

Essential Air Service

Posted by Jeff Helmericks on 6/14/2020, 2:29 pm

I definitely don't have a dog in this fight, and have nothing to gain by supporting one company over another. Over the past decade I have probably made over 500 trips to and from McGrath in everything from a small single engine to multi-engine turbine. Only once was I not in the pilot's seat and then I was in one of the Forestry planes, so about the only time I would be riding a commercial flight is if I break down; so please take my comments only from a business and pilot's perspective.

As nice as it would be to ride a "big" plane to and from Anchorage, I don't see it happening, at least not unless we get another 135 operator based in McGrath. When we had Tanana Air bringing people in from the surrounding area to fill seats a plane such as the Saab 340, or the Dash 8 made economic sense. After the departure of that "feeder" to fill seats the big plane is a money loser for too much of the year.

So where does that realistically leave us? I have heard comments that the notion of riding a single engine airplane such as the PC-12 makes some folks nervous and would prefer even a Navajo because it has two engines. Now don't get me wrong the Navajo is a good plane, even more so 36+ years ago when they stopped making them... If safety is your concern there simply in no comparison between a piston and turbine powered airplane, no matter how many engines it has. As an example, if you took a PC-12 flight to and from Anchorage every day, on average it would take about 342 years before you could expect to experience an engine failure. Even then due to the higher cruise altitude afforded by being pressurized, odds are you would be within gliding distance of an airport.

Another safety benefit to and pressurized aircraft is the ability to fly above most the weather and ice as you cross the Alaska Range. Even during the summer months icing is a concern anytime you are above 6-8,000' and the minimum altitude to cross the Alaska Range is around 10,000. Another advantage to turbine power is an abundance of cabin heat. Piston twins are notoriously cold; I have made many flights where I ended up wearing my emergency gear while in the air.

My pick of the present list of companies? That's easy AAT. They are already serving MCG and are a known quantity. AAT has the right planes to continue providing reliable and safe service to a community the size of McGrath. From what I see the planes are new and well maintained. As a company AAT appears to be on good financial footing simply by the fact they pay their bills promptly, something the Ravn, Hageland, ERA, or whatever else they called themselves, never did.

Roll the dice, or go with an outfit we know will continue to do the job; for me the choice is easy.

Re: Essential Air Service

Posted by Jeff Helmericks on 6/14/2020, 3:26 pm, in reply to "[Re: Essential Air Service](#)"

Reminds me of the saying "It is easier to fool someone than to convince someone they have been fooled"

Now, back to the engine that powers the PC-12 and the Caravan:

"The Pratt & Whitney Canada PT6 is a turboprop aircraft engine produced by Pratt & Whitney Canada. Its design was started in 1958, it first ran in February 1960, first flew on 30 May 1961, entered service in 1964 and has been continuously updated since. It consists of two basic sections: a gas generator with accessory gearbox and a free power turbine with reduction gearbox, and is often seemingly mounted backwards in an aircraft in so far as the intake is at the rear and the exhaust at the front. Many variants of the PT6 have been produced, not only as turboprops but also for helicopters, land vehicles, hovercraft, boats, as auxiliary power units and for industrial uses. By November 2015, 51,000 had been produced, had logged 400 million flight hours from 1963 to 2016. It is known for its reliability with an in-flight shutdown rate of 1 per 651,126 hours in 2016."

Hmmm... Seems pretty good to me, wish Lycoming/Continental could claim stats like that!! 😊

Re: Essential Air Service

Posted by Richard A. on 6/14/2020, 4:18 pm, in reply to "[Re: Essential Air Service](#)"

Good write up Jeff and our vote is also for A.A.T. they are a great bunch of people and provide the best customer service Verdene and myself have encountered in over 50 years of flying!

Why I support AAT

Posted by Brad on 6/12/2020, 9:49 pm, in reply to "[My take on EAS](#)"

A agree with the sentiment that what's best for McGrath is ultimately what I should support. And there seem to be two big areas of concern when deciding what's best, safety and economics.

With regards to safety, I'm no expert. But I do know how to talk with and read experts. At the end of the day, to me, it's a numbers game. And all the data and articles and mechanics I've interacted with same the same thing, the King Air and the Pilatus have excellent safety ratings. "It's a matter of time" is a true statement, but one that statistically applies equally to both planes. Even the article cited says, "Since their start of production, single-engine turboprops have not had a single fatality due to engine failure." Anyways, just saying that when I consider filling a plane with my family (Now you know which Brad this is) safety is #1. And I'd climb in either aircraft with as much confidence.

Regarding economics, I'll add one more consideration I think most would agree with but should be stated. What's best for McGrath should be what's best for the company. I mean that in two ways. First, I'd hope we would want whatever system we have in place here, to be fair and beneficial for everyone, us and the airline. This is one of the first things I learned moving here. The market is small, and for the most part, we watch out for each other. I can't see how competing companies is not just best, but even good for those companies.

Which brings up my last point. What's best for McGrath is what's best for the company. I want a company to survive healthily, so as to facilitate consistency. Yes, in most situations, a monopoly is less than ideal. But, from the perspective of this new-comer, AAT has built a reputation which leads me to believe they can handle that responsibility/privilege (Hoping I don't eat my words, AAT).

So, I support AAT, for the same reasons some of my neighbors don't. Because I think it would be best for McGrath.