

March 3, 2008

Docket Management Facility
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
West Building Ground Floor, Room W12-140
Washington, DC 20590-0001

Re: Docket No. FAA – 2007 – 29305; Automatic Dependant Surveillance – Broadcast

The U.S. Parachute Association submits these comments on behalf of 31,400 members who enjoy and support the sport of skydiving, known to the FAA as “parachute operations.” Some 220 U.S. operators also affiliate with USPA. These operators provide the aircraft and the facilities for skydiving, and they would be directly affected by any requirement for avionics equipage.

The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking details aspects of the future air traffic control system, including a proposal to require new avionics on aircraft desiring ATC services or flying in Class A, B, and C airspace, or at or above 10,000 feet above mean sea level. Because aircraft engaged in parachute operations sometimes fly in Class A, B, and C airspace, and nearly always fly at or above 10,000 feet msl, USPA submits these comments to ensure that the FAA is fully aware of the scope and nature of parachute operations, and of the financial impact on those operations.

The vast majority of civilian parachute operations are commercial in nature, yet are conducted under 14 CFR 91, as allowed by 14 CFR 119.1(e)(6). Because skydivers must remain in visual meteorological conditions (i.e. cloud clearance and visibility requirements), the jump aircraft are generally limited to those same conditions. The operators must also meet requirements in 14 CFR 105 that include providing notification to air traffic control when operating in Class E and G airspace (the majority), or receiving authorization from ATC when conducting parachute operations in Class A, B, C, or D airspace. Additionally, the pilot must establish and maintain radio communication with ATC prior to each drop. ATC generally provides traffic advisories to the jump pilot and advises non-participating aircraft of the time, location and altitude of the drop.

The U.S. jump fleet is composed of 296 piston aircraft and 124 turbine aircraft. Nearly all use jump run altitudes at or above 10,000 feet above mean sea level. The piston aircraft typically go to altitudes of 10,000 to 11,000 feet above ground level (higher if turbo-

charged); the turbine aircraft typically climb to altitudes of 13,000 to 15,000 feet above ground level. These VFR jump planes do not cruise at altitude; but rather fly a climb, exit phase, and descent profile from and to the same airport each time. Nearly all of these flights are conducted in Class E and G airspace.

As the NPRM correctly notes, “the aviation industry is an extremely competitive industry with slim profit margins.” This is true as well for jump operators, only more so because they face the additional limitations of weather, since jump operators must operate in VMC and fairly light winds (for the parachutes).

While there are obvious overall benefits to an ATC system that utilizes ADS-B, not all operators will derive the same benefit. A jump operator flying above 10,000 feet msl (as most do) with ADS-B would not see the enroute efficiency gains touted by the NPRM. However, the cockpit display of nearby traffic would seem to be an enhancement in safety.

Obviously, the requirement to be equipped with ADS-B would impose a negative economic impact on all jump operators. The proposal estimates that the average “GA” aircraft (presumably piston) could incur an equipage cost ranging from \$6,578 to \$22,283. A turboprop aircraft would incur a cost ranging from \$12,906 to over \$486,000. The lower end of each range imposes a tremendous burden on the operator; the upper end puts the operator out of business. It seems that the FAA ADS-B proposal will move the infrastructure cost from the ground to the cockpit.

USPA endorses the proposals of others that the FAA consider any infrastructure savings to be passed on to the operators that are forced to equip in the form of financial assistance for the equipment and installation.

Please contact me at 540-604-9740 ext. 330 if I may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

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