FAA Extends Boeing Next-Generation 737 ETOPS From 120 To 180 Minutes

The Boeing Next-Generation 737 family of airplanes recently received approval for 180-minute extended-range twin-engine operations (ETOPS) from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

ETOPS provides the most direct routing between cities. With this approval, the Next-Generation 737 models are authorized to fly routes that are within three hours of adequate airports. "By allowing airlines the ability to offer economical point-to-point service, long-range twinjets provide passengers more direct routes and shorter travel times," said John Hayhurst, 737 Programs vice president and general manager.

These direct routes and shorter travel time can allow airlines to avoid large hub airports and route flying passengers more conveniently to their final destinations. To air travelers, it means more service options, greater choice in departure and arrival times, and more direct routings.

ETOPS is nothing new to the Boeing 737 family. The 737-200 model was approved for 120-minute ETOPS in 1985, the 737-300/-400/-500 in 1990 and the 737/-600/-700/-800 received 120-minute ETOPS approval late last year. In fact, 737 models have performed over 100,000 ETOPS flights to date.

Substantial testing was done during the development and flight-test phases of the Next-Generation 737 program, paving the way for 120-minute ETOPS approval in 1998. The airplanes entered service in early 1998.

"The Next-Generation 737 airplanes are derivatives of the Classic 737s, and are powered by derivatives of the highly reliable CFM56 engines," said Hayhurst. "The increase from 120- to 180-minutes reflects the Next-Generation 737's high dispatch reliability, a fleet service history of 500,000 in-flight hours in just 20 months and high engine reliability rate."

Design improvements in the Next-Generation 737, such as new engines, a new auxiliary power unit (APU), and a new electrical system led to greater reliability and paved the way for granting 180 minute ETOPS certification.

The CFM56-7 engine type, which exclusively powers the Boeing Next-Generation 737-600/-700/-800/-900 and Boeing Business Jet models, has an engine reliability rate significantly better than required for 180-minute ETOPS.

Sixty-two customers worldwide have ordered 1,198 Next-Generation 737s, with more than 300 currently in service.

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