Business Aviation Pilot Interview: "WAAS is Absolutely Huge. It is Critical."

At a recent aviation meeting, a corporate business aviation pilot volunteered an unsolicited and radiant testimonial for the Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS). He explained that the Instrument Landing System (ILS) at his destination airport, Westchester County Airport (HPN) in White Plains, New York, had been down. Thanks to the availability of a WAAS-enabled Localizer Performance with Vertical guidance (LPV) approach, the pilot was able to easily and safely land at White Plains. We conducted an informal interview with that pilot to ask him more about his experience with WAAS.

Q: Tell us a little bit about yourself and your aviation background, please.

A: My name is Dean Saucier. I have been a licensed pilot since 1974 with an ATP and Boeing 737 rating and have been involved in business aviation since 2000. Over the years, I have helped to establish a number of corporate flight departments. I have been involved with National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) for the past 14 years. It is a terrific organization. (We learned that Dean is currently the Northeastern Regional Representative for NBAA.)

Q: When did you become aware of the Instrument Landing System (ILS) outage at White Plains? Was it when you filed your flight plan or while you were enroute? Did the availability of the WAAS LPV help in your flight planning?

A: I found out that the ILS was inoperative just prior to departing via NOTAM, and, yes, it did help in my planning.

Q: How did you become aware of the WAAS LPV at White Plains as an option to the out-of-service ILS?

A: Via the ATIS. The ATIS noted that the ILS was down and to expect an RNAV (GPS) approach.

Q: If it had become necessary to fly to an alternate airport, where would you have landed (how far away) and how would this have affected your trip?

A: Due to the time of day, surface traffic was heavy and congested and so my alternate would have been Sikorsky Memorial Airport (BDR) in Bridgeport, Connecticut. It is approximately 30 miles away. Teterboro Airport (TEB) in New Jersey may have been suitable were it not for the time of day. I would have been extremely late for my meeting.

Q: Have you had positive experiences with WAAS LPVs at other airports?

A: Yes, I've had to avail myself to an LPV approach at airports other than White Plains. As an example, the ILS on runway 24 at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, Connecticut (BDL) was out of service on one of my trips. Instead, I used the RNAV (GPS) approach to runway 24 which included an LPV line of minima.

Q: How did you begin flying WAAS approaches?

A: I heard about WAAS LPV and decided to make an approach in VFR conditions to see if it really worked as advertised. If it did, it would open up more and better options for me at airports with LPV approaches, and it did! It also appears to be tighter than an ILS approach. You can definitely notice a difference between ILS and LPV. With an LPV, it seems like you are right on the centerline all the way down while with an ILS, it not always appears to be the case.

Q: How is WAAS supporting business aviation?

A: WAAS is absolutely huge! It is critical. With lower approach minima we are able to deliver passengers to their destinations with fewer weather related delays. WAAS is also an enabler of RNP approaches, thus providing constant rate descents, and in many cases, saving time and fuel while increasing safety.

Q: Anything else you would like to add about WAAS?

A: Personally, I like using LPV approaches since they are satellite rather than ground based, thus not prone to the variances on an ILS approach due to infringements at runway ILS critical areas or other factors. Also, there is a certain amount of comfort in knowing that rather than stepping down at waypoints, you can follow the glide slope. For those, that may not have yet flown an LPV, I recommend they give it a try. Maybe try it on a VFR day just to see how effective it is and to increase your initial comfort level. Once you try it, I expect that LPV will very quickly become your preference.

Special thanks to Mr. Dean Saucier for his time and enthusiasm for WAAS.

- David Kerr (FAA AJM-321/NAVTAC)/ Mary Ann Davis (FAA AJM-321/NAVTAC)