



Chapter 736 Newsletter for March 2019

WHITE HOUSE UNVEILS 2020 BUDGET

ATC 'PRIVATIZATION' NOT A FACTOR

The unveiling of the White House's \$4.75 trillion budget on March 11 included \$8.6 billion for a border wall, reductions in several domestic programs, and a significant boost for the U.S. military. But noticeably absent from this year's budget? Air traffic control privatization.

Despite a strong push for the removal of ATC from the FAA over the last two years, the White House appears to have listened to the nearly 250 general aviation industry groups, bipartisan lawmakers, unions, small airports, and state aviation departments on why the so-called "privatization" proposal did not solve the problems proponents purported it would address.

The newly released fiscal year 2020 budget is a blueprint for the administration's priorities and among other things calls for improvements to the FAA's air traffic infrastructure. Ultimately, Congress will determine where and how much to provide the departments and agencies across the federal government. The president's budget calls for the investment of \$3.3 billion to modernize the nation's ATC system while improving safety and reducing flight delays. A proposed \$136 million infusion would expand the Data Communication program, improving communication between controllers and pilots.

The president's budget also includes provisions for the Department of Transportation to keep pace with new technologies such as unmanned aircraft systems, commercial space transportation, and autonomous vehicles.

BOEING ACQUIRES FOREFLIGHT

The co-founder of ForeFlight says the breakneck pace of enhancements to the flight planning app will not change now that his company is owned by airliner behemoth Boeing.

The airliner manufacturer announced March 6 that it had acquired Houston-based ForeFlight. Previously privately held, ForeFlight is believed to be the largest player in the electronic flight bag app business. The company teamed with Boeing-owned Jeppesen in 2016 to incorporate Jeppesen terminal and en route charts as an option in ForeFlight. ForeFlight was also working with Jeppesen's FliteDeck Pro app team to bring new features to that product.

ForeFlight was founded in 2007 when general aviation pilots Tyson Weihs and Jason Miller developed a weather planning service for the first generation of Apple iPhone. When the next iPhone model could handle apps, the team quickly expanded the capabilities into flight planning. When the iPad came about in 2010, the product sprouted IFR and VFR chart overlays and many other features. Today, the app integrates weather and preflight planning with a moving map and overlays a variety of additional resources for GA, business aviation, the military, and the airlines. In addition to the mobile app for Apple iOS products, the company offers a free online flight planner that integrates with the app. Subscription price points in the GA world vary between \$100 and \$300 annually, depending on features selected. ForeFlight has developed a reputation for an amazing pace of innovation and new features, with app updates occurring every few weeks. The company also has an admirable reputation for customer service.

And the pace of innovation and focus on GA will continue, said co-founder Tyson Weihs in a March 6 interview. “We’re going to keep the same velocity up. Every time we have a software release, we think about what can we do for everyone. There are some features that require a lot of investment for a certain segment of the market. Our roots are in GA. That’s where we grew up. It’s our passion. We’re on a mission to continue to create the sort of impact we’ve done over the past decade with GA.”

Weihs said the relationship with Boeing developed over many years, and ultimately the two companies decided that the acquisition was the best move. “We’re as excited as we’ve ever been. It’s great opportunity for us and the team. We couldn’t be more thrilled to be working with Boeing on the next leg of our flight.”

He said the entire leadership team and all of the 180 employees are involved in the transition and that ForeFlight is continuing to hire and is expanding its office space in Texas and in Denmark.

ForeFlight’s exceptional leap in enhancing general aviation pilots’ flight planning experience and improving in-flight situational awareness and decision making demonstrates a company focused on quality, innovation, and safety.

Air Taxi Aces Test Flight

While motorists fume about sitting in cars on gridlocked streets, there is actually plenty of open driving space directly over their heads. That’s the theory undergirding the interest in urban air taxi services.

In January, Boeing successfully completed the first test flight of its autonomous personal air vehicle (PAV) prototype. The 30-foot-long and 28-foot-wide proof of concept executed a controlled takeoff, hover, and landing during the flight, which lasted less than a minute.

Powered by an electric propulsion system with eight lift motors and one cruise propeller, the electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) air taxi is expected to have a range of up to 50 miles. Its advanced airframe integrates the propulsion and wing systems to achieve both hover and forward flight capabilities.

Aurora Flight Sciences, Boeing NeXt’s subsidiary, is designing the fully autonomous vehicle. The first flight tested the PAV’s autonomous functions and ground control systems.

“This is what revolution looks like, and it's because of autonomy,” said John Langford, president and chief executive officer of Aurora. “Certifiable autonomy is going to make quiet, clean, and safe urban air mobility possible.”

As work on the prototype continues, future flights will test forward, wing-borne flight, and the transition between vertical and forward-flight modes, which is the most challenging feat for this type of vehicle.

Unlike earlier business concepts that imagined personal aircraft whisking executives and dignitaries across cities, the current generation of air taxis is modeled on ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft. In fact, Uber is hoping to launch an air taxi service as early as 2023 in Dallas and Los Angeles.

Boeing hopes to provide aircraft for on-demand air taxi services. The idea is to have both two- and four-passenger variants vertically take off and whisk passengers around cities. Boeing's PAV is described as the next generation of autonomous electric aircraft that will be safer, quieter, and cleaner than existing alternatives, such as helicopters.

SUPERIOR AIR PARTS GROUNDS TWO ENGINE MODELS

Superior Air Parts has begun an “immediate and mandatory” buyback of its XP-382 and XP-400 aircraft engines manufactured for the sport aviation market because of detonation-induced damage for which a cause has not been determined.

After the Coppell, Texas-based company became aware that the XP-400 engine's ignition timing was generating **excessive internal stress**, it paid owners to ship the engines back to the company for evaluation. When adjustments produced unsatisfactory results, the company decided to ground all XP-400 engines and XP-382 engines, which share many components, “to eliminate the possibility of any future occurrences.”

“We disassembled, inspected and tested the key components in each engine,” said Bill Ross, Superior Air Parts vice president of product support, and an airframe and powerplant mechanic with inspection authorization, in a March 1 news release.

“The good news was the majority of the engines were absolutely clean, with no signs of stress wear or damage. The bad news is of the few we found with issues, neither our engineering team or our metallurgy specialists were able to define a consistent root cause of the issues.”

The grounding and buyback decision “does not include any XP-320 or XP-360 engines,” the company said.

In a telephone interview, Scott Hayes, Superior Air Parts vice president of sales and marketing, estimated that 120 engines were subject to the buyback, many of them purchased to power aircraft including some Van's Aircraft models, Glasair Sportsman, and others.

Hayes said that when deciding how to handle the issue, he and Ross asked themselves what they would want as pilots in that scenario. “The best we could come up with was to refund the original purchase price and all associated freight,” he said. Superior Air Parts

will also provide owners an allowance for engine removal and reinstallation, as “something to soften the blow.”

With the recreational flying season fast approaching, owners of aircraft affected by the engine buyback will have to look elsewhere for powerplant options, he said, noting that the company had no ready substitute and was “trying to come up with solutions to get people in the air as soon as possible.”

“Most everyone we talked to has been frustrated, however they appreciate the fact that we are willing to step up and make them as right as we can make them,” he said.