Boeing Announces C-130 Total Life Extension Program

The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA] today announced a new program that will extend the service life of C-130 aircraft up to 30 years.

The C-130 Total Life Extension (TLE) program addresses several aircraft modernization needs, including avionics, wiring, structures and systems. Key benefits include an innovative, patent-pending Center Wing Box solution, a comprehensive avionics modification and compliance with 21st century civil aviation standards.

"The C-130 TLE program offers customers flexibility and affordability at a fraction of the cost of a new aircraft while significantly lowering total ownership cost," said Mike Harris, Boeing vice president and program manager for C-130, during a media briefing at the 2006 Farnborough Air Show. "After providing operational analysis of the entire aircraft, Boeing is able to provide a comprehensive upgrade and modification plan that offers C-130 owners a wide range of options."

The C-130 Avionics Modernization Program (AMP) is part of the overall TLE avionics package. The new avionics system features digital displays and the 737 commercial airliner's proven flight management system, both of which provide navigation, safety and communication improvements to meet Communication Navigation Surveillance/Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM) requirements. The CNS/ATM upgrade will allow the C-130 fleet to be deployed worldwide.

One commonality C-130 owners may face is the Center Wing Box issue. Based on the aircraft's condition (i.e., level of corrosion or fatigue cracks), Boeing's TLE solution allows Center Wing Box upgrades without having to remove the box from its structure. Currently in development and entering the testing phase, Boeing's C-130 Center Wing Box solution will save time and reduce overall total ownership cost. It also can be applied to a refurbished box or a new box, more than doubling the life of the box from a fatigue crack standpoint.

"The reduction in total ownership costs will be assessed when testing is complete," said Harris. "However, if the C-130 AMP is any indication, then cost savings should be significant."

The C-130 AMP provides upgrades for C-130s at 1/7th the cost ($10 million to $15 million) of a new, basic C-130J aircraft ($65 million to $75 million). The enhanced digital avionics increase situational awareness for the warfighter tenfold over old analog cockpits, dramatically increasing information available to aircrews at a glance, simplifying tasks and decreasing workload. Upgrade commonality brought by the AMP also allows additional flexibility in assigning aircrews regardless of the model design type. In addition, the C-130 AMP meets U.S. Special Forces requirements, while the basic C-130J requires additional mission equipment enhancements.

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