# Committee Corner

News from ALPA's Committees

## In Search of the Holy Grail

### Committee considers ways to boost member participation.

ALPA's Special Representational Structural Review Committee (SRSRC) has been studying ways to increase member participation at local council meetings. Recent concerns over lack of participation prompted the study, which seeks to improve communication between the union's members and their local council representatives.

While ALPA has no hard-and-fast statistics about participation, some councils have reported less than satisfactory attendance at meetings. Some feel that the situation has contributed to a disconnect between members and their representatives.

"Unfortunately, a minority of members can really have a significant influence on the decision-making process," says Capt. Paul Rice, ALPA's vice-president–administration/secretary, who works closely with the SRSRC on policy issues. "Getting an accurate reflection of the will of a pilot group can be very difficult when so few members show up at meetings."

But just what makes a successful meeting? How can local councils create an open and unifying forum in which members can discuss and debate issues of importance?

The problem of low member participation is one that the Association has studied several times throughout its 75-year history—and is one that nearly every association and union faces in one form or another. For ALPA, the issue is once again front and center because recent advances in communications technology have generated new ways for members and their elected representatives to interact.

The SRSRC, a presidential committee that deals with structure and governance issues for the Association, continually reviews ALPA's *Constitution and By-Laws* and Association policies, occasionally recommending updates to ALPA governing bodies. ALPA's October 2005 Executive Board asked the Committee to look into the member participation issue.

"If you want to improve attendance, meetings have to be interesting as well as convenient," says First Officer Mike Geer (Delta), SRSRC chairman and an ALPA executive vice-president. "If you're just asking members to come and rehash old business, most of them aren't going to be interested. But if the speakers are interesting, and the issues are relevant, members will be much more likely to show up."

Capt. Derek Martin (FedEx) is also an SRSR Committee member, and Capt. Terry Fenningham (Independence) served on the Committee before his airline folded.

The Committee has been investigating three specific areas relating to member participation: educating members about various ways they can communicate with their council representatives, the feasibility of conducting electronic "town hall" meetings, and the possibility of changing the frequency requirement for meetings.

#### Enhancing communication

"We need to hear from our members through a variety of sources so that no single source drives the process," says F/O Geer. "Unfortunately, it's not unusual for a council resolution to pass, and then subsequent polling to indicate that the decision did not reflect the will of the majority of members."

Council resolutions are not binding on council representatives, which means that if circumstances change or additional information becomes available, a representative can choose to vote another way. The resolution, while expressing the will of the people attending a meeting, is not the only way to provide input.

"Phone calls and e-mail messages to council reps, as well as surveys and polls, are all great methods for members to use to voice their opinions," says F/O Geer. "Members need to participate and to take advantage of the communication channels that work best for them."

#### Electronic town halls

Council meetings can be very important to a pilot group because they encourage dialogue and debate. Some have suggested that broadcasting meetings electronically over the Internet might be a good way to encourage participation. However, many technical and legal problems associated with electronic meetings complicate a rapid transition to such a model.

"For a number of reasons, electronic meetings don't work easily within the ALPA structure," says F/O Geer. "The concept looks attractive, but it poses some real challenges for us with regard to validating votes, authorizing participation, and protecting members."

Council meetings are limited to members in good stand-

## Special Representational Structural Review Committee

## ALPA Leadership Conference


PHOTOS: JOCELYN AUGUSTINO

Capt. Paul Rice (above right) welcomes nearly 90 elected pilot representatives (above and right) gathered for the ALPA Leadership Conference in ALPA's offices in Herndon, Va.

ing. But—as numerous federal agencies, many global corporations, and hoards of criminals can attest—verifying someone's identity over the Internet can be very difficult. The SRSRC believes that exposing members to that kind of risk is dangerous and unnecessary.

"Within the safe confines of a local council meeting, debate, discussion, dissension, and democracy all prevail—because you know who's in the room and no one is making a verbatim recording of the meeting," says Capt. Rice. "If you go electronic—say with streaming video—you create a record that can be easily duplicated. A video of a local council meeting making its way into a public forum could be disastrous and, in fact, has been at another union within the AFL-CIO. You certainly wouldn't want something you said in a council meeting to be taken out of context and held against you by your employer or the general public."

Additionally, the Committee questions whether electronic participation is the ideal way to solve the low participation riddle. The recent widely publicized ALPA Age 60 electronic survey generated only 37.6 percent participation. Of the approximately 50,500 ALPA members who were eligible to take part in the survey, only about 19,000 responded. While sophisticated sampling could adjust the results scientifically, that is science, not democracy.

### Frequency of meetings

The Committee is also considering whether to recommend changing the frequency requirements for holding council meetings. ALPA's *Constitution and By-Laws* require that local councils meet at least once every 3 months. But just how frequently do members need to meet with their representatives for ALPA to be an effective organization, and how would changing the number of required meetings affect participation? Are four meetings a year enough, or too many?

"Some local councils have as many as ten meetings per year," says Capt. Rice. "Because the practice is ingrained in the local culture of that council, leaders and members may not realize that they don't have to meet that often. When the local council meeting was, by far, the prominent way to communicate with local leaders, monthly meetings made sense. Now, in the age of the Internet and cell phones, members have many legitimate ways to communicate their desires to their local leaders."

Ironically, despite low attendance at meetings, the SRSRC has found that participation rates are really not any lower now than in the past. In fact, history suggests that attendance at local council meetings has remained generally low on average, although participation may increase when controversial issues are being considered.

"In 1955, local council attendance was basically the same as it is today," says Capt. Rice. "A very small percentage of members who are activists show up consistently at local council meetings. It's always been that way, and likely always will. What needs to change is the involvement of members who cannot, for whatever reason, attend their local council meetings."

"There is no harder ALPA job than being a local council representative," says F/O Geer. "Our goal is to help local council reps and members figure out the best way to communicate with one another so that members can make their desires known and receive effective representation within the union."

The SRSRC will present its findings to ALPA's May 2006 Executive Board.—*Gavin Francis, Staff Writer*

# ALPA Works with Government and Industry on Neutralizing the MANPADS Threat

*Adapted from the second in a series of "white papers" on airline security that ALPA's National Security Committee has issued.*

ALPA first recognized the threat that man-portable air defense systems (shoulder-mounted antiaircraft missiles, or MANPADS) posed to airliners shortly after the Afghan/Soviet conflict of 1979–1989. The lack of accountability for U.S.-supplied Stingers and the subsequent black-market availability of those missiles gave terrorists, whether motivated by politics or narcotics, the ability to attack aircraft with a standoff "shoot and scoot" capability. ALPA was one of the first organizations to announce and actively promote to government and law enforcement agencies its concerns about this emerging threat.

The perception of a MANPADS threat to airlines increased dramatically after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. As of early 2006, all MANPADS attacks on airliners have occurred in war zones or regions of active conflict and terrorism. The United States, however, remains at risk because of its current global military and political activities; as a result, the potential MANPADS threat to airliners is very real.

## Conclusions

ALPA's National Security Committee has reached the following conclusions about MANPADS:

(1) The MANPADS threat is real, but the actual risk of a catastrophic hit on transport-category aircraft is probably lower than is commonly believed.


(2) Other types of standoff weapons pose at least as great a threat as MANPADS, particularly during ground operations.

(3) Equipping all airliners with counter-MANPADS systems will not provide defense against other types of standoff weapons.

(4) Airliners could be "hardened" against MANPADS attacks by making them less susceptible to loss of flight controls. This could be done by using such devices as hydraulic fuse plugs to prevent loss of all hydraulic fluid and subsequent loss of control.

(5) NASA has developed and successfully tested a propulsion-controlled aircraft (PCA) system that could be used to safely fly and land an FMS/FADEC-equipped airplane whose flight controls have been damaged or incapacitated.

(6) The MANPADS threat to airlines is a threat to national security; therefore, the U.S. government should bear the cost of developing counter-MANPADS technology.

(7) The Transportation Security Administration and the FAA have not provided guidance to flightcrew members on how to deal with a warning of a MANPADS launch, nor explained their plan to deal with airspace threatened by a MANPADS launch.

(8) When counter-MANPADS systems become effective, affordable, and available, and the federal government agrees to pay for installing them on U.S. airliners, that option should be considered.

## ALPA National Security Committee

## Recommendations

ALPA's NSC has developed recommendations in three broad areas—prevention, defense, and response.

To prevent or reduce the likelihood of attacks, the government should use other countermeasures, such as gathering intelligence, using surveillance, disrupting terrorist plans, and adopting nonproliferation measures to counter all types of standoff threats, including MANPADS. On the local level, airports, municipalities, and law enforcement organizations should work to prevent attacks with MANPADS and other types of standoff weapons by keeping areas around major airports under surveillance. Also, to deter terrorists, the government and industry should inform the public of measures being undertaken to counter MANPADS, perhaps using neighborhood "area watch" programs like those around British airports.

Regarding defense against MANPADS, the Department of Homeland Security should proceed with its program to test existing counter-MANPADS technologies, with the active involvement of ALPA and other affected stakeholders. Moreover, the DHS should expand its R&D program to develop advanced-technology, alternative counter-MANPADS systems that are highly effective and have low acquisition and maintenance costs, and that create little or no drag.

Airliners should be made less susceptible to loss of flight controls. They should be equipped with hydraulic fuse plugs and other enhancements to prevent loss of hydraulic power as the result of a MANPADS attack. The federal government should fund, and the FAA should develop and certify, the PCA system for airliners. This system, which would cost a fraction of the potential expense of

electronic MANPADS countermeasures, would allow flight crews to fly the airplane to a safe landing after total or partial failure of flight control system components.

If the DHS test program leads to mandated installation of counter-MANPADS systems on airliners, the U.S. government should buy, install, and maintain the systems. Such systems must be totally automated and require no intervention by flight crews to function correctly.

To read the unabridged "white paper," visit ALPA's website, www.alpa.org.

The TSA and the FAA should establish clearly defined common terminology for flightcrew response to a MANPADS threat alert, and define plans to direct pilots away from airspace threatened by a missile or any form of a ground-based weapon attack.

To improve airlines' response to MANPADS attacks, the U.S. government should test aircraft vulnerability to MANPADS hits, and manufacturers should use that information to develop enhancements to reduce the vulnerability of existing and future airliners. Meanwhile, airlines should amend their flight-training curricula to instruct flight crews on planning for a MANPADS attack, on alternate airport considerations in the event of an actual hit, and on emergency flight procedures, particularly for cases in which flight control by conventional means is lost or impaired. ALPA strongly supports manufacturers' and aviation authorities' efforts to develop PCA control techniques for each airliner model. Airlines should provide adequate training for flight crews so that they can use PCA techniques to land safely.

A national alert system should be established to deal with a significant attack. The system would provide for communicating emergency information between government agencies, ATC facilities, flight crews, airline security entities, and other appropriate recipients.

Finally, the federal government and the airline industry should develop a crisis management plan to provide guidance for safely and securely operating the U.S. air transportation system after a MANPADS attack.

## Government response to MANPADS threat

The DHS, in partnership with other federal agencies, is taking an aggressive approach to counter the threat of shoulder-fired missiles attacks against airliners. The DHS is studying the viability of adapting existing military technology to airline use.

In January 2004, the DHS winnowed the original group of 24 potential contractors to just three—BAE Systems, Northrop Grumman, and United Airlines. In August 2004, the DHS eliminated the United Airlines team and began an 18-month Phase II evaluation with BAE Systems and Northrop Grumman vying for the final contract. After Phase II is completed, the DHS will recommend to the administration and Congress the best solution to defend airliners against MANPADS.

DHS leaders appear to be committed to working with key stakeholders and have solicited input through scheduled executive-level meetings and briefings with aviation industry representatives.

## ALPA response to the MANPADS threat

The ALPA National Security Committee (NSC) participates in counter-MANPADS efforts and focuses on both air- and ground-based defensive activities. ALPA initially established its own internal Counter-MANPADS Task Force, which consisted of pilots and staff from the aviation safety and aviation security disciplines, but later chose to integrate the effort into the ALPA NSC.

The NSC coordinates its efforts with such DHS entities as the Science and Technology Directorate and the Aircraft Protection Programs Office (Systems Engineering and Development). The NSC also monitors research and development and current threat activity, and provides advice and recommendations to the airline and defense industries from an operational perspective. The NSC frequently attends staff- and executive-level meetings that the DHS, the TSA, the Department of Defense, Boeing, and Airbus convene.


AIR LINE PILOT FILE PHOTO

The November 2003 MANPADS attack on a DHL A300 in Iraq was a reminder that the threat is real, but also that a catastrophic result from a MANPADS shot is not a given.

The NSC has found shortcomings in TSA and FAA procedures regarding MANPADS attacks. Neither the TSA nor the FAA have published guidance to flightcrew members on how to deal with a MANPADS warning nor have they provided any information on how they expect to clear air traffic from endangered airspace. The NSC seeks to gain more information and, if requested, to help federal authorities establish comprehensive policies and procedures to deal with this potential scenario.