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Delay in Mitsubishi Regional Jet means more work in Washington state



Originally published January 23, 2017 at 3:01 pm Updated January 23, 2017 at 6:00 pm



1 of 2 Mitsubishi Aircraft's MRJ is displayed during the roll-out ceremony at the company's Komaki plant in

central Japan in 2014. (AP)



The advertisement for Westharbor Homes is a vertical banner. At the top, the logo features a large orange 'W' with a white wave underneath, followed by the text 'Westharbor Homes' in white and orange. Below the logo is a photograph of a modern, single-story house with a grey roof, white trim, and a concrete driveway. The house is set against a backdrop of tall evergreen trees under a clear blue sky. A red banner with white text reads 'Explore two new neighborhoods'. Below this is a photograph of a person's legs in black leggings and white sneakers running on a path covered with fallen yellow leaves. A red circular seal with white text says 'AWARD WINNING HOMES' and 'Port Ludlow'. At the bottom, a dark blue banner with white text reads 'Perfectly Northwest'.

The two-year delay in the Mitsubishi Regional Jet (MRJ) announced Monday is clearly a big setback for Japan's commercial jet program, but it means more jobs in Washington state, where the jet is undergoing flight tests.

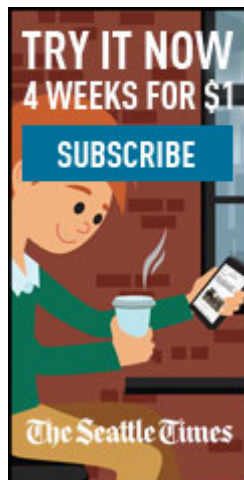


By [Dominic Gates](#) 

Seattle Times aerospace reporter

The two-year delay in the Mitsubishi Regional Jet (MRJ) announced Monday in Japan is clearly a big setback for that commercial- jet program, but it means more jobs in Washington state, where the jet is undergoing flight tests.

This fifth delay in the program, which follows [a yearlong delay in late 2015](#), comes after engineers discovered the design doesn't meet certification requirements related to the safe separation of redundant aircraft systems.



The engineering analysis of the certification process is being done in Seattle, with most [flight tests being at Moses Lake](#).

So Mitsubishi has already increased total hiring in the state, from the previously planned 400 people, to 550 — including 300 sent from Japan and 250 hired locally.

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Of those, about 150 are in Seattle, including 100 engineers recruited locally by AeroTEC, [Mitsubishi's testing and certification partner](#).

AeroTEC President Lee Human said Monday his target is now to bump up the number of local engineers to 170.

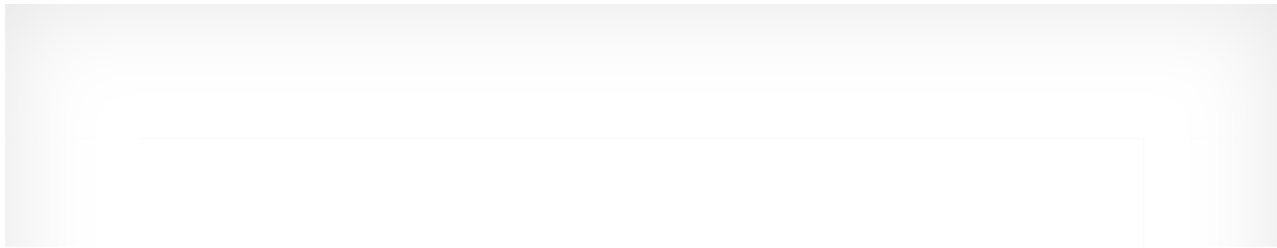
"We are hiring right now," he said. "Our hope is to fill those positions over the next three months."

Japan's first commercial-jet project in more than 40 years, the MRJ comes in two initial models: the 88-seat MRJ 90 now delayed until 2020; and the 76-seat MRJ 70, which will enter service a year later.

As it moves to fix the problems behind the delay, Mitsubishi also intends to add more flight-test planes to the four previously planned to fly out of Moses Lake.

Human said AeroTEC is recruiting experienced engineers, specialists in everything from engines to avionics to ice protection, from the U.S. and Canada to work at the MRJ Seattle facility.

ADVERTISING



In a news teleconference from Japan, Yugo Fukuhara, vice president of sales and marketing at MRJ maker Mitsubishi Aircraft, said the new delay is due to the need for a redesign that will relocate certain avionics components and reroute the wiring to those components.

Certification requires that redundant systems be sufficiently separated so that not all are affected in some extreme situation that rips out one piece of the airplane, he said.

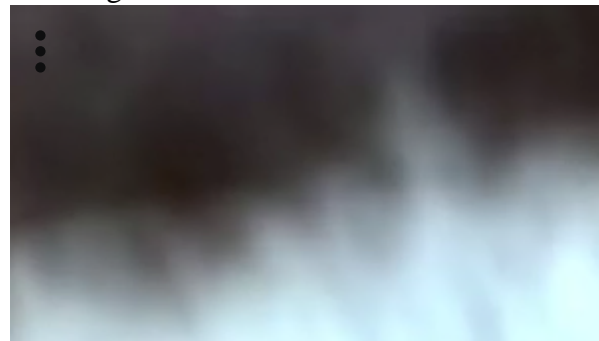
Fukuhara said the issue was discovered last fall and since then the company has been reviewing the design and working out the impact on the schedule.

He said the five current flight-test planes can still fly because the design changes don't affect the aircraft performance.

However, Mitsubishi will have to build more test planes with the redesigned systems to complete certification. Human said probably two more will be needed, and those will almost certainly join the four planned for Moses Lake.

With the extra flight-test airplanes, the Moses Lake center will be busier than ever and in use for two years longer than first planned.

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Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI), the parent of Mitsubishi Aircraft, said it is

restructuring management to give MHI' chief Shunichi Miyanaga direct oversight of the MRJ program.


And it announced a plan not only to increase the MRJ engineering staff but also to raise the percentage of that staff consisting of Western, non-Japanese engineers.

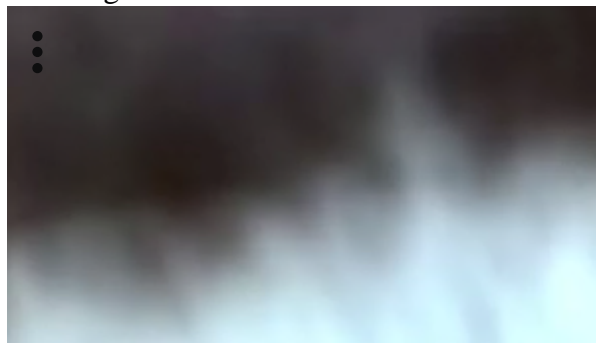
Because Japan lacks local experience in modern aircraft-certification processes and requirements, Mitsubishi has already hired many North American and European engineers at MRJ headquarters in Nagoya, Japan, in addition to the engineers hired in Seattle.

It was the certification experts brought in from outside Japan who found the MRJ design inadequate to meet certification requirements, he said.

“Meeting certification requirements is very complex,” Human said. “Some certification elements were missed. These were discovered as a result of global expert participation. Some of my team members were involved in those assessments.”

Mitsubishi's plan to delay the MRJ's entry into service clearly adds substantial development expense.

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Chief Financial Officer Masanori Koguchi said in June the jet's development costs had already tripled to as much as 600 billion yen (\$5.3 billion) from initial estimates. Fukuhara declined to provide detailed financial data on the increased cost.

However, a slide provided by Mitsubishi seems to indicate the program now won't pay back its development costs until around 2030.

“We are committed to this business for the long term,” Fukuhara said. “And

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, one of the biggest companies in Japan, can afford this long-term investment.”

Dominic Gates: 206-464-2963 or dgates@seattletimes.com Information on the CFO’s July cost projection came from Bloomberg News.

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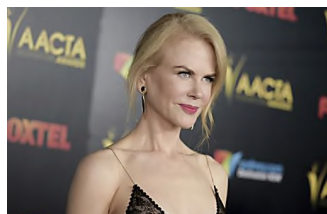
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