Air Traffic Bulletin

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In this Issue:

Regional Jets (RJ)

/*TR/E/ One of the best practices that many controllers use when communicating with pilots is "Using Specific Traffic Descriptions." When controllers fully describe "traffic" to pilots, it helps pilots find their traffic quickly while listening to controller instructions.

FAA Order JO 7110.65, Air Traffic Control, Chapter 3, Airport Traffic Control—Terminal, Section 8, Paragraph 3-8-1. SEQUENCING/ SPACING APPLICATION, states if air traffic controllers instruct a pilot to follow traffic, they should give the *description and location* of that traffic. For example, if a controller is working at the AirVenture Oshkosh airshow, he or she would give detailed descriptions of traffic to help pilots find the aircraft to follow while monitoring such a vast array of aircraft such as: "Follow the blue-and-red biplane to your right," or "Follow the yellow tail-dragger ahead," or "Follow the silver Citabria on left base." When there is a need for a more definitive description of traffic, the controllers provide it; however, they usually avoid cluttering up frequencies with too much detail.

When working air carriers or commuters, it is usually sufficient to say, "Follow the Boeing Seven Seventeen ahead," or "Follow the Dash-8 to your right." However, imagine working at an air carrier or commuter *hub* airport, and there are long lines of similar jets and commuter aircraft taxiing out for departure. When telling the fifth MD-80 or the fourth regional jet to taxi out and join the mix, the pilot will appreciate some help in identifying traffic.

It is easier to locate the traffic if the controller provides both the aircraft type and the name of the airline. A pilot can then look for a specific paint scheme and the characteristics of that particular aircraft. This might not be so easy if the controller used generic terms such as: "Follow the Boeing Seven Thirty-seven," or "Follow the regional jet," and there are several of each in view. Controllers working similar situations can help pilots by providing more information such as: "Lear Five Charlie Echo, Runway Three Zero, follow the United Express Embraer ahead, and to your left, hold short of Runway Two Five."

Paragraph 3-7-2, TAXI AND GROUND MOVEMENT OPERATIONS, states examples of controller phraseology for use on the airport surface. It does not specifically say that a controller has to give the company name or the aircraft type. In the phraseology, it states to

follow "(*traffic*)." Paragraph 3-1-6, TRAFFIC INFORMATION, subparagraph b, states: "Describe the relative position of traffic in an easy to understand manner, such as "to your right" or "ahead of you." An example provided is: "Traffic, US Air MD-Eighty on downwind leg to your left." This phraseology gives a pilot two specific things to look for—the color scheme of the company, and the shape of the long MD-80 fuselage. Paragraph 2-4-21, DESCRIPTION OF AIRCRAFT TYPES, subparagraph b, Air Carrier: 1. Manufacturer's model or designator further clarifies what is required. Phraseology examples are: "L-Ten-Eleven," "American MD-Eighty, Seven Thirty-seven," and "Boeing Seven Fifty-seven."

The terms "regional jets or RJs" are commonly used. The previous mindset was that everyone knew that a regional jet was made by Canadair, and the aircraft identification was CARJ, and they all looked alike. These smaller jets generally seat less than 71 passengers. They can look very different and are configured for a wide range of passenger loads. They are now manufactured by several different companies such as Embraer, Canadair/Bombardier, and Dornier, and all have different aircraft type designators. Stretch versions, holding more than 71 passengers, will further "blur" the line between "regional jets" and other air carrier aircraft.

The smaller jets have widely varying performance characteristics and appearance. They fit right in the flows with the larger jet aircraft. Others have various ranges of performance differences in the climb-out phase, altitude, and descent. These differences require that controllers learn what to expect from each aircraft type.

Air traffic controllers can always count on a dynamic environment. As different types of regional jet aircraft join the air carrier and commuter fleets, there are more instances where regional jet aircraft types display the same company markings, and must be identified more clearly when issuing traffic to avoid misidentification.