

Because Boeing and China need each other, tariff delivery disruption might not last

By [Jon Hemmerdinger](#) | 15 April 2025

Aerospace analysts suspect China and the USA will negotiate a solution to ensure new tariffs do not keep Chinese airlines from continuing to receive new Boeing jets.

By some reports, the tariffs have already prompted Chinese carriers to pause those deliveries.

FlightGlobal has not confirmed those reports, but one source says Boeing and its Chinese customers are now discussing paths by which deliveries can continue.

The discussions remain fluid as the parties work through how new tariffs apply to jets in various stages of production, certification and delivery – including 737 Max already at Boeing's completion and delivery facility in Zhoushan, China, says the source, who declines to be identified due to the sensitive nature of the topic.





Source: Boeing

China's Xiamen Airlines operates 12 787s (a 787-8, above), and 146 737s, according to Cirium data

The Wall Street Journal reported on 14 April that China told its carriers to stop ordering new Boeing jets and to receive approval before accepting already ordered aircraft. *Bloomberg* reported the same day that China had ordered its airlines to stop receiving Boeing aircraft.

But analysts think too much is at stake for any pause to continue for long, noting the importance of Chinese customers to Boeing and that Chinese airlines badly need Boeing jets and other US-made aerospace goods.

"We believe much of the headline risk with the pause in deliveries is a negotiating tactic, and we would be surprised if the delay were extended, considering the importance of US parts for the Chinese fleet," RBC Capital Markets financial analyst Ken Herbert said in a 15 April research report.

Chinese airlines require US-made components for their existing Boeing fleets, Herbert adds.

Boeing declines to comment about the reported delivery disruption.

"We do see this as unsustainable," says BofA Global Research analyst Ron Epstein in a 15 April note. "When considering balances of trade, we think the Trump Administration can't ignore Boeing. In fact, Boeing [aircraft are] one of the few high-tech manufactured goods that the US exports in large numbers."

The reported China-delivery pause comes after US President Donald Trump last week slapped more tariffs on Chinese imports, prompting Beijing to respond in kind. The USA is now taxing some Chinese imports at 145%, while China is taxing US products at 125%.

NEW HOMES FOR BOEING JETS

Some analysts think China and Chinese airlines, by refusing to take Boeing jets, will suffer more than the US manufacturer.

"By stopping Boeing deliveries, China does not hurt the USA," says Addison Schonland, co-founder of consultancy AirInsight. "India will take them all, even at a slight discount."

Schonland is referring to 737 Max in Boeing's inventory – jets built for Chinese airlines but not yet delivered. Boeing has recently, due to tension with China, delivered dozens of those aircraft to other customers, notably Indian carriers Air India Express and Akasa Air.

"India wins, as its airlines keep growing. China loses because its airlines grow more slowly," Schonland says.

Others agree Boeing will find homes for jets built for Chinese customers.

"Boeing should have no difficulty reallocating the aircraft to other airlines that need additional capacity. We see India as a potential recipient," says BofA's Epstein.

Boeing faces the risk that tariffs could prompt Chinese airlines to place more orders with Airbus, further eroding the US company's competitive position.

But analysts note that Airbus's backlog is already full, meaning it largely lacks capacity to fill holes left by a Boeing boycott. Additionally, they suspect China ultimately wants Boeing to remain a supplier; having a competitor to Airbus works in China's interest, they say.

"Airbus can't realistically be China's only supplier of large commercial jets due to capacity constraints," says Epstein.





Source: Weibo

CFM International Leap-1Cs power Comac's C919

The trade war could also have implications for China's homegrown aircraft manufacturer Comac, which relies on components produced by many US suppliers. Those include GE Aerospace, which through its CFM International partnership supplies the Leap-1C turbofans that power Comac's C919.

China is developing a domestic engine for the C919, but that project is expected to take many years. As a result, China must step carefully lest a trade war spiral to hinder Comac's acquisition of Leaps, analysts say.

"If China stops buying aircraft components from the US, the C919 programme is halted or dead," says BofA's Epstein.

On the flip side, the trade war could benefit Comac by driving up C919 demand and "accelerating its move toward self-sufficiency", says Richard Aboulafia, analyst with AeroDynamic Advisory. "I never thought Comac had any hope until now."

He suspects the Trump administration's posture and policies will drive China's aerospace industry to align closer with other countries, and leave buyers less inclined to order Boeing jets.



Air China's fleet includes 130 737s (a 737 Max 8, above), eight 747s, 28 777s and 14 787s, Cirium shows

Boeing's success in China has long been intertwined with geopolitics. The company delivered its first aircraft to a Chinese customer in 1972, the same year US President Richard Nixon visited Beijing, opening diplomatic relations between the countries following years of isolation.

China was the first country in 2019 to ground the 737 Max following two crashes. The global grounding lasted 20 months, until late 2021, when Boeing resumed deliveries.

But Chinese carriers held out – they did not start accepting new 737 Max until early 2024, a delay analysts attributed to trade war that escalated during Trump's first term and continued under President Joe Biden.

Amid all that disruption, Boeing continued assembling 737 Max, leaving it with a stockpile of undelivered aircraft that in October 2021 included 370 737 Max, of which one-third (about 120 aircraft) were for Chinese customers, Boeing said at the time.

Boeing has since whittled down that stockpile to fewer than 40 aircraft, including 30 earmarked for Chinese airlines, according to data provider Cirium.

Boeing views China as a major market in the coming decades, anticipating Chinese customers will need 6,720 narrowbody and 1,575 widebody jets in the next 20 years, according to its most-recent market outlook.

BOEING SHIFT

That said, analysts view Boeing as now less reliant on Chinese customers.

Boeing's backlog includes many orders from unnamed customers, some of which are likely Chinese. But of named buyers, Chinese customers hold orders for only 130 aircraft, including 96 737 Max, 23 777s and 11 787s, according to Boeing's data.

Boeing has delivered only 109 aircraft to Chinese buyers between 2020 and March 2025. By comparison, it delivered 668 aircraft to Chinese customers between 2015 and 2020, its data shows.

"China has been a much less important market for Boeing than it has been historically," says RBC's Herbert.

"As of late, Boeing has largely derisked from China," adds a 15 April report from financial firm Jefferies.

