

Fuel for thought

KC-767 supporters tell why aircraft best meets USAF's requirements

By FELIX SANCHEZ

The race to build the KC-X aerial tanker jet is coming down to the wire. The U.S. Air Force wants to begin replacing its aging fleet of more than 500 KC-135 refueling planes with an initial buy of 179 KC-X planes. This work is worth an estimated \$40 billion. But the winner would also be the favorite for the

remaining KC-Y and KC-Z competitions that will ultimately replace the entire tanker fleet. Total potential value: \$100 billion, not to mention additional work for maintenance and upgrades to the jets.

The Air Force now says it likely will select the contract winner—Boeing or the team of European Aeronautic Defense and Space Co. (EADS) and Northrop Grumman—in the first quarter of 2008.

“We have developed a very compelling proposal for the Air Force,” said Mark McGraw, vice president for Tanker Programs. “Our KC-767 would provide unrivaled capability and operational flexibility to the warfighter. It’s the lowest risk to

the Air Force, by far. And for the taxpayer, it represents the absolute best value.”

Boeing has more than 75 years of experience with tankers, having built, modified and supported nearly 2,000 for the Air Force and international customers.

The KC-767 would support more than 44,000 U.S. jobs, and provide work for 300 suppliers in more than 40 states. It would be built with more than 85 percent of its parts assembled or created in the United States. That compares to the competitor’s proposed tanker being built in multiple European countries before being shipped to the United States for final assembly.

But more important than the economic benefits, Boeing’s proposal is best for the customer, company executives said.

“The KC-767’s footprint allows our warfighters to deploy more tankers, get access to more bases that are closer to the fight, put more ‘booms’ (refueling devices) in the sky and be able to offload more fuel,” McGraw said. “We will be able to deploy, with a full load of fuel, from more locations around the world than our competition. That’s a fact.”

At recent events like the Airlift/Tanker Association Conference and the Paris Air Show, executives have countered competitor claims about the KC-30 offering, especially arguments that its offering, because it’s bigger than the KC-767, will meet more of the Air Force’s requirements.

“Bigger is not better,” said Dave Bowman, vice president and general manager of Boeing Global Mobility Systems. “It’s not about being bigger—it’s about meeting the Air Force’s mission requirements. Boeing will deliver the very best tanker—the best for the mission and the best for the money.”

Support for Boeing also has come from groups with technical know-how.

“By all accounts, Boeing’s tanker is the most technologically advanced in the world, and has already gained the lion’s share of international customers based on its advanced fly-by-wire boom design, 21st century cockpit, generous fuel capacity and compact size,” said Gregory J. Junemann, president of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers.

On the other hand, the competition’s proposed tanker is too big to land at many military bases, Junemann said.

Members of the U.S. Congress also have spoken on the KC-767’s behalf. Said Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-Kan.) at Boeing’s Wichita, Kan., site: “When our sons and daughters strap into the next tanker, they need to know it was designed, built and supported by the best in the world.” ■

felix.sanchez@boeing.com



U.S. Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-Kan.) takes the controls of an aerial refueling simulator in the KC-767 Advanced Tanker Trailer after a recent tanker rally in Wichita, Kan. Dennis Struve, Boeing Flight Test Boom Operator, looks on.

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