

Supersonic Project May Boost Government Industry Programs

WASHINGTON (CP) — The U.S. supersonic transport program now getting under way may set a pattern for future government-industry projects in this country.

At Senate hearings completed last week, Dr. Jerome B. Wiesner, director of the Office of Science and Technology, said: "This is a new experience for the Federal Government, but I don't think it is the last."

Testifying before the Senate Commerce Committee's Aviation Subcommittee, Wiesner Oct. 21 endorsed the Federal Aviation Administration's proposal that the Government put up 75 per cent of the estimated \$1 billion development cost for a commercial supersonic transport to be in use in the 1970s.

For a number of years, he said, Government support of research and development was linked to military needs. But now, "it is becoming increasingly clear that we have the manpower, the capability to do many things" outside of the military realm "which the private sector of the country just can't pay for, and we are going to have, I think, increasingly to ask whether it is . . . in the national interest to do something of this sort . . ."

FAA Administrator Najeeb E. Halaby told the House Appropriations Committee in July that unless the Government put up the money, private industry would be unable to undertake the project.

He said the Administration was concerned that if the United States did not build an SST, the long-range aircraft market would be captured by the British and French, who are co-operating on the construction of a 1,450 mph jet liner.

The consequences to the U.S. balance of payments would be severe if this happened, he said, since American airlines would have to buy the foreign jet.

There are misgivings about the project in the U.S. aviation industry, which is not wholly convinced that a supersonic transport is necessary or that it should invest capital in what could be an unsuccessful venture. But the pressure of foreign competition is moving the program forward in spite of industry foot-dragging.

The FAA's proposal, outlined by President Kennedy in a June 14 letter to Congress, is as follows:

Private industry would be invited to submit bids in a preliminary design competition for an SST which could carry 163 passengers 4,000 miles at speeds faster than Mach 2.2 (1,450 miles an hour at the plane's cruising altitude of over 35,000 feet). These specifications were chosen to make the plane competitive with the British-French Concorde, a Mach 2.2 airliner with a range of 3,750 miles and a capacity of 100 passengers.

The winning manufacturers for the airframe and the engine would be chosen by May, 1964, and would then spend a year on detailed design. Following this, two flying prototypes would be built, flight tested and perfect-

ed. The aim is to have an American SST to deliver within a year of the Concorde, which is scheduled for delivery in January 1970.

Private manufacturing companies engaged in the development would put up 25 per cent of the cost; the Federal Government would put up 75 per cent (but no more than \$750 million), and would oversee the project.

If the airlines failed to show sufficient interest in the SST, or if the obstacles to producing a money-making SST appeared too great to overcome, the Government would withdraw from the project, in effect ending it.

Six manufacturers have told the FAA that they will compete in the design competition. These were three airframe manufacturers (Boeing Co., the leading maker of subsonic jet transports, Lockheed Aircraft Corp. and North American Aviation) and three engine makers (Pratt & Whitney division of United Aircraft Corp., Flight Propulsion division of General Electric Co. and Curtis Wright Corp.).

However, three major manufacturers did not enter the design competition: Convair division of General Dynamics Corp., Douglas Aircraft Co. (both of which sustained large losses from unsuccessful sub-

sonic jets) and McDonnell Aircraft Corp.

One major fear of the airlines is that every time radically advanced equipment is introduced by one company, the others will have to invest in comparable innovations or lose business. The rush to buy would then lead to overcapacity, and the recovery, depending upon the growth of air traffic, would probably be slow. This was the experience in the changeover from propeller planes to jets.

The pressure of technological competition is illustrated by the speed with which companies lined up for the as-yet undesignated American SST. Starting

with Trans World Airlines, five airlines signed up between Oct. 14 and Nov. 1 for early delivery of 32 SST aircraft, and deposited advance payments of \$3 million.

The competition appears to be doing as well. United Press International Nov. 2 reported that 35 Concorde had been ordered, 26 of them by American firms.

The Concorde will cost about \$10 million, but the cost of the American SST is uncertain. If built of aluminum, it will cost about \$13 million. But this metal would limit it to the speed of the Concorde.

In order to build a swifter plane, manufacturers will probably have to use an alloy of

steel and titanium, as yet undeveloped. The price for a steel-titanium airliner would probably be about \$25 million.

Senate Hearings

At the Aviation Subcommittee's hearings, both airlines and manufacturers said it was doubtful that a commercially successful airliner could be built under the terms and timetable set by the FAA. They suggested that the Government put up all of the development costs, as the British and French governments have done for the Concorde.

However, Sen. A. S. Mike Monroney, D-Okla., chairman of the Aviation Subcommittee said

Oct. 30 that he believed the three-to-one cost sharing formula added that American airlines operating on international routes would be forced to buy it if an American SST were not available.

"If they buy it," he said, "they may need federal subsidies to cover operating losses. If they don't buy it, they may lose passengers and need subsidies anyway."

Boyd said sonic boom, created by planes travelling faster than sound, might make the plane unacceptable in many areas of the world, thus limiting its usefulness. Its cost, he said, would make any overcapacity "a killer" for domestic airlines.

Boyd said he thought the Con-

corde would be "a loser," but added that American airlines operating on international routes would be forced to buy it if an American SST were not available.

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