

# Concorde Is Facing A Decisive Hearing

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The issue of whether the 1,350-mile-an-hour Concorde should be allowed to fly regular passenger runs into the United States will enter the decisive stage today in Washington when Transportation Secretary William T. Coleman Jr. presides over a one-day hearing.

Mr. Coleman has promised a decision by Feb. 4 on the request by the British and French partners in the \$3-billion Concorde project for permission to operate two daily flights to Kennedy International Airport in New York and one flight a day to Dulles International Airport at Washington.

Before the deadline set by Mr. Coleman, and despite protests from environmentalists and the forebodings of many economists, the Concorde will open the first regularly scheduled passenger service by a supersonic plane on Jan. 21 with flights by Air France between Paris and Rio de Janeiro and by British Airways between London and the Middle East sheikdom of Bahrain.

The British and the French had wanted to open the service

across the North Atlantic, potentially the most profitable route, and had made their request for flights to Kennedy and Dulles in early 1975. Blocked by opposition groups that protested mainly against the noise of the supersonic plane, they turned elsewhere.

Even if Mr. Coleman gives Federal approval for operations of the Concorde in the United States, local officials could at least temporarily block flights by the plane to Kennedy. The Federal Government operates Dulles.

Seldom in the half century of airline operations has a new plane come on the scene in such inauspicious circumstances.

The Concorde—a graceful craft, with a drooping nose and highly swept triangular wing—will offer the sufficiently affluent traveler what has always been aviation's prime attraction, new dimension in speed. It will virtually halve the flying time of subsonic jets on routes over water and wasteland.

Continued on Page 6, Column 1

## Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

where there will be little or no human exposure to its sonic boom. It will bring almost any two points on the globe within 12 hours of one another.

### Shortcomings of Aircraft

While few doubt that supersonic air travel will some day be routine, there are serious questions whether the Concorde will play more than a brief pioneer's role. Besides its noise, its shortcomings include: engine emissions that might produce a very small increase in a nonfatal form of skin cancer; a small capacity of about 100 passengers; and staggering operating costs—including amortization of the \$65 million price per plane—that could produce deficits, even at fares that have been set at 15 to 20 percent above present first-class rates.

The noise caused by the plane has been the main reason for opposition by communities around Kennedy airport and their officials. They cite the Federal Aviation Administration's Environmental Impact Statement on the Concorde, which says that, on a flight-for-



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Transportation Secretary William T. Coleman Jr., who will preside at hearing on Concorde today.

flight basis, the "loudness or noisiness under the take-off path is double that of the Boeing 707 and "four times the noisiness of a Boeing 747."

French and British as well as some administration officials say it is wrong to compare the Concorde with the current jets on a one-for-one basis. They emphasize figures in the F.A.A. statement showing that four Concorde flights a day would represent a bare increase in the noise of all other aircraft operations at Kennedy.

### Threat to Alliances Seen

Those who favor the Concorde view the campaign against it as a threat to United States relations with two close allies, who have at stake a huge investment, their national prestige, and hopes for long-term benefits from the technological achievement represented by the plane.

In recent debate in the House of Representatives before passage of an amendment to the airport-aid bill that would ban the Concorde for six months, pending receipt of more data on health and safety issues, the two sides stated their views strongly.

Representative Bella S. Abzug, Democrat of Manhattan, said: "We must seriously ask ourselves of the few hours gained in flight time by the few people who can afford supersonic travel are worth the harm to our atmosphere, the noise discomfort to thousands of our citizens, and the waste of energy."

"We must erect a permanent legislative barrier against these nonstrous aircraft," said Representative Norman Lent, Republican of Nassau County.

On the other side, Representative Jack Kemp, a Republican from the Buffalo area, declared: "To determine the destiny of his achievement for Britain and France on emotional or political issues would be doing our two allies an enormous wrong as well as inviting retaliation." Representative Wayne Hays, Democrat of Ohio, said: "If I were the Prime Minister of Britain and I had the power he does, I would issue an edict that Pan Am and T.W.A. would not land there anymore."



### First Paying Passengers

Secretary Coleman will evidently still be wrestling with his difficult decision when, two weeks from Wednesday, the Concorde carries the first paying supersonic customers.

The two 100-passenger Concorde's making the inaugural flights are scheduled to roll down their respective Paris and London runways at the same moment. The Air France plane will make a refueling stop at Dakar, on the west coast of Africa, before completing the 5,977-mile run to Rio. The trip will take seven hours 15 minutes, including the hour's stop, compared with the current scheduled non-stop time of 11 hours 10 minutes from jumbo jets.

The British Airways craft will fly subsonically to the Mediterranean—to keep from cracking its sonic boom across the populated flight path—before accelerating to supersonic speed. The time savings on the non-stop 3,515-mile trip will not be as dramatic as on the Air France run because of extra coglegs to avoid land areas and because of the speed restriction when the plane is over land. But the trip will take only four hours 10 minutes against the jumbos' current six hours 20 minutes.

The high fares on the Concorde have caused the greatest

uncertainty on the part of the operators over whether the planes will pay their way or produce a financial debacle.

On the Paris-Rio run, the round-trip fare will be \$2,890 at current exchange rates, compared with \$2,410 first class and \$1,550 economy class on subsonic jets. On the London-Bahrain run, the round-trip fare will be \$1,762, compared with \$1,532 in first class and \$836 economy class on subsonic planes.

There are varying estimates on what percentage of the 100 seats must be sold for a profitable operation of the Concorde. They depend on the level of optimism about engine reliability and other elements that go into maintenance costs, and on the future of fuel costs, landing fees, and the like.

### First-Class Travel Down

The recession has caused a decline in first-class travel, and pessimists warn that this could affect Concorde patronage.

But the supporters of the Concorde note that first-class passengers on present planes reach their destination at exactly the same time as the economy-class passengers on the same plane. The Concorde passenger, they say, is not buying frills as the present first-class passenger but time—time that can be translated into extra business opportunities, ex-

tra recreation, or reduced fatigue.

To maximize the time advantage, the French and British are planning everything possible to speed processing procedures at the airports. These steps include special check-in counters, provisions for check-in as late as eight to 10 minutes before flight time, and arrangements to hasten passenger transfers from connecting flights.

The Concorde debate in this country has been building since last March 3, when the F.A.A. gave tentative approval for the limited operations requested to Kennedy and Dulles. The administration based its stand on a draft environmental impact statement that said that the planes were noisy but not substantially noisier than the current subsonic jets and that although large fleets of such planes could produce dangerous atmospheric effects, such problems would be minimal with the small fleets currently planned.

Since then the Concorde has passed a number of performance milestones. But new noise measurements last summer showed that the plane would have a good deal more noise impact than previously indicated.

### Setbacks for Concorde

In the last few weeks of 1975, there were a succession of psychological setbacks for the program. Word got around that the British and French had retained Washington law firms headed by political figures to help win their legal battle for landing rights here.

And the Justice Department charged certain public relations consultants retained by the Concorde's builders with failing to register properly and with breaking rules against contingency bonuses in contracts covering political lobbying. The case—which the defendants generally thought was unnecessary and based on ambiguous rules—ended with the signing of a consent decree to cease the activities involved.

Later the House passed an amendment to ban the Concorde for six months, but it is given little chance of passage by the Senate and approval by President Ford.

Most damaging perhaps was the tentative finding of the Environmental Protection Agen-

cy that, because of the increase in the rating of the Concorde's noise levels, allowing it into Kennedy would be undesirable and flying into Dulles, in a less populated area, would be questionable.

Throughout most of the Concorde debate, the British and French have taken a low-key approach, believing that they would ultimately prevail. They have relied on the fact that current treaties guarantee their airliners nondiscriminatory treatment and on assurances from President Nixon on this score. They also relied on the exemption of the first 16 Concorde's from proposed noise rules on the ground that the design antedated the rules and that ex post facto rule-making was unfair. And they firmly believed that the noise impact of the small Concorde fleet would be minimal.

Their cool approach has been laid aside because of the recent setbacks. Their bluntest attack was leveled at the E.P.A., which had earlier favored limited Concorde flights here.

At a news conference, the British Embassy's civil aviation counselor, A. R. Gordon-Cuming, called the latest E.P.A. study a "pretty unprofessional piece of work." He accused the

agency of having confused two types of noise measurement and of having wrongly compared the Concorde's noise level to that of a "heavy truck or heavy street traffic," when actually "it is the noise level produced by a range of ordinary household appliances."

### Retaliation Recommended

A Member of Parliament, Robert Adley, recently said in the House of Commons that if the Concorde is banned from New York, British trade unionists should subject goods being imported from New York to "appropriate political delays."

Last week a Gallup Poll in Britain showed that 50 percent of those offering an opinion would approve restriction of United States airlines flights to Britain if the United States banned the Concorde, and 54 percent would approve action to prevent the sale of United States aircraft to Britain.

The dominant opinion among aviation officials here is that Mr. Coleman will approve entry of the Concorde into the United States, but perhaps with more restrictions than the limitation of six flights a day. He might, for instance, put it on probation for a year, leaving it to the next Administration to re-

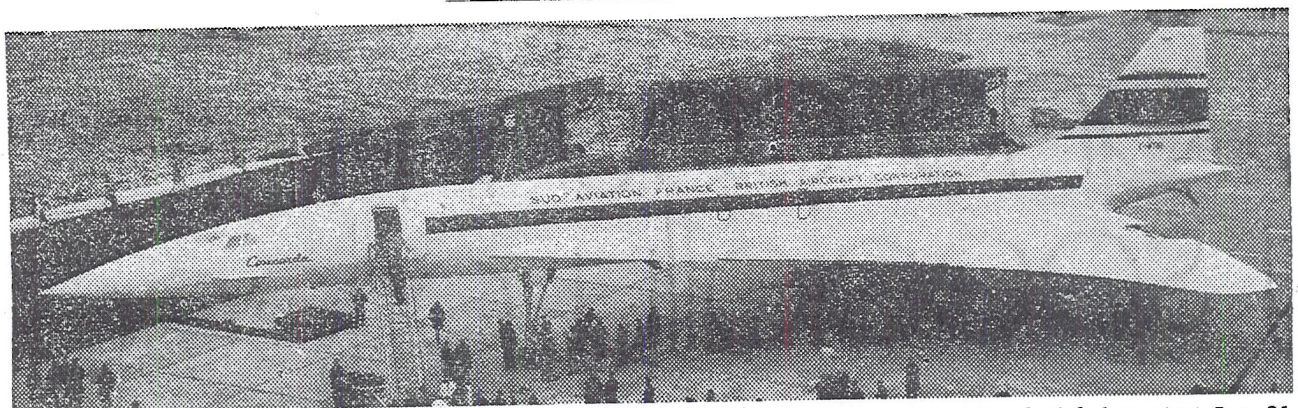
view the issue on the basis of actual experience.

That would virtually assure Concorde flights to Dulles, conceivably by late this spring, since the Government operates the airport. It would not assure flights to Kennedy, since the operator of that field is the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which is controlled by the two states' Governors.

Governor Carey made clear months ago his misgivings about Concorde flights to Kennedy and now he has finally made up his mind. In testimony prepared for delivery by an aide to the Coleman hearings today, Mr. Carey says approval "for Concorde operations into New York on a commercial basis must be denied."

Among the reasons cited: excessive noise, the need to deal with the threat of increased skin cancer; and the questionable safety of a low altitude turn to meet the official Port Authority's noise standard.

The French and British are expected to contest in court any Carey-imposed ban. But it could take months, certainly until after next fall's election. The Concorde's entry to New York, if it ever comes, appears to be a year or more away.



The Concorde at its roll-out in France in 1967. Regularly scheduled passenger service is scheduled to start Jan. 21 with an Air France flight from Paris to Rio de Janeiro and a British Airways flight from London to Bahrain.