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## Qantas waiting for Sunrise to launch international inflight Internet

By Marisa Garcia →



Qantas plans to time the launch of its international inflight connectivity services to correspond with new longhaul aircraft to debut around the time of the ViaSat-3 launch.

At a press briefing earlier this month in Sydney, where the International Air Transport Association held its Annual General Meeting, Qantas CEO Alan Joyce said there is “a very good reason” why the carrier does not have Internet available on its new Kangaroo route from London to Perth.

*The product internationally is still terrible, we think. We've tried it. It's Ku-band, and that's what our competition is using. And we're not that far away from the Ka-band satellite being launched by Viasat ... [which fits] perfectly*

*with our new aircraft  
2020-2021. If we put Ku  
on, we'd only have to take  
it off to put the new Ka-  
band in.*

Joyce mentioned that the domestic Viasat Ka-band connection is **performing well**, to the standards the airline would like to see throughout the full fleet. Passengers can easily stream Netflix on it without diluting the service quality, he said.

The first aircraft to receive this international wifi connection is still a bit of an unknown – for now, it goes by the name Sunrise. That new ultra long-range plane is pitting Airbus against Boeing once again, for what is perhaps one of the biggest challenges they've faced: allowing the airline to fly non-stop connecting Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane to London, New York, Paris, and even Rio.

## SHORTEST ROUTE TO DEPLOYMENT



Singapore Airlines recently announced it will re-open its Singapore-New York area route using an Airbus A350-900ULR, configured with a light-payload, high-revenue cabin configuration of **94 premium economy and 67 business class passengers**. This all-premium configuration makes sense for the airline's business objectives. It is similar to the product offering that Singapore Airlines previously had on board its A340-500 from New York to Singapore, though this time premium economy is in play.

Referencing the SIA configuration, industry analyst Addison Schonland of AirInsight told RGN: "The [A350-900ULR] plane probably is at its limits

and they want to save the weight. Discounted fares are not a concern for this market. Think about it this way, use this flight and save a hotel night.”

But Qantas has different objectives. The airline said it intends to have over 300 passengers on board its Sunrise aircraft, in a four-cabin configuration, though there is a lot of flexibility still with the airline even considering cabin zones instead – something akin to the **Airbus belly berths concept revealed during the Aircraft Interiors Expo** this year, and the **Zodiac Lifestyle cabin concept**.

It’s all sunrise in blue skies for now. Airbus may offer up its A350-1000 in a ULR configuration, but Qantas said it will need to be reassured that the right economics are in place.

“If they really want to get Sydney non-stop, an airplane will have to be stripped, just the way SIA is doing,” noted Schonland. “The question really should be just how big is this market?”

He added, “SIA has the right kind of cabin product to support the premium nature of these long legs. How about Qantas? I’m not so sure they are there yet.”

Qantas is working to get there. The airline is tracking the performance of the new Boeing 787-9 long-range service from London to Perth and has reported 90% load factors in premium economy, for example. It will be watching whether those load factors remain high, and monitoring demand for the other cabin products as management goes through the decision-making process for the Sunrise cabin.

It’s not clear whether the A350-1000 could take the cabin payload that Qantas ultimately determines would make these routes profitable and still offer the intended range. Nor is it clear that Boeing could offer anything “off the catalogue” that could meet this payload and mission.

For now, Sunrise is in its infancy, Joyce said, with a formal RFP intended to be issued later this year and a decision to follow as soon as next year for a 2022

delivery.

There is an open question about whether Airbus – contending **with the diminishing of its A380 program** – should be pursuing custom designs on new models unless there is a larger market, beyond the needs of Qantas. No doubt that’s something Boeing is considering too.

During a one-on-one in Sydney, RGN asked **Mylène Scholnick**, Principal at ICF, to give us her thoughts on the market viability of an A350-1000ULR and whether Airbus can or should give Qantas the Sunrise they dream of.

She believes that, if Airbus pursued it, it would be because the airframer considers the R&D investment sound. “[OEMs] are usually very careful, [but] they have to listen to their customers. So they are always in tune with the airlines and it’s usually the airlines that drive the programs,” she said. “[Airbus] believe there is a market for that [A350-1000ULR] and they are in such tight competition with Boeing that if one makes a move then the other has to make a move to stay relevant.”

Scholnick added that Airbus has confidence in the A350 as a game-changing new family of aircraft, deserving variants. “Their view is that there are going to be more ... they think it’s going to become a flagship for them beyond the A320.”

If Airbus is committed to delivering a Qantas Sunrise, the question remains – what will Boeing do when they hit high noon?

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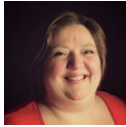
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About Marisa Garcia



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Marisa Garcia has worked in aviation since 1994, first in the manufacturing of aircraft interiors and cabin safety equipment, and turned to writing about the industry in 2013 with the launch of her own site FlightChic.com. She is a freelance contributor to leading aviation and travel industry titles including Aircraft Interiors International Magazine,... Read More

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**Glen Towler**

June 18, 2018 at 8:41 pm - Reply

Good news for Qantas. I am surprised that they are getting such high load factors on their LHR to PER flights. I wouldn't want to spend so much time stuck in a aircraft and I am used to flying for 13 or 14 hours across the pacific. But I guess some people want to get there as fast as possible. I would imagine flying this route in economy would be hell.

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