



Air Transport Association

November 14, 2000

Federal Aviation Administration
Office of the Chief Counsel
Attn: Rules Docket (AGC-200)
Docket No. 28293 (FAA-2000-7952)
Room 915G
800 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20591

Re: Docket No. FAA-2000-7952, Service Difficulty Reports, Final Rule
65 FR 56191, September 15, 2000

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Following are the comments of the Air Transport Association (ATA) of America, Inc.¹ on the information collection requirements of the Service Difficulty Reports, Final Rule, Docket No. FAA-2000-7952; a final rule intended to improve the reporting system to effectively collect and disseminate clear and concise safety information to the aviation industry.

This final rule addresses information collection that is subject to review by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. While the current service difficulty reporting requirements were approved under OMB assigned Control Numbers 2120-0008, 2120-0085, 2120-0003, and 2120-0039, an opportunity for comment on the paperwork portion of this amended rule was not provided during the Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) stage. To that end, the FAA is soliciting comments on four aspects of its submission, and this letter provides the ATA comments to each aspect.

¹ ATA's members are Airborne Express, Alaska Airlines, Aloha Airlines, America West Airlines, American Airlines, American Trans Air, Atlas Air, Continental Airlines, Delta Air Lines, DHL Airways, Emery Worldwide, Evergreen International Airlines, Federal Express, Hawaiian Airlines, Midwest Express Airlines, Northwest Airlines, Polar Air Cargo, Reeve Aleutian Airways, Southwest Airlines, Trans World Airlines, United Airlines, United Parcel Service, and US Airways. Our associate members are Aeromexico, Air Canada, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, and Mexicana.

Aspect (i) "Evaluate whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information will have practical utility;"

ATA COMMENTS:

On numerous occasions ATA has questioned the value of reporting the service difficulty data. The preamble to the current final rule acknowledges this concern, but fails to respond in a meaningful way and repeats the objective of the Service Difficulty Report (SDR) Program. The FAA provides no examples of any proactive action benefiting aviation safety that have arisen from the many years of SDR data submission. Even current SDR data, submitted by way of the FAA's new internet methodology, still routinely takes two to three weeks before it can be retrieved from the same system; this is not "practical utility!"

In the same section of the preamble, page 56193, responding to a comment regarding the increased reporting of non-routine work tasks during heavy maintenance due to the general wording of the new § 121.704, the FAA states, *"The SDR program does not require the reporting of nonroutine work tasks. The program only requires the reporting of defects when found."* This is a contradictory pair of sentences; all defects found during routine scheduled maintenance become nonroutine work tasks for appropriate corrective maintenance! Consequently, rather than clarifying the intent of the new § 121.704, the FAA has added to the confusion of just what information it is requiring to be reported.

Furthermore, in the same section of the preamble, page 56193, an FAA response states, *"In the past, the SDR database may not have been utilized to its fullest potential. Some reporting requirements were subjective . . . The FAA undertook this rulemaking effort to correct such deficiencies."* While the ATA fully agrees with the FAA's assessment of the utilization of the SDR database, this rulemaking effort falls far short of correcting such deficiencies. In fact, we believe the amended rules remain subjective in interpretation and, combined with the existing limited capabilities of information retrieval from the SDR database, will do nothing to correct existing deficiencies. In support of this statement, ATA offers the following examples:

- The new § 121.703(a)(11) requires the reporting of any emergency evacuation system or component found to be defective or that fails to perform the intended function during testing or maintenance. The purpose of testing and maintenance in an air carrier's FAA-approved routine scheduled maintenance program is to find such defects or failures before they occur in-service. Reporting these findings through the SDR system, without understanding the full content of the air carrier's maintenance program (the tasks and intervals, processes and procedures) associated with the discovered defect or failure, will confuse the database with potentially misleading information.

Comments of the Air Transport Association, continued

- The preamble to this final rule the FAA speaks to its concern about collecting data related to uncommanded movements of flight controls during autothrottle and autoflight operations (page 56195). The new § 121.703(a)(12) requires that the air carrier report each failure, malfunction, or defect concerning, "*Autothrottle, autoflight, or flight control systems or components of these systems.*" Again, without fully understanding the operator's maintenance program, aircraft utilization and operating parameters, this very significant increase in data collection is of no utility and cannot always be directly related to uncommanded flight control movements. Furthermore, this wording will require the reporting of minor things like loose knobs or failed background lighting, and can very easily be interpreted to require reporting of all component failures interfacing with these systems (e.g., all Navigation System component discrepancies).
- The new § 121.703(e)(13) and the new § 121.704(d)(9) require each SDR to have a unique control number. Each SDR is formatted to address one component failure. Multiple component failures in the same incident require multiple SDR's, each with a unique control number. This makes correlation of incidents (and utility of the information) more difficult.
- The new § 121.703(e)(7) requires the use of the applicable Joint Aircraft System/Component (JASC) code, as opposed to the industry standard of ATA Spec100 (now iSpec2200). While the JASC coding is similar to ATA iSpec2200 coding, it is not the same, and iSpec2200 coded data cannot readily be related to JASC coded data. Ignoring, for the time being, the significant operator time and training burden of this change, this requirement alone immediately negates the utility of the majority of historical data currently in the SDR database, which is all based on ATA iSpec2200. Disregarding past years of collected SDR data will dramatically limit the value of such a program and re-coding it all to the JASC code will be both time intensive and costly. The SDR program will be of limited value during this transition period.
- The existing SDR rules require the reporting of major repairs to structure. The preambles of both the 1995 SDR NPRM and the 1999 Supplemental NPRM (SNPRM) speak of collecting data on primary structure and principle structural elements. The new § 121.704 does not mention major repairs and only limits reporting of primary structure and principle structural elements to composite structure. ATA does not believe that reporting all corrosion, cracks, or disbonding of metallic structure that are not primary structure and principle structural elements (e.g., secondary structure like clips, brackets, standoffs, fairings, or galley frames whose failure or deterioration does not have an adverse effect on safety or airworthiness) provides any utility to the FAA or the industry toward the advancement of aviation safety.

Comments of the Air Transport Association, continued

Aspect (ii) "Evaluate the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used;"

ATA COMMENTS:

Based upon the comments received to the 1995 SDR NPRM and the 1999 SNPRM, the FAA has estimated in the preamble to this Final Rule a 45% increase in the total reports (page 56198); yet they also state that the economic impact is "minimal" costing each air carrier on average, \$67 per year (page 56200). In another place in the preamble (page 56201), the FAA equates the burden to approximately two man-hours per air carrier per year. While \$67 or two man-hours per year is truly "minimal" to an air carrier, a 45% increase in the number of reports is not; nor does a 45% increase relate to only \$67 or two man-hours! Other elements of the burden that are significantly underestimated or misapplied include:

- Depending upon one's interpretation of the wording used in this final rule, ATA members are now estimating a 1000% to 5000% increase in the total number of SDR reports; (e.g., one member's review shows 463 SDR's submitted under the existing rules, but 23,822 SDR's would have had to have been submitted under the new final rule, primarily due to having to report all autothrottle discrepancies, all autoflight discrepancies, all flight control discrepancies, all navigation discrepancies, and all corrosion, cracks, disbonding and repairs of metallic structure).
- ATA is also aware of members that believe they will have to hire anywhere from 5 to 20 new full-time employees to support the new rules.
- ATA members also believe that completing each one of these reports will now require an additional 30 - 45 minutes of processing time to research the additional details required. The additional data required by the new wording of § 121.703(e)(1) - (13) is not readily available; especially if the FAA is wanting the data on the specific root cause failure (e.g., a generator failure that is eventually traced back in the shop to a bearing failure will require correcting the original "open" SDR to identify all the details on that bearing; total cycles/time on that bearing, even manufacturer and manufacturer part number may not be available through the shop teardown reports). If the air carrier subcontracts these repairs (as more and more do), the information is even less likely to be available.
- The FAA is estimating a significant cost savings (\$1.4 million) for the reduced workload on the FAA's Principle Maintenance Inspectors (PMI's) to off-set their estimate of a cost increase to the air carriers and the increased repair station costs of sending SDR copies to the Certificate Holders. This is

Comments of the Air Transport Association, continued

"apples and oranges" mathematics; the reduced PMI workload is not a savings to the air carriers or repair stations!

- The cost savings claimed for reducing duplicate reports by repair stations and air carriers is almost non-existent; the air carriers already control this situation.
- The FAA is taking a cost savings for requiring a unique control number on each SDR, but the management and existing control of SDR's by the air carriers is already "standard operating procedure."

Aspect (iii) "Enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information collected; and"

ATA COMMENTS:

ATA recommends the following changes to reduce subjectivity and enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information collected:

- Combined with its lead-in sentence, § 121.703(a), *"Each certificate holder shall report the occurrence or detection of each failure, malfunction, or defect concerning --"*, § 121.703(a)(12) is proposed to read, *"Autothrottle, autoflight, or flight control systems or components of these systems."* This one sentence accounts for a very significant portion of the projected 1000% to 5000% increase in the number of SDR's. All of the preambles leading up to this final rule speak to FAA concern with tracking uncommanded movements within these systems; therefore, ATA recommends § 121.703(a)(12) be reworded as, "Uncommanded actuation or any emergency flight crew action taken on autothrottle, autoflight and flight control systems or related components of these systems."
- The proposed § 121.703(e)(7) and § 121.704(d)(6) requires, *"The applicable Joint Aircraft System/Component Code;"* and in the process, immediately negates the utility of the many years of historical SDR data collected to date. New SDR data that is JASC-coded cannot be readily trended back into the ATA-coded data, nor readily compared within the industry (between air carriers) where ATA coding will remain the prevalent coding scheme. Therefore, ATA recommends that this sentence (requirement) be deleted from both locations.

- The proposed § 121.703(e)(9) requires, "*The manufacturer, manufacturer part number, part name, serial number, and location of the part that failed, malfunctioned, or was defective, if applicable;*". This is a major administrative burden which will cause many SDR's to remain "open" for upwards of 60+ days, especially for air carriers that subcontract their component maintenance. ATA recommends that the wording be basically returned to as is currently written, "Identification of the part and system involved, including available information pertaining to type designation of the major component."
- The proposed § 121.704(a)(1) requires reporting, "*Corrosion, cracks, or disbonding that requires replacement of the affected part;*" and § 121.704(a)(2) requires reporting, "*Corrosion, cracks, or disbonding that requires rework or blendout because the corrosion, cracks, or disbonding exceeds the manufacturer's established allowable damage limits;*". The preambles associated with the history of this final rule have always spoken of the FAA's concern with gathering data on primary structure or principle structural elements, yet the new final rule wording covers all metallic structure (that would include clips, brackets, standoffs, fairings, galley frames, etc.). Furthermore, for operators of "aging aircraft," existing CPCP and SID Airworthiness Directives (AD's) already require this reporting. The FAA needs to enhance utility by interconnecting its own data collection systems rather than requiring the operators to do this for them by having to report the same thing through multiple FAA data collection systems.

The ATA recommends § 121.704(a)(1) be reworded to, "Corrosion, cracks, or disbonding of primary structure or principle structural elements that requires replacement of the affected part, unless already reported by an existing CPCP or SID AD requirement;" and rewording § 121.704(a)(2) to, "Corrosion, cracks, or disbonding of primary structure or principle structural elements that requires rework or blendout beyond routine in-service limits, unless already reported by an existing CPCP or SID AD requirement;".

- The proposed § 121.704(a)(4) requires reporting, "*Repairs made in accordance with approved data not contained in the manufacturer's maintenance manual.*" This wording will add significantly to the volume of SDR's submitted to the FAA, but will not add utility to the database. The manufacturer's maintenance manual contains only generalized information on structure, and should not be the basis upon which structural repairs are reported. This will result in the air carriers having to report many industry and type design standard repairs, already contained in the appropriate Structural Repair Manual (SRM). ATA recommends that the wording remain as is currently written, "Aircraft structure that requires major repair."

Comments of the Air Transport Association, continued

Aspect (iv) "Minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated electronic, mechanical or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses."

ATA COMMENTS:

Much of the structural data required to be reported in this final rule is already required to be reported to the FAA through existing CPCP and SID AD requirements. In order to minimized the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, ATA recommends that the FAA interconnect its current systems of data collection, rather than force the operators to report the same information to the FAA through multiple collection systems.

SUMMARY REQUESTS:

In light of the significant confusion regarding the text and intent of this final rule, the lack of any published guidance material in the form of an Advisory Circular and FAA Inspector's Handbook Bulletin, and the very significant administrative and financial burdens this final rule will impose on the air carriers, ATA requests:

1. **An immediate public meeting on the "Service Difficulty Reports" Final Rule, Docket No. FAA-2000-7952, Ref. No. 65FR 56191, dated September 15, 2000.**
2. **ATA requests the immediate public release of the associated guidance materials; i.e., an appropriate Advisory Circular and the FAA Inspector's Handbook Bulletin.**
3. **ATA requests that the effective date of the subject final rule be immediately withdrawn until a reasonable time period following the requested public meeting and public release of the associated guidance materials.**
4. **If neither of the above three (3) requests are granted, ATA requests the subject final rule be immediately amended to incorporate the wording changes, clarifications and deletions requested in the body of this letter.**

Sincerely,



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