Boeing Introduces Radio Frequency Identification on 787 Dreamliner

Boeing [NYSE: BA] announced plans to introduce radio frequency identification (RFID) "smart labels" on maintenance-significant parts of the 787 Dreamliner. RFID technology will improve configuration control and help airlines reduce costs by managing part maintenance and repair histories.

"Boeing customers are eager to take advantage of automated identification technology, especially the capabilities and benefits of RFID," said Mike Bair, 787 vice president and general manager. "Introducing this advancement on our newest airplane makes good sense."

RFID is an automated identification technology that uses radio frequency waves to transfer data between a reader and items that have RFID devices affixed. The "smart labels" contain a microchip and antenna and operate at internationally recognized standard frequencies. Similar to a bar code, the RFID tag stores data but offers enhanced data collection and significant advantages such as being able to read without a direct view of the RFID label and a dynamic read/write capability.

"Information stored on the RFID tag will enhance parts traceability and reduce cycle time to solve in-service problems by improving the accuracy of information exchanged between customers and suppliers," said Lou Mancini, vice president and general manager of Boeing Commercial Aviation Services.

Boeing plans for the tags to contain unique identification as well as maintenance and inspection data in accordance with industry standards developed for commercial aviation by the Air Transport Association. Typical Dreamliner parts to incorporate RFID smart labels will be serialized end items such as line replaceable units (LRUs) and life-limited parts as well as on-board emergency equipment. Smart labels will be applied during the manufacturing process by the responsible systems and equipment supplier prior to delivering the airplane to airlines.

The FAA published RFID policy in May 2005 which states that passive RFIDs -- transponders that do not have a dedicated power supply and derive their operating power from the reader -- pose no safety risk and are acceptable for use on civil aircraft under specified conditions.

Boeing has successfully completed two in-service evaluations of passive RFID smart labels on a FedEx MD-10 Freighter. The tests showed that passive RFID devices do not adversely affect the simultaneous operation of any aircraft systems or interfere with continued safety of flight.

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