

EXPECTED SHORTAGE OF 6,000 PILOTS IN CANADA

On May 16, ATAC held a Symposium in Ottawa on Pilot Recruitment. This is an issue of global concern to all carriers and innovative solutions are required if we are to meet the expected demand for pilots in the next twenty years.

A panel of speakers representing carriers of all types gave testimony of the impact that the existing pilot shortage has on their operations and the anticipated disruptions the growing shortage will have if we ignore the problem. Representatives from Sunwing, Porter, Jazz, Bearskin, Transwest Air, Waterloo Wellington Flight Centre, and ALPA described their perspective on the impact of the growing demand for pilots on our market and suggested ways forward.

Mike Doiron presented the Canadian Council for Aviation and Aerospace (CCAA) data and trends on the international and Canadian demand for pilots. Airbus and Boeing forecast that the need for new pilots to be trained in the next twenty years to exceed 500,000 worldwide. The information also indicates that there will be a shortage of 6,000 pilots in Canada within twenty years if no action is taken to increase the number of people entering the profession. Mike emphasized the need to attract the next generation to the industry at a very young age.

Although Canadian flight training institutions train a growing number of professional pilots every year, the growth is mostly from international students training here and leaving the country shortly after. Unfortunately, the number of Canadian trained pilots each year has been stagnant while demand grows. CCAA data indicates that we are falling behind by over two hundred pilots a year in Canada which impacts the way Canadian airlines do business.

The problem doesn't only lie in Canada. The US FAA is reporting a similar sombre outlook. "FAA data shows the number of ATP practical tests being administered in the United States is declining... ATP numbers peaked in 2016 at over 8,000 certificate issuances. If the current monthly trend continues this year, that number is expected to reach only about 3,300." (CCAA)

The market outlook by Airbus and Boeing points to an insufficient number of trained pilots to meet market demand worldwide. The fact that other jurisdictions are experiencing the same loss of new talent to other occupations can only further add to the problem in Canada as the demand from abroad for Canadian pilots will increase. Canadian pilots are sought after by foreign airlines due to the robust training provided by Canadian flights schools.

Canadian carriers of all types are finding it increasingly difficult to find qualified and experienced pilots. Attracting and retaining pilots to remote locations and smaller communities in all provinces and territories is proving to be more and more challenging.

The high cost of training, the limited availability of financial aid, and the relatively low wages paid to new low time pilots is making our industry less and less appealing to youth looking for a career path. The aviation industry is also having a difficult time attracting women and visible minorities. This problem must be addressed urgently as we are depriving ourselves of a significant pool of potential recruits.

Although the problem is most severe with pilots, other trades in our industry are finding it just as difficult to attract newcomers. Aircraft maintenance professionals and flight attendants also see demand exceeding supply.

As if the situation was not already alarming enough, new flight and duty rules recently tabled by Transport Canada will only increase the demand for pilots and exasperate the shortage. Industry has been waving a huge flag before the authorities to point out that their new rules will jeopardize safety rather than increase it. It is unacceptable that new rules, aimed at augmenting safety, could have the reverse effect because they are putting pressure on industry to rely on less experienced pilots to meet the market demand.

The small and regional carriers are already suffering from the growing demand for pilots, often compromising their own operation as pilots are swept away faster than they can be trained. Flight training organizations are finding it increasingly challenging to retain flight instructors as they are also the target of the larger airlines in dire need of experienced pilots.

The Government needs to appreciate the importance of the looming crisis and work with air carriers, flight training organizations, and the Education Departments across Canada to help attract sufficient pilots and maintenance personnel to preserve our current level of service in Canada.

ATAC will be relentless in the pursuit of innovative solutions in addressing this issue and will continue its lobbying and awareness campaigns in an effort to help meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

John McKenna
President and CEO

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