

The History and Status of
The General Session of AEEC
December 9, 2004

By

Lawrence Carpenter
Director Special Projects
ARINC Industry Activities

Introduction

This report is based on research of the literature of AEEC, particularly the various reports of the AEEC General Session and their accompanying Administrative Sessions. It was undertaken to understand if there was a problem with General Session that was causing lower airline attendance and raising valid concerns on the part of suppliers, particularly AAI members, with regards to continuing support of the meeting with hospitality activities and guest programs.

In doing the research, a tabulation of attendance by airlines and others was produced (Attached). The tabulation shows that no significant change in number of airlines or airline personnel has occurred during the period in question.

Early meetings

Until 1953, all meetings of AEEC were closed to other than airlines. The first open meeting was held in 1953. The first AEEC General Session report was issued for that meeting. The meeting lasted three days. Total attendance was 78, up from the 55 of the last closed meeting.

General Sessions were held two or three times a year until 1971. The end of 1953 saw the first meeting with total attendance over 100. By 1957 attendance had edged up to over 200. Of that group, 25 airlines sent 36 people. Fourteen AEEC airline members attended. The peak for attendance in the early period came in 1959 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary celebration. Total attendance of 287 included 32 airlines and 51 airline people. Fifteen of them were AEEC members.

Following this meeting, attendance began falling until it was again well below 200. During this period, the European Airlines Electronic Committee (EAEC) also emerged and by the time of the first European AEEC meeting, their officers were also AEEC airline members. The first international meeting, in Brussels, brought total attendance back. Attendance that year was 268 supported by 39 airlines with 87 people (the AEEC General Session airline attendance record), 13 of them AEEC members.

Attendance again began to fall, dropping to 113 for the second 1965 meeting. The planned introduction of wide body jets by Boeing, Douglas, and Lockheed, however, brought about a resurgence of interest in standards to support the new avionics for these aircraft. This increased interest was accompanied by a significant jump in attendance at General Session. Throughout the period of standards work in support of these aircraft, attendance grew significantly. Over 400 people (466 actually, the AEEC General Session attendance record) attended the twentieth anniversary meeting. There were 31 airlines supplying 74 people for this meeting. Throughout the development period, attendance was in the 300s or high 200s.

Following completion of this work, airline and total attendance began a gradual decline. This decline was reversed in 1977 when AEEC decided to develop digital standards for the Boeing 757 and 767, then being designed. Meetings were more often being held once a year than twice a year up to this point. When the workload of standards tapered off, the General session had been reduced to two days with a symposium added for the third day. No help in attendance was noted.

The work in support of digital standards was the beginning of the 600 and 700 series of ARINC standards. This work forced dropping of the symposium, which had shown little value to attendees anyway, increase of the meeting back to three days and, for a short time, reintroduction of twice a year meetings. Attendance at General session jumped in response to this work and remained high until it was completed in 1984. Follow-on work on the standards and good economic times held the industry's interest for several more years. Attendance at General Session remained near 300 supported by 50 to 60 airline people. The introduction of the Boeing 777 held this interest until the early nineties, when a period of depressing airline financial results also depressed their support of attendance at General Session. Attendance in 1994 hit a low of 201 with only 30 airline people registered.

AAI and AEEC

Once the supplier side was invited to participate in the General Session as observers, their numbers rose quickly. They, too, waxed and waned in consonance with the interest in the standards being developed and the financial situation in the industry. Early on, some suppliers began to provide hospitality through operation of suites. These half-dozen suites were well attended by both customers and rival suppliers. Many suppliers could not afford to compete with the big ones in providing suites, however.

The first Manufacturers' Reception was put together for the first European meeting in 1964. This was so successful, pooling the resources of many companies who could not justify hospitality suites, that it was continued. It also quickly expanded as a concept in two other meetings also attended by many of the suppliers. These were the Avionics Maintenance Conference (AMC) and the European Airlines Electronic meeting (EAEM). The AMC had started out as an add-on meeting to the AEEC meetings and later split off to become free-standing. It differed from the general Session in that it was a general information exchange meeting and problem solving forum for avionics maintenance issues. The EAEM (later renamed IAEM and finally absorbed by AMC in 2000) was an offshoot of the EAEC. Both of these roughly paralleled the purposes of their US counterparts.

The Manufacturers' reception was very successful and continues into the present. The group gradually morphed into the Airlines Avionics Institute (AAI). This organization was formalized in the mid-1980s and added a constitution, charter, rules of conduct, and a business manager. The first business manager was Frank Chandler, who earlier was a very active AEEC member from American Airlines. By the time AAI became a formal organization, they also were hosting coffee breaks and sometimes hosting spouse programs for the General Session. Suite operations also grew, but outside AAI.

AAI added exhibits to their reception after the departure of David Featherstone as Chairman of AEEC. AAI had been doing this for many years at AMC and AIEM. The suite activity peaked in the late 1980s with about 30 suites in operation. This was a ratio of around one suite for every two airline attendees. The suite number gradually declined into the low 20s as participation in General Session also lowered during the bad financial years of the early 1990s.

The first concerns publicly expressed by AAI members and other suppliers about low suite attendance by customers was responded to in 1993 with a half-hearted promise by AEEC members to try harder to get to the suites "conditions permitting." A more serious set of concerns was expressed in 1995 and the response by AEEC members was that the suites and reception added little value to the business purpose of AEEC. Some discussion of how to generate more interest in the general Session and improve attendance took place in 1996 and 1997, but little change was made. A second try at adding symposia was no more effective than the first attempt in the trough between the wide-body and digital spurts of standards activity. No change in attendance patterns as the result of these additions to the meeting is discernible in the record. Another attempt to redefine the General Session was made in 2000 with no noticeable changes as a result of the effort. It is not clear from the record whether this was in response to continuing concerns from the supplier community.

The General Session Today

With the worsening economic conditions of the first part of this decade and no really new standards in development, attendance has predictably fallen some. The year 2003 was a particularly bad financial time for the industry and is reflected in lower airline attendance and total attendance. Total attendance was 279 with airlines sending only 34 people from 21 companies (this number is normalized by not counting the extra 35 Delta people attending as a result of the meeting being in Atlanta. Total attendance would also be 244 without this influx.). The number of suites had fallen to around fifteen by this period. The ratio of suites to airline people attending had improved to around 1:2.5. Airline attendance was fairly stable during the period with the one low year exception, hovering around the low to mid-40s. Attendance rebounded some in 2004.

AAI has renewed its call for reforms to enhance attendance. AEEC management is looking at what to do and has instituted meetings with AAI to explore possibilities.

Conclusions

The AEEC General Session has always had as its thesis management and development of industry standards. Two prior attempts to broaden its focus have met with little success. The attendance at the General Session has always grown when a new airframe development is underway and peaked based on financial condition of the industry and the location of the meeting. Airline attendance has followed this pattern as well, but is considerably more resistant to poor financial times than the general attendance is. As in the last downturn, financial pressures have caused suppliers to consider the value of their investment more closely. It is not so much that attendance by customers has dropped, but rather that they notice it more when times are hard.

In the past down cycles, either financial health returning or new aircraft developments have reversed the trend and AEEC General Session has grown, sometimes to new records in attendance. The question that must be asked, by both the supplier community and the AEEC, is if this is just another downturn that will reverse itself. Certainly it is expected that the economy will improve over the next few years. It is somewhat less likely that an industry need for new standards will also happen in the near term.

For the first time since the formation of AEEC, the airframe manufacturers and suppliers have developed a new generation of aircraft and avionics with little input from the airlines. This movement was presaged by the development effort of the Boeing 777, when airlines were consulted closely, but new standards were less important to them. They have generally made decisions independently of existing or developing ARINC standards. This pattern of closely held development actually started with the companies building regional aircraft. It has been so successful that it appears the same business model has been embraced by the builders of large aircraft. The traditional Characteristics that built AEEC may no longer be viable, both due to this new business model and the change from federated to integrated architecture of much of the avionics systems. It is interesting to note that the foundation of AEEC was based on the desire to wrest this control from the manufacturer and place it in the hands of the customer.

It appears to this writer that the future of General Session is not so much tied to finding a new focus for it, but is just as inextricably tied to the standards its parent, AEEC, produces as it has always been. If the standards create renewed interest, General Session will again grow as the economy rebounds. If the standards remain of low interest (one might even say of low relevance) to the community, AEEC *and* its General Session will be hard pressed to prosper.

LDC

| Meeting | Airline | | | Total | Notes | Airline/ Company | Airline/ Other |
|---------|---------|-------|-----------|-------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| | AEEC | Other | Companies | | | | |
| 2003 | 16 | 18 | 21 | 279 | 35 Delta not counted in airlines | 1.6 | 8.2 |
| 2002 | 16 | 31 | 29 | 276 | | 1.6 | 5.9 |
| 2001 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 52 | 9/11 caused regular meeting to cancel | 1.0 | 8.7 |
| 2000 | 17 | 32 | 28 | 281 | | 1.8 | 5.7 |
| 1999 | 17 | 25 | 23 | 338 | 50th Anniversary; 7 UA not counted | 1.8 | 8.0 |
| 1998 | 18 | 26 | 29 | 309 | 18 Fed Ex not counted in airlines | 1.5 | 7.0 |
| 1997 | 18 | 28 | 29 | 313 | 2 Air Canada not counted in airlines | 1.6 | 6.8 |
| 1996 | 18 | 19 | 21 | 251 | | 1.8 | 6.8 |
| 1995 | 18 | 22 | 23 | 286 | | 1.7 | 7.2 |
| 1994 | 13 | 17 | 22 | 201 | | 1.4 | 6.7 |
| 1993 | 17 | 25 | 25 | 295 | 12 American not counted in airline | 1.7 | 7.0 |
| 1992 | 14 | 34 | 24 | 327 | | 2.0 | 6.8 |
| 1991 | 16 | 20 | 21 | 304 | | 1.7 | 8.4 |
| 1990 | 17 | 33 | 26 | 382 | 10 Delta not counted in airlines | 1.9 | 7.6 |
| 1989 | 16 | 39 | 26 | 307 | | 2.1 | 5.6 |
| 1988 | 14 | 46 | 30 | 240 | | 2.0 | 4.0 |
| 1987 | 17 | 29 | 27 | 280 | 3 TWA not counted in airlines | 1.7 | 6.1 |
| 1986 | 16 | 31 | 26 | 295 | | 1.8 | 6.3 |
| 1985 | 16 | 35 | 31 | 302 | 4 AF and 3 UTA not counted | 1.6 | 5.9 |
| 1984 | 16 | 36 | 34 | 292 | | 1.5 | 5.6 |
| 1983 | 17 | 23 | 28 | 244 | | 1.4 | 6.1 |
| 1982 | 17 | 25 | 27 | 252 | 6 Sabena not counted in airlines | 1.6 | 6.0 |
| 1981 | 18 | 24 | 28 | 286 | | 1.5 | 6.8 |
| 1980 | 19 | 40 | 33 | 343 | | 1.8 | 5.8 |
| 1979 | 14 | 36 | 30 | 260 | | 1.7 | 5.2 |
| 1978-2 | 18 | 24 | 29 | 292 | | 1.4 | 7.0 |
| 1978-1 | 19 | 36 | 30 | 268 | | 1.8 | 4.9 |
| 1977 | 18 | 29 | 32 | 319 | 16 UA not counted in airlines | 1.5 | 6.8 |
| 1976 | 15 | 27 | 27 | 212 | 5 LH not counted in airlines | 1.6 | 5.0 |
| 1975-2 | 19 | 22 | 29 | 241 | | 1.4 | 5.9 |
| 1975-1 | 17 | 28 | 29 | 246 | | 1.6 | 5.5 |
| 1974 | 16 | 23 | 28 | 273 | 10 UA not counted in airlines | 1.4 | 7.0 |
| 1973 | 15 | 46 | 37 | 288 | Record missing - best estimate | 1.6 | 4.7 |
| 1972-2 | 18 | 27 | 22 | 255 | | 2.0 | 5.7 |
| 1972-1 | 17 | 19 | 22 | 254 | 9 AC not counted in airlines | 1.6 | 7.1 |
| 1971 | 17 | 18 | 26 | 225 | 3 TW not counted in airlines | 1.3 | 6.4 |
| 1970-2 | 17 | 29 | 29 | 403 | 22 from British airlines not counted | 1.6 | 8.8 |
| 1970-1 | 17 | 36 | 28 | 346 | EAEC officers added to AEEC | 1.9 | 6.5 |
| 1969-2 | 14 | 33 | 28 | 378 | | 1.7 | 8.0 |
| 1969-1 | 14 | 60 | 31 | 466 | 20th Anniversary Meeting | 2.4 | 6.3 |
| 1968-2 | 11 | 39 | 23 | 311 | | 2.2 | 6.2 |
| 1968-1 | 13 | 49 | 27 | 319 | | 2.3 | 5.1 |
| 1967-2 | 13 | 50 | 32 | 312 | | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| 1967-1 | 14 | 37 | 27 | 319 | 10 UA not counted in airlines | 1.9 | 6.3 |
| 1966-2 | 11 | 25 | 21 | 198 | | 1.7 | 5.5 |
| 1966-1 | 15 | 15 | 24 | 197 | | 1.3 | 6.6 |
| 1965-2 | 14 | 17 | 28 | 113 | | 1.1 | 3.6 |
| 1965-1 | 14 | 21 | 28 | 194 | | 1.3 | 5.5 |
| 1964-2 | 13 | 74 | 39 | 268 | First European Meeting | 2.2 | 3.1 |
| 1964-1 | 14 | 23 | 26 | 153 | | 1.4 | 4.1 |
| 1963-2 | 12 | 32 | 25 | 178 | | 1.8 | 4.0 |
| 1963-1 | 12 | 20 | 20 | 122 | | 1.6 | 3.8 |
| 1962-2 | 12 | 16 | 19 | 138 | | 1.5 | 4.9 |
| 1962-1 | 8 | 25 | 23 | 198 | | 1.4 | 6.0 |
| 1961-3 | 11 | 23 | 24 | 184 | | 1.4 | 5.4 |
| 1961-2 | 12 | 27 | 21 | 257 | | 1.9 | 6.6 |
| 1961-1 | 12 | 16 | 17 | 211 | | 1.6 | 7.5 |
| 1960-2 | 9 | 22 | 19 | 219 | | 1.6 | 7.1 |
| 1960-1 | 13 | 14 | 24 | 214 | | 1.1 | 7.9 |
| 1959-2 | 15 | 14 | 25 | 141 | | 1.2 | 4.9 |
| 1959-1 | 15 | 36 | 32 | 287 | 10th Anniversary meeting | 1.6 | 5.6 |
| 1958-3 | 8 | 12 | 15 | 193 | | 1.3 | 9.7 |
| 1958-2 | 13 | 24 | 26 | 167 | | 1.4 | 4.5 |
| 1958-1 | 10 | 10 | 16 | 178 | | 1.3 | 8.9 |
| 1957-3 | 12 | 41 | 30 | 197 | | 1.8 | 3.7 |
| 1957-2 | 14 | 39 | 28 | 203 | | 1.9 | 3.8 |
| 1957-1 | 14 | 22 | 25 | 225 | | 1.4 | 6.3 |
| 1956-3 | 11 | 27 | 24 | 177 | | 1.6 | 4.7 |
| 1956-2 | 12 | 23 | 26 | 171 | | 1.3 | 4.9 |
| 1956-1 | 11 | 16 | 21 | 182 | | 1.3 | 6.7 |
| 1955-2 | 8 | 30 | 24 | 127 | | 1.6 | 3.3 |
| 1955-1 | 11 | 24 | 23 | 120 | | 1.5 | 3.4 |
| 1954-3 | | | | 145 | | | |
| 1954-2 | | | | 107 | | | |
| 1954-1 | | | | 155 | | | |
| 1953-3 | | | | 118 | | | |
| 1953-2 | | | | 92 | | | |
| 1953-1 | | | | 78 | | | |
| 1952-4 | | | | 55 | | | |
| 1952-3 | | | | 45 | | | |
| 1952-2 | | | | 45 | | | |
| 1952-1 | | | | 40 | | | |
| 1951-4 | | | | 43 | | | |
| 1951-3 | | | | 28 | | | |
| 1951-2 | | | | 29 | | | |
| 1951-1 | | | | 24 | | | |

