Boeing Awards MHI Contract to Supply 747-400 Special Freighter Cargo Doors

Boeing [NYSE: BA] today said Mitsubishi Heavy Industries will supply the main-deck cargo door and surround structure for the 747-400 Special Freighter, a program to convert passenger airplanes into freighters.

The door and surround structure are integral to changing 747-400 passenger airplanes to freighters.

Mitsubishi is one of two supplier partners announced for the 747-400 Special Freighter program, which launched in January and thus far has announced 15 firm orders and 15 options from a total of three customers.

Jim Morris, vice president of Supplier Management for Boeing Commercial Airplanes, said Mitsubishi is a well-established Boeing Commercial Airplanes supplier partner that also has cooperated in the company's other businesses.

"This additional program work on the 747-400 Special Freighter cargo door and surround continues the important expansion of Mitsubishi's role in the production of quality Boeing parts on schedule and at a competitive price," Morris said. "Japan has a significant role working together with Boeing, and this is one more step in increasing and strengthening our partnership."

Junichi Maezawa, managing director and general manager of Mitsubishi's Aerospace Headquarters, said, "This is one of the outcomes from the cooperative relationship between Boeing and MHI, and it is our pleasure to participate in the freighter conversion business that is increasing year by year. Together with our Chinese partners, TAECO and Xi'an Aircraft Industry Company, we are expecting to contribute greatly to the 747-400 Special Freighter."

For the conversion to a freighter configuration, a 747-400 passenger airplane receives a side cargo door and layout identical to the 747-400 production freighter. The Special Freighter includes 30 pallet positions on the main deck and comparable volume. The upper deck is capable of seating up to 19 people, an option found on no other converted freighter.

The production freighter is distinguished by its nose door, providing greater ease and efficiency in loading, along with increased revenue potential by allowing for unusual and outsized items to be carried. The 747 Freighter family is the backbone of the world's dedicated freighter fleet, providing nearly half of the world's freighter capacity.

Boeing, in its World Air Cargo Forecast 2004/2005, estimates that air cargo traffic will increase by 6.2 percent annually over the next 20 years. Nearly 3,000 freighters will be added to the world fleet during this period, including replacements for retired airplanes. About 75 percent -- 2,226 of the additions -- are expected to be conversions from existing passenger and combi airplanes.

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