AIRLINERS COULD DITCH THEIR CO-PILOTS UNDER EU PLAN TO IMPROVE SAFETY AND CUT COSTS

News / Airlines

It may seem a little pie in the sky, but in the not too distant future, commercial airliners could be flown without co-pilots under an EU-backed project designed to improve safety and cut the cost of flying.

Aircraft manufacturers are working on a project that could eventually lead to the introduction of single-pilot operations on commercial jets.

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A consortium of 35 companies and research groups across Europe, including Boeing, Airbus and BAE Systems, is developing automated technology to reduce reliance on crew members in the flight deck.

The ACROSS project - Advanced Cockpit for Reduction of Stress and Workload - seeks to develop more sophisticated autopilot technology to take over aircraft, particularly during bad weather, emergency situations and in congested skies, situations when accidents are more likely to occur.

The scheme, co-funded by the European Commission, hopes to lead to the development of new technologies which can help improve pilots' 'situational awareness', as well as relieve some of the burden placed on them at a time when air traffic is only predicted to increase.

The research programme makes it clear, however, that the ultimate aim is the 'long-term evolution' of single-pilot cockpits, rather than the existing two-pilot flight crews on most aircraft.

The project says that research is needed because although continuous safety improvements have succeeded in reducing the accident rate in aviation over successive decades, the reduction 'seems to have reached a plateau, stabilising at a rate of approximately two accidents for every million departures'.

29 DECEMBER 2015

SOURCE: DAILY MAIL

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