

## Private Jets Push Limit on Luxury Thanks to FAA: Cindy Skrzycki

By Cindy Skrzycki



Bombardier Global Express XRS private jet

July 24 (Bloomberg) -- As commercial airline passengers face another summer of crowds, delays and missed connections, the owners of private jets can look forward to federal regulators' help in making their flights more comfortable and stylish.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration proposed for the first time on July 13 new rules that would allow safety criteria for jets operated for private use to be less stringent than those for commercial airliners.

The proposal, which was pushed by the General Aviation Manufacturers Association, comes as sales of luxury jets of all sizes have more than doubled to \$16.5 billion since 1988.

"The sky is the limit," said Jeff Bosque, president of Associated Air Center in Dallas, which designs and builds interiors for well-heeled entrepreneurs, heads of state and just plain rich owners of private aircraft made by Boeing Co., Airbus SAS and other companies. Clients often bring personal designers who worked on their residences or yachts.

They are "looking for a flying home," Bosque said.

The current interior cabin rules were made with the safety of commercial passengers in mind, not personal aircraft, where there are fewer people and trips involved. The new rule wouldn't apply to companies that lease or otherwise make money operating business jets.

Until now, VIP air travelers have had to seek exemptions, often a long and costly process, when they wanted to upgrade jet interiors with such amenities as large bedrooms; bathing facilities; big dining areas with LCD lighting -- or spiral staircases.

75 Exemptions

Alison Duquette, a spokeswoman for the FAA, said the agency has issued 75 exemptions to its cabin-interior rules during the last decade.

Sometimes, the answer is no. The agency denied a request for a glass disco dance floor in a Boeing 777-200; it also has declined to allow chandeliers.

Though the FAA has had this idea on the back burner since 2001, the big push came from the aviation makers' association. The Washington-based trade group represents 60 companies that manufacture general aviation aircraft, including Chicago-based Boeing, Bombardier Aerospace of Montreal and Cessna Aircraft Co. of Wichita, Kansas.

"Now, business jets seating six or seven have the same standards as commercial planes," said Walter Desrosier, vice president of engineering and maintenance for GAMA.

The group sent the FAA a 46-page letter in 2003, asking for changes to rules covering such issues as flight attendants, exits, aisles, side-facing seats, placards and signs, and glass partitions and mirrors.

#### A New Way

Realizing that the exemption process was taking too much time and resources, the agency proposed the new way to certify personal aircraft.

James Butler, chief executive officer of Shaircraft Solutions LLC in Bethesda, Maryland, which advises clients on private air travel, said most of them want smaller aircraft and worry more about Internet connectivity in the air than 10-course meals.

Still, there is a robust high-end.

Boeing Business Services, a joint venture between Boeing and General Electric Co., reports the price for its largest business jet, the BBJ3, is \$67 million. That's without a paint job or furnished interior. Because of demand, the company can't start building yours -- which is the size of a 737 airliner -- until 2011.

Since Boeing started its business line in 1998, it has delivered 104 jets to customers such as Miami Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga, the South African Air Force, and the government of India, according to spokeswoman Vicki Ray.

**\$153 Million 787**

About a third of the orders are from the Middle East, and 44 percent are placed by individuals. Ray said that in May Boeing sold a 787 VIP, list price \$153 million, to Hong Kong billionaire and real estate tycoon Joseph Lau. Its ultra-large cabin can accommodate a loft on its second floor, a spiral staircase and high ceilings.

Airbus Corporate Jet offers a competitor that costs \$55 million. A Gulfstream Aerospace G550 is about \$46 million, fully furnished, though with no bathtub or shower. A Bombardier Global Express XRS is in the same price range.

Sales of high-end business jets, which climbed from 515 in 1998 to 885 last year, have created a thriving business in interior design. The installation of beyond-your-imagination cabins has blossomed, with tabs that industry experts say can range from \$10 million to \$40 million or more.

## Lavish Loos

This can include lavish loos, staterooms, meeting rooms with computers and faxes, security systems, dishwashers, gourmet cooking areas, and separate rooms for the nanny and bodyguard.

The FAA proposal covers many of the design and safety issues that come up repeatedly, and areas where there now are no rules, such as for cooktops and advanced electronics.

The agency figures jet owners will save about \$725,000 per plane if they follow the new rule, rather than file for a separate exemption.

The FAA proposes marginally reducing the level of safety by requiring hand grips just in aisles.

Interior doors to partition the planes ``are one of the most desired features because of the enhanced privacy and noise isolation" they provide, the agency said, and are ``regarded as paramount to an acceptable luxury interior."

Doors are allowed if they remain open during takeoff and landing and are ``frangible," or easy to break, so no one would be trapped.

## 'Luxury Interiors'

Private jet owners ``do not want to be restricted in their choice of materials for their luxury interiors" by flammability rules, which now require commercial airline passengers to be evacuated within 90 seconds. These rules will be waived, the FAA said, as long as passengers can get out in 45 seconds. That allows use of such favored fabrics as mohair, suede and tapestries for walls and ceilings.

The current interior safety rules didn't ``envision" cooktops, the agency said. It proposes allowing the use of guards on pots and pans and spill trays to lessen the risk of fire and dripping liquids on the floor.

The general aviation trade group said a new rule would be a welcome change from the need to seek exemptions. ``If we can get them down in a rule, we can work to those published standards," said Desrosier of GAMA.

Besides, he added, there will still be plenty of luxuries that remain off-limits for air travel. Hot tubs, for instance, he said. ``You can't put a seat belt on it."