QANTAS TALKS UP OPERATIONAL BENEFITS OF ONBOARD WIFI

News / Airlines



Qantas says passengers won't be the only ones set to benefit from the installation of internet wifi across its domestic fleet, with its pilots, engineers and ground staff looking forward to using the new technology as part of their day-to-day duties.

The airline announced in February plans to equip its domestic fleet of Boeing 737-800s and Airbus A330s with internet wifi, with connectivity to be provided by ViaSat's global satellite network and the National Broadband Network's Sky Muster satellites.

The airline was scheduled to conduct a trial on board a 737 before the end of 2016, before rolling it on the 100-odd aircraft in 2017, with the service to be offered free for all passengers.

In the meantime, Qantas's flight operations and engineering staff were exploring the untapped potential of on board connectivity across the business, from real-time monitoring of the performance of the aircraft, dealing with irregular operations before passengers walk off the aircraft and providing more weather-related information to pilots enroute.

Also, Qantas said in a blog post on its website onboard wifi could also help cabin crew more accurately assess the condition of passengers who fell ill during flight.

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In turn, this may reduce the number of medical diversions, which averaged about two or three a month and often caused “a lot of disruption to hundreds of people”.

To that end, Qantas said it had trialled a device able to scan the heart condition of someone experiencing chest pains. That scan was sent by wifi to a medical officer on the ground, who would assess the data to determine if the aircraft should divert or able to continue on to its original destination.

“Sometimes it’s hard to tell how serious a condition is, so we tend to err on the side of caution and land as soon as we can,” Qantas said.

“It often turns out that we could have kept flying with no negative effect on the sick passenger (who also wants to get to their destination, particularly if it’s home)”.

Connecting passengers would also be better looked after when flights were delayed, Qantas said, as ground staff could prepare new itineraries and send that information to them while they were enroute.

And pilots could potentially provide a smoother ride as on board internet could allow the streaming of “richer information on real-time weather conditions expected along the flight path”.

“They can use this to dodge areas of turbulence and make better use of tailwinds to reduce flying time,” Qantas said.

And finally, Qantas’s engineers anticipated being able to receive data generated by the aircraft during a flight would enable ground crews to begin work on any issues that pop up before the flight landed at its destination.

“Our engineers can closely monitor the technical performance of the aircraft in real-time and be ready if something needs attention,” Qantas said.

“If they detect a replacement part is needed (like, a new fuel filter) they’ll get a head start on making sure it’s available when the aircraft lands.”

Australia’s two largest airlines had plans for wifi in 2017, with Virgin Australia to equip its 777, 737 and Airbus A330 fleet with in-flight internet wi-fi from mid-2017.

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