



Engine switch puts back Mi-38 helicopter THIS WEEK P8

PROCUREMENT STEPHEN TRIMBLE SEATTLE

US Army studying turboprops in new twist for ACS tale

Shift from jets would shake up bidding for surveillance fleet

The US Army is considering shifting to turboprop aircraft for its next-generation aerial common sensor (ACS) fleet, potentially reversing a key focus of its acquisition strategy after a star-crossed, six-year pursuit of jets, according to industry sources.

The potential change has been disclosed during the last three weeks in private notices and informal discussions to several potential ACS suppliers, according to multiple industry sources.

Specifically, the army in late April issued a request for information seeking basic knowledge about how turboprop aircraft could support a changed vision for the ACS mission, with potential payload sizes ranging from 2,265kg (5,000lb) to 9,075kg.

On 15 May, Alenia confirmed that it responded to the army's notice by proposing two aircraft: the ATR 42 and the C-27J. The US Army has already ordered the latter, although its C-27Js are proposed to be transferred to the US Air Force next year. A special mission variant of the ATR 42, meanwhile, is also in service as a maritime patrol aircraft with the Italian coast guard and customs and border patrol agencies.

Kevin Hopkins, Raytheon's lead executive for the ACS competition, says that military variants of the Beechcraft King Air 350, Bombardier Dash 8 Q400 and EADS Casa turboprops also could qualify for the same role.

"Turboprop-based [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] is known very well to us," Hopkins says.

Such a shift would shake up the teams of bidders that have been pursuing the contract for most of the last decade. Until recently, the army had decided to pursue a business jet-sized platform, with the Bombardier Global Express XRS and Gulfstream G550 as the leading contenders.

Last year, systems integrators formed teams, with Northrop Grumman partnering L-3 Communications and Boeing signing a non-exclusive agreement with Gulfstream. Northrop says it remains interested in ACS.

The ACS contract was originally awarded in 2004 to a Lockheed/Embraer team, but the deal was cancelled in January 2006 after the sensor payload outgrew the capacity of the ERJ-145 regional jet. ■

See Comment P5



Designers need standards guidance to move beyond the concept stage

REGULATIONS MAX KINGSLEY-JONES HAMBURG

Airbus, engine makers ask for open rotor clarity

Airbus has joined forces with engine manufacturers to seek clarification from certification authorities on the likely airworthiness requirements for open-rotor-powered airliners.

Several engine manufacturers are exploring open rotor engine designs as a possible way to deliver a step-change in operating economics for future airliners. However, Airbus's powerplant chief, Sébastien Remy, wants more clarity from the European Aviation Safety Agency and the US Federal Aviation Administration on certification requirements, to prevent designers heading down blind alleys.

"Open rotor [powered aircraft designs] are concepts and do not exist so are not covered by any certification rules, per se," he says.

"It is an area that we are ad-

ressing with the engine manufacturers to propose to the airworthiness authorities [what requirements they will set] to certify these types of machines."

While open-rotor airliner configurations have been studied for many years, there are questions about likely airworthiness rules in areas such as engine layout and blade containment.

Remy says that it is important that "we understand perfectly what kind of rules we have to follow" to ensure that any designs being evaluated would be viable from an airworthiness standpoint.

He adds that the lack of airworthiness benchmarks means "there is currently some uncertainty about the true performance of these new concepts". ■



How might open rotors cut aviation emissions? See flightglobal.com/environment



The main fuselage was gutted by fire after crashing into a paddy field

ACCIDENT

Death toll nears treble figures in Indonesian L100-30 airbase crash

At least 98 people were killed when this Lockheed L100-30 operated by the Indonesian military crashed while preparing to land at Iswahyudi airbase in Magetan regency about 160km (85nm) from Yogyakarta in east Java on 20 May.

The death toll included some people on the ground when the

aircraft (A-1325) and carrying 98 passengers and 14 crew, crashed into a paddy field and low-rise brick buildings next to a forest and came to rest upside down. The aircraft's main fuselage was gutted by fire.

Some of the survivors of the accident are said to have been seriously injured. ■