Two-way Communications between the Flight Crew and the Operator and their Operations Centre

BACKGROUND

Many of the commercial transport aircraft have two-way communications between the flight crew and their operator and Operational Control Centre (OCC). One such system is the Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System (ACARS) which enables the exchange of messages between the flight crew and their maintenance departments and airline dispatch while in flight. There are other ways such as Satellite communication via the SAT Phone and onboard WIFI as well as HF or additional VHF.

However, not all commercial transport aircraft are equipped with such features, and in recent times the necessity of this form of communication has become more and more essential.

The ICAO report from an incident in 2021 highlighted the lack of communications between the flight crew and the operator, as there was no ACARS or alternate system on board. This meant the flight crew took a specific decision without the benefit of guidance from their operator.

The report states:
"Communications could not be established between the flight crew and the OCC during the flight when such communications would have been necessary in line with the operator's procedures. Had such communications between the flight crew and the OCC been established it would have impacted the course of events."

ICAO Annex 6 Part I, International Commercial Air Transport, Chapter 7 Aeroplane Communication, Navigation and Surveillance Equipment states that:

'7.1.1 An aeroplane shall be provided with radio communication equipment capable of:

a) conducting two-way communication for aerodrome control purposes;

b) receiving meteorological information at any time during flight; and

c) conducting two-way communication at any time during flight with at least one aeronautical station and with such other aeronautical stations and on such frequencies as may be prescribed by the appropriate authority.'

POSITION

IFALPA believes that all commercial transport aircraft should be equipped with a dedicated, encrypted, and secure means of communication - separate from normal Air Traffic Control communications – for use between the flight crew and the operator and their OCC (or equivalent function), such as ACARS, onboard WIFI, and/or SAT Phone.