

Trans States

Pilots Enjoy Growth, Positive Change in 2013

By John Perkinson
Staff Writer

After a period of challenges following the economic downturn of 2008, the pilots of Trans States Airlines have witnessed positive change at their airline in recent years. This Embraer EMB-145 operator has experienced growth at a time when much of the 50-seat market remains sluggish, and the relationship between the pilots and management continues to improve.

"We have added seven planes to our fleet and are hiring new pilots every month," says Capt. Cliff Simmons, the pilots' Master Executive Council (MEC) chairman. "We are halfway through a four-year labor contract, and we're routinely communicating with the company to ensure that we address concerns that arise. Things aren't perfect, but there's a noticeable difference in the way we're doing business."

Management contract-compliance issues continue to surface, but the pilots have been quick to respond to these with notable success. "Management has been pretty good about working with us to solve problems before they become grievances," Simmons says.

For example, the pilots and management recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to clarify the pilots' trip cancellation policy negotiated in the last contract. Pilots had expressed concerns about inconsistent application of cancellation pay, so the MEC drafted the MOU to ensure that those affected receive the appropriate credit

and in a uniform manner.

One of the biggest challenges for Trans States flight operations has been preparing for the new Part 117 flight-time and duty-time (FT/DT) rules, slated to go into effect on Jan. 4, 2014. Trans States received an exemption for an early transition date of Dec. 29, 2013. Regarding the transition, the MEC has drafted a letter of agreement (LOA) that adds a long-call reserve option, which will provide some added schedule flexibility for both the pilots and management. The LOA amends the method of assigning trips to reserves, converting a reverse-seniority system into a "bucket" system that matches reserve day availability with trip length.

Pointing to the specifics of the rule change and new rest standards, Simmons says, "Making adjustments for FT/DT changes has also accelerated the company's hiring efforts." Trans States has hired more than 150 pilots in the last year and a half, and classes are currently planned through the first part of 2014.

Trans States, which operates United Express and US Airways Express flights, has been working on a pilot preferential bidding system, and the pilots have been meeting with the company periodically to discuss implementation. Once the two sides come to terms, they will need to incorporate the language in an LOA. However, this effort has been placed on a back burner while the airline concentrates on transitioning to the new FT/DT rules.

Trans States pilots continue to work closely with

their peers at other airlines through the ALPA Fee for Departure Committee and the US Airways Express Pilots Alliance. These groups provide a collaborative forum for pilots of similar operations to share what's happening at their airlines. Simmons stresses, "The information exchange and support are invaluable, regardless of whether we are in contract negotiations or not."

Looking ahead to 2015, the pilots' contract contains a provision to extend the amendable date by two years if Trans States acquires Mitsubishi regional jets by August of that year. Trans States Holdings, the airline's parent company, signed a deal with the Mitsubishi Aircraft Corporation several years ago for 100 next-generation Mitsubishi jets (50 orders, 50 options). However, the Japanese airframe manufacturer has faced some design and certification delays, and it remains to be seen if the company can meet this deadline.

Nonetheless, Trans States management's new willingness to communicate and its apparent interest in addressing concerns before they become larger problems have clearly facilitated a more positive work environment, and Trans States pilots are doing all that they can to make sure this trend continues.

Founded in 1982 as Resort Air, Trans States is the fifth-largest privately held regional airline in the United States. Trans States Airlines, Compass Airlines, and GoJet Airlines are owned by Trans States Holdings. 



An EMB-145 parked under a double rainbow at Chicago O'Hare International Airport.

PHOTO BY KATE SCHAEFER, TRANS STATES FLIGHT ATTENDANT

TSA at a Glance

Pilots joined ALPA: 1994

Founded: 1982

Number of pilots: 352

Headquarters: Bridgeton, Mo.

Operations: Approximately 175 daily flights serving 39 cities as a United Express and a US Airways Express carrier

Pilot domiciles: St. Louis, Mo., and Dulles, Va.

Fleet: 30 EMB-145s