FC5203

Posted on 30.01.2023 by Steve Forward

Category: Flight Crew (Commercial)

Report Title New Flight Planning System woes

Initial Report

My employer has introduced a brand-new electronic replacement briefing and flight planning application. The purpose seems to be because a new back-end system has been introduced to our flight planning and the flight crew must switch briefing systems to be compatible. This system has a number of bugs and negative features that have been highlighted to the company by a huge number of flight crew. They include:

– Inadequate NOTAM presentation with significantly less filtering than previously

– Poor presentation of enroute weather

– Aircraft MEL items hidden in the OFP

– Completely new briefing flow

Flight crew have been required to self-brief on this new application with minimal, poorly designed CBT and no formal time allocated for them to do so. As an example of the major issues the company has had to release a 9-page notice on how to do fuel checks in the new app.

Although a limited parallel run was attempted, it was not available at all for some fleets, and on others the flight plans were on completely different routings so no possible training benefit could be realised.

As it stands the current application is inadequate. The company are aware of a number of bugs and have listed them as "improvements coming" but have elected to launch anyway. This has massively increased pilot workload and increases the risk of:

– aircraft dispatching with incorrect fuel

– aircraft dispatching without taking account of MEL items

– incorrect flight plan fuel being missed

– hugely increased time required to brief leading to pressure on other aspects of the operation.

I feel that note should have been taken of concerns raised by a significant portion of the pilot group

across various types the airline operates and the launch delayed until those concerns were addressed. I would like this issue properly to be raised with the regulator who may not be aware of the concerns reported mainly via a dedicated company reporting form for this application rather than the ASR route.

Comment

Although the required functionality was probably all available and it was just a matter of getting used to the new system, this report seems to indicate that insufficient user-testing was conducted (using real first-time users and not those who developed the system), and that user-acceptance and user-confidence (i.e. buy-in from the users to increase their willingness to adopt the change) were not ensured before the new system and procedures were introduced.

Some system changes are so large that face-to-face training should be given rather than simply asking people to read online manuals, view VTC sessions and conduct computer-based training courses – this should be factored into the deployment of new large-scale safety-critical systems and procedures and is a key lesson from change management. Furthermore, the introduction of such a radical change might be questioned when most flight crew were flying their maximum hours during the summer-2022 ramp-up of operations with concomitant tiredness and likely lack of enthusiasm for large-scale extra-curricular self-study. There is a clear case in these circumstances for official time to have been rostered for the training, even if conducted as self-learning, and that that time should be scheduled for appropriate periods other than at the end of a tiring duty for example. All of these elements should have been highlighted by running the change through the company's SMS to ensure that it made sense, did not introduce unmitigated risks and was handled more empathetically overall.

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