders are: Toyota Motor, 10%; Mitsubishi Corporation, 10%; Sumitomo Corporation, 5%; and Mitsui, 5%. The ownership of the remaining 2.5% is not being disclosed.

The money raised will be used for development of the MRJ, adds the company.

The MRJ is a 70- and 90-seat regional jet aircraft that MHI is developing under the auspices of Mitsubishi Aircraft.

The MRJ's launch customer is All Nippon Airways, which is due to receive its first aircraft in late 2013 or early 2014. ■

Read more about the Mitsubishi Regional Jet at flightglobal.com/mrj



The first MRJ is due to be delivered in late 2013 or early 2014

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