

Support for the Proposal

One commenter concurs with the proposed AD.

Request To Remove Terminating Action

Two commenters request that we remove paragraphs (f) and (g) of the proposed AD. Those paragraphs would require replacing the numbers 3 and 6 and numbers 4 and 5 torque tube assemblies. Both commenters state that these replacements would be costly and burdensome to operators of the affected airplanes. One of the commenters, the airplane manufacturer, presents data that show that there have been no reported cases of trailing edge flap skew since the release of the original issue of Boeing Alert Service Bulletin 757-27A0125 on July 17, 1997. The commenter states that these data show that the proposed inspections are adequate to ensure the safety of the airplane fleet.

We partially concur with the commenters' request. We agree that it is not necessary to mandate replacement of the torque tube assemblies at this time. We consider three criteria for those situations where repetitive inspections may be permitted to continue indefinitely, even though a positive fix to the problem exists: (1) The area is easily accessible, (2) the damage is easily detectable, and (3) the consequences of the damage are not likely to be catastrophic. In consideration of the excessive wear that may occur on torque tube assemblies numbers 3 and 6 and numbers 4 and 5, we have determined that the circumstances meet these three criteria warranting the ability of owners and operators, at their option, to perform continual repetitive inspections.

However, we find that some operators may wish to replace and upgrade the affected torque tube assemblies in lieu of continuing to inspect indefinitely. Thus, we have determined that it is appropriate to leave the replacement of the torque tube assemblies as one option for compliance with this AD. Therefore, we have retained paragraphs (f) and (g) of the proposed AD in this final rule, but we have removed the required compliance times from those paragraphs. In addition, we have revised the Cost Impact section of the preamble of this AD to show the terminating modifications as optional.

Request To Revise Compliance Times for Initial Inspections

Two commenters request that we extend the compliance time for certain initial inspections that would be required by the proposed AD. One

commenter requests that we revise the initial compliance time for paragraphs (c) and (e) of the proposed AD from the latest of 3,000 total flight cycles, 24 months after the airplane's date of manufacture, and 18 months after the effective date of the AD, to the later of 24 months and a certain flight-cycle limit (e.g., 3,000 flight cycles) after the effective date of the AD. The second commenter requests that we revise the initial compliance time to not less than 24 months after the effective date of the AD. (This commenter does not specify to which paragraphs its request is intended to apply.) The second commenter states that its data do not support the proposed inspection timetable with respect to total flight cycles or calendar time since date of manufacture. It contends that wear is a function of cycles and should be free of calendar restriction. Both commenters are seeking an extension of the compliance time so that it will coincide with their approved "C"-check interval.

We concur with the commenters' request. The original intent of the 18-month compliance option in paragraphs (b)(2), (c), and (e) of the proposed AD was that it would coincide with "C"-check intervals for the majority of operators. This did not take into consideration that certain freighter configurations of Model 757-200 series airplanes have a "C"-check interval of 24 months. Thus, we have revised paragraphs (b)(2), (c), and (e) of this AD to require accomplishment of the initial inspections associated with those paragraphs prior to the accumulation of 3,000 total flight cycles, or within 24 months after the effective date of this AD, whichever is later.

Request To Revise Repetitive Inspection Interval

One commenter requests that we revise the repetitive interval for the inspections of the gearbox assemblies and U-joints specified in paragraph (e) of the proposed AD. The proposed AD specifies that these inspections must be performed every 3,000 flight cycles or 24 months, whichever is first. The commenter requests that we revise the interval to 3,000 flight cycles or 18 months, whichever comes first, to coincide with its "C"-check interval of the earliest of 6,000 flight hours, 3,000 flight cycles, and 18 months. The commenter presents data that show that Model 757 series airplanes typically reach the 18-month limit before they reach the 3,000-flight-cycle limit.

We partially concur with the commenter's request. We do not agree that it is necessary to reduce the intervals to meet the commenter's

intent. Unless a "minimum" inspection interval is specified, operators are always permitted to perform actions earlier than the compliance time specified in an AD. In this case, it is at the operator's discretion to inspect its affected airplanes at the earlier of 18 months or 3,000 flight cycles, if that interval more closely fits the operator's maintenance schedule.

However, for clarification, we find that a change in terminology may be helpful. Therefore, we have revised paragraphs (b), (c), and (e) of this AD to state that repetitive inspections must be accomplished "at intervals not to exceed 3,000 flight cycles or 24 months, whichever comes first."

Request To Clarify Applicability of Inspection Requirement

One commenter points out that one airplane, line number (L/N) 412, was omitted from paragraph (c) of the proposed AD. The commenter states that paragraph (c) should be corrected to identify "airplanes with L/Ns 1 through 580 inclusive, which are identified as Groups 1 and 2 airplanes" in the service bulletin.

We concur. While L/N 412 is included in Groups 1 and 2 in the service bulletin, that L/N was inadvertently omitted from paragraph (c) of the proposed AD. Our intention was for our AD to align with the referenced service bulletin; no differences were noted in the preamble of the proposed AD. Therefore, we have revised paragraph (c) of this AD to include L/N 412. Because the airplane with L/N 412 is not a U.S.-registered airplane, there is no economic impact on the U.S. fleet and, thus, we find that making this change will not increase the scope of the AD or the economic burden associated with the AD.

Request To Give Credit for Previously Accomplished Inspections

One commenter requests that credit be given for inspections accomplished before the effective date of the AD per Revision 1 of the service bulletin. The commenter states that the compliance time for the first inspection should then be 3,000 flight cycles or 24 months from the most recent inspection.

We concur but find that no change is necessary to meet the commenter's intent. We give credit for actions accomplished before the effective date of an AD by means of the phrase "*Compliance: Required as indicated, unless accomplished previously,*" which appears in every AD. As the commenter states, the next inspection must be done within 3,000 flight cycles or 24 months after the most recent