

U.S. Executive Order Opens Door For Maintenance Manual Discussion



A recently issued executive order from U.S. President Joe Biden could help revive efforts by some in the aviation maintenance community to increase access to manuals and other service information.

The debate over instructions for continued airworthiness (ICA) – or the information operators need to ensure they can maintain their aircraft and engines – dates back several decades. On one side are manufacturers that spend a lot of money to develop their products, a group that hopes to recoup at least some of that investment through aftermarket services. On the other hand, independent maintenance providers want to serve their customers and, in some cases, expand their businesses by adding new capabilities.

Linking the two are seemingly straightforward regulatory requirements that call for design approval holders to “make available” all information that is essential to continued airworthiness – think maintenance manuals – to both customers and anyone else required to comply with aviation regulations. But defining “make available” has not been easy, given that expensive licenses seen as reasonable by a manufacturer are considered onerous by an independent repair shop.

Even when the ICA regulations are being violated, the victims may not have recourse. Piedmont Propulsion Systems learned this the hard way when a U.S. court ruled that Hamilton Sundstrand was in violation of FAA regulations by withholding certain propeller repair information. But the court also determined that agencies had no obligation to enforce their own rules. Piedmont, a First Aviation Services subsidiary, eventually received what it sought from

Hamilton, now part of Raytheon Technologies, paving the way for Piedmont to become the first independent shop to offer full, major 568F propeller support, including blade compression-wrap removal and reapplication.

But stories like Piedmont's are too infrequent, according to the Aeronautical Repair Station Association (ARSA). So the association, long the leading voice calling for more transparent and consistent application of ICA regulations, is again speaking up and pointing to Biden's "Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy".

The order calls on agencies to form working groups, look at their rules and identify areas where competition is being limited. In a July 30 letter to Transportation Department Secretary Pete Buttigieg and FAA Administrator Steve Dickson, ARSA called on the Transportation Department working group to include ICA on its list of issues.

"We urge you to ensure this issue is addressed by the [Transportation Department] competition working group directed by the [order] and that ending FAA's inconsistent enforcement of ICA rules is part of the implementation plan," ARSA Executive Vice President Christian Klein wrote.

The Biden order calls out several issues of concern – most of them linked to passenger issues, such as getting refunds or having clear information on how much their tickets and ancillary add-ons will cost. But a few industry-specific issues are noted as well, including supporting "airport development" and fostering advanced air mobility development.

ARSA is hopeful that fixing the machines that make much of this possible will make a worthy addition to the working group's tasks.