

Good \$500,000 Airliner Needed in Country Today, CAB Reports

By ROBERT J. SERLING
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WASHINGTON (UPI)—Forty years ago the nation was told that what it needed was a good five cent cigar.

Today, its being told it needs a good \$500,000 airliner. The need is not academic. On its fulfillment depends quite a few million dollars in taxpayers funds — the money the federal government shells out to the local service airlines for serving unprofitable communities with planes that couldn't make money anyway.

This is the basic problem: The Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) this year is paying 13 local service carriers more than \$80 million to bring air service to smaller communities which do not provide sufficient traffic to be profitable. And one of the ways the CAB believes it could cut this subsidy bill is to have those airlines operate a transport that would be cheaper to buy and cheaper to fly.

Serve Small Cities
The so-called "airlines of main street" serve the small-city market with three basic types of equipment, each inherently unsatisfactory for the job. They fly modern prop-jet F27's, postwar twin-engine Convairs and Martins, or the beloved but obsolete DC 3.

The trouble with the F27's, Convairs and Martins is that they are too big for many of the cities they serve. It makes little economic sense to operate a 52-passenger Convair or a 40-passenger F27 or a Martin into a community that is lucky to board five passengers daily.

A recent CAB study of more than 88,000 local service flight departures showed that at the small communities seldom need a plane capable of carrying more than 24 passengers. One statistic was startling: 76 per cent of the departures had 18 or fewer passengers.

The trouble with the smaller DC3 is simply its age. It costs 71 cents a mile to fly. Maintenance and spare parts for a plane

designed in 1935 are expensive, just as they would be for an "orphan" automobile no longer being manufactured.

What he local service airlines would like is a modern plane about the size of a DC3, selling for around a half million dollars. The Association of Local Transport Airlines (ALTA) even had a special committee draw up specifications for a DC3 replacement.

The committee called for a plane that could carry 18 passengers and baggage plus 1,000 pounds of cargo, operate on a 3,500-foot runway, fly 500 miles non-stop or through three stops with a full payload without refueling, have an approach speed of only 60 miles an hour, cruise at least 300 mph and cost only 40 cents a mile to fly.

Not a single U.S. manufacturer has such an airplane on the drawing board although the market potential is enormous. The local service airlines alone still operate nearly 200 DC3's. In fact, the gallant old lady carries 25 per cent of their traffic and is responsible for 45 per cent of their total plane miles flown.

French Have Airliner
The French have a smaller airliner with many of the characteristics cited in the ALTA "dream plane" — the Nord 262. But it also has a direct operating cost of 60 cents a mile which does not meet a prime requisite of both ALTA and the CAB: a transport so inexpensive to fly that it could break even or make a little money serving low-traffic communities.

The CAB itself has been conducting serious studies of the DC3 replacement problem. It has talked with more than 25 manufacturers both here and abroad. Boeing and Douglas supplied special reports on the particular requirements for a overhaul intervals, the price of parts and depreciation, there is no present way to build an 18-24 passenger airliner that would sell for less than \$500,000 and still have direct operating costs even as good as the DC3's 71 cents a mile. The lowest figure given the CAB was 93 cents and the highest \$1.36.

Been Some Predictions
There have been some predictions that the helicopter eventually will become the real DC3 replacement. The optimists point out that a 200-mile-an-hour "copter could beat a pure jet on a short-haul flight because the former could take passengers into the heart of a city. But helicopters thus far have proved notoriously expensive to operate.

Likewise, the so-called "compact" jets like the DC9 and BAC 111 do not appear to be replacements for the DC3. They are too expensive (\$3 million) and too big (carrying at least 60 passengers).

The CAB frankly concedes that it may be necessary for the federal government to underwrite part of the development costs for a jet-age DC3, just as its doing for the supersonic transport. A lot of aviation experts would rather see the \$750 million federal investment in a supersonic airliner going instead toward an aircraft for which there is an obvious crying need.

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Number of Fires Caused by Man on Forests Decreases

The number of man-caused fires on lands under the jurisdiction of the Oregon department of forestry dropped from 137 in 1962 to 88 in 1963.

The number on Rogue River National Forest dropped from a five-year average of 30 fires per year to 7.

These figures were reported by Curt Nesheim of the state forestry department and Robert Torheim of the national forest at the recent meeting of the Southern Oregon Conservation and Tree Farm association.

The total fires from all causes on the state forests dropped from 178, burning over 2,096 acres in 1962; to 120, burning over 361 acres in 1963, Nesheim said. Fires caused by the lumber industry dropped from 12 in 1962 to 5 in 1963.

Constitute Fire Hazard
Nesheim said that the tracer bullets being imported and used in the forest constitute a definite fire hazard. All efforts to regulate or control the use of this ammunition, he added, has been unsuccessful.

The improvement in the national forest's fire record is reflected in the total number, also, Torheim stated. The total (including lightning strike fires) dropped from a five-year average of 67 fires per year to 38 in 1963. Only two fires were charged to the lumber industry and each of them was confined to one fourth acre or less "because of alertness of the crews."

The Rogue River National Forest would have had an even more outstanding year in fire prevention, Torheim said, if recent lightning storms had not changed the situation.

Officers Commended
Ed Branchfield, state representative, addressing the meeting, commended the officers of the Southern Oregon Conservation and Tree Farm association for their prompt action in the recent attempt by the Public Utilities Commission to put into effect a limitation on duty hours for log truck drivers, "which would have been a crippling blow to the industry and especially to the independent log trucker."

Branchfield also discussed the current controversial tax referendum and answered questions. He pointed out to the group that representatives informed on the effect various bills would have on the local economy.

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