

AREA OF CONCERN 124-1

7/12/06

SAFETY: No

SUBJECT: Controller Identification of Aircraft Types

DISCUSSION: ALPA has received reports from pilots that indicate controllers are issuing traffic using a generic type of identifier such as “RJ” or “Regional Jet” as opposed to the phraseology required by FAAO 7110.65, Paragraph 2-4-21. ALPA further contends that due to the significant differences in these types of aircraft it is no longer practical to describe them in such generic terms as is being done in the NAS. With some “RJs” and/or “Regional Jets” carrying from 50 to over 100 passengers, the likelihood of misidentification of types when traffic is issued, increases and could create a hazard during many critical phases of flight such as visual approaches where one aircraft must visually identify the traffic to follow. It was felt that sufficient guidelines are available for controllers in 7110.65 but that a refresher of current issues may be helpful.

SUGGESTED ATPAC ACTION: That ATPAC coordinate with ATO-T.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Mandatory training for controllers in the form of an Air Traffic Bulletin or other required training be accomplished to ensure this situation is brought to the attention of controllers and corrected.

125 - Due to insufficient time for the appropriate discussions this AOC will be further deferred until 126.

126 - After discussion it was determined that Steve Alogna will draft a recommendation for ATPAC to present to ATO-T for an MBI/ATB.

127 - Time constraints did not permit discussion of a proposed memorandum.

128 - The committee agreed on a memorandum for submission to ATO-R.

129 - A written recommendation was presented to Rich Jehlen for consideration of ATPAC’s recommendations.

130 - A formal request will be made to ATO-T for action.

RECOMMENDATION: The following information be included in an MBI/ATB:

*F/ET The generic term “Regional Jet” of the early 90’s was correctly described as a large corporate-sized airplane capable of carrying 50 passengers and powered by 2 engines that were usually stationed under the vertical stabilizer. The Bombardier CRJ-100 was such an airplane. As the need for a larger version of the “RJ” grew so did the airplane itself with other aircraft manufacturers making their own versions. For instance, the newest Bombardier RJ-900 has the same physical shape as the preceding “RJs” but is capable of seating over 85 passengers. The newest Embraer entry to this market is the E-195 with engines under the wings as on B737 and seating capacity from 108-122. As you can see issuing traffic on these variants leaves considerable room for interpretation by the pilot. Will the pilot receiving instructions for Visual Separation to follow the “RJ” pick the 50 passenger or the 122 passenger

jet behind? Is this the one you want the receiving aircraft to sequence behind or is it the other “RJ?” The accurate identity of these various types of jets is becoming more confusing to the pilot and tower community alike.

It is the controller’s responsibility to ensure the positive identification of traffic issued so the pilot may see and/or follow. The only way to make sure the traffic is the one that is intended is to issue the full type description of the traffic such as, “Embracer 195” or “Bombardier CRJ-100.” When you transmit, “Do you have it in sight?” or “Follow the (blank),” be sure both you and the pilot are talking and looking for the correct airplane.

131 - ATO-R will present the memo below to ATO-T for their review.

The Air Traffic Procedures Advisory Committee has identified a potential problem in ATC phraseology and procedures. ATC at many locations when issuing clearance for Visual Approaches may provide relevant traffic information and instruct the aircraft to

“Follow” the designated traffic. The ATPAC Committee has been made aware that in some locations the traffic being issued is being limited to a description such as, “Follow the RJ.” It is our opinion that this is an insufficient description owing to the large variety of “RJs” in the system and the likelihood for the aircraft issued Visual Approach clearance identifying and following an incorrect aircraft. These RJs may now range from King Air size to DC9 size and we feel that these types must be made clear to the following aircraft.

ATPAC requests you initiate action to ensure this potential problem area is addressed. The committee recommends that this may be accomplished through an MBI in the form of Computer Based Instruction or an Air Traffic Bulletin.

132 - ATB in process expected mid-September. Mr. Jehlen suggested that this AOC should be removed from the minutes and tracked separately to be returned when a resolution is available. This and other items will be removed from the minutes and returned on action dates submitted by the responding office.

133 - Not discussed at this meeting. Mr. Jehlen suggested that this AOC should be removed from the minutes and tracked separately to be returned when a resolution is available. This and other items will be removed from the minutes and returned on action dates submitted by the responding office.

134 - Scott Casoni distributed the following article to members. No discussion.

*/*TER/ Even though controllers and pilots use the same language, sometimes there can still be misunderstandings. Perhaps it’s because they each have such different viewpoints. Tower controllers are working multiple aircraft and coordinating with coworkers in a complex, dynamic tower environment, while pilots try to get their aircraft out to the runway (or onto the ramp), concentrating on the physical operation of the aircraft and following their traffic.*

This special Air Traffic Bulletin addresses one of the “best practices” that many controllers use when communicating with pilots. More specifically, when controllers

fully describe “traffic” to pilots, it helps them find their traffic quickly while listening to control instructions.

FAAO 7110.65 Paragraph 3-8-1, Sequencing and Spacing, states that if air traffic controllers tell a pilot to follow traffic, they should give the *description and location* of that traffic. For example, if a controller is working at Oshkosh during Air Venture week, he/she would give *very* detailed descriptions of traffic in order to help pilots find the aircraft to follow in all the chaos: “Follow the blue-and-red biplane to your right,” or, “Follow the yellow tail-dragger ahead,” or, “Follow the silver Citabria on left base.” When there is a need for more description, the controller provides it. But, since most controllers will never wear that pink shirt, they usually avoid cluttering up frequencies with that much detail about traffic.

At most airports, when working air carriers or commuters, for instance, it is usually sufficient to say, “Follow the DC10 ahead,” or “Follow the Dash-8 off your right.” But imagine working at an air carrier or commuter *hub* airport. There are long lines of similar jets and commuter aircraft taxiing out for departure. When telling that fifth MD80 or the fourth regional jet to taxi out and join the mix, the pilot will appreciate some help in identifying their traffic.

Imagine being in the pilot’s seat; it’s easy to locate the traffic if the controller gives both the aircraft type and the name of the airline. A pilot can then look for a specific paint scheme and the characteristics of that particular aircraft. Not so easy if the controller uses generic terms like, “Follow the 737” or “Follow the regional jet” and there are several of each in view! As a controller working one of those situations where airplanes are everywhere, help pilots out by giving them more information: “Lear five Charlie Echo, runway 30, follow the United Express Embraer ahead and to your left, hold short of runway 25.”

In a more general description, the FAAO 7110.65, Paragraph 3-7-2, Taxi and Ground Movement Operations, shows controller phraseology examples for use on the airport surface. It doesn’t specifically say that a controller has to give the company name or the aircraft type in the example, it just says to provide “(traffic).” In a little more detail, Paragraph 3-1-6b, Traffic Information, states, “Describe the relative position of traffic in an easy to understand manner, such as ‘to your right’ or ‘ahead of you.’” Here, an example is provided: “Traffic, U.S. Air MD-Eighty on downwind leg to your left.” This phraseology gives a pilot two specific things to look for—the red-white-and blue colors of US Airways, and the shape of the long MD-80 fuselage. And in very clear detail, Paragraph 2-4-21, Description of Aircraft, further clarifies what is expected. It states, “Manufacturer’s model or designator.” Phraseology examples are as follows: “L-Ten-Eleven, American MD-Eighty, Seven Thirty-Seven and Boeing Seven Fifty-Seven.”

The term “regional jets” is commonly used. It used to be that everyone knew that a *regional jet* was made by Canadair, the aircraft identification was CARJ and they all looked alike. Not anymore! These smaller jets generally seat less than seventy-one passengers; they can look very different and be configured for a wide range of passenger loads. They are now made by several different companies, among them Embraer, Canadair/Bombardier, and Dornier, and all have different aircraft type

designators. Stretch versions holding more than seventy-one passengers will further blur the line between “regional jets” and other air carrier aircraft.

These smaller jets can also have widely differing performance characteristics. Some fit right in the flows with the larger jet aircraft. Others have various ranges of performance differences in the climb-out phase, at altitude, and in descent. These differences require that controllers learn what to expect from each aircraft type. As more companies continue to upgrade their fleets from turboprops to regional jets, system capacity will be affected as jet routes get filled up and turboprop routes go unused.

One thing can always be counted on in air traffic control: *things will change*. As more and different regional jet aircraft join the air carrier and commuter fleets, more instances of different regional jet aircraft types wearing the same company markings are likely to be seen. Remember: it is good practice to describe “traffic” to pilots using both company name and actual aircraft type.

CURRENT STATUS: DEFERRED TO MEETING #135

IOU REMAINS OPEN (ATO-T)