

Is United Airlines about to scrap its Airbus A350 order?

The Chicago-based airline is in a dispute with Rolls Royce, the sole engine supplier for the hugely popular A350 programme.



Tim Brownlee · February 13, 2026

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United Airlines has had an order in with Airbus for its most modern widebody, the A350, since 2009 – but reports suggest that the carrier may be contemplating tearing the contract up amid an apparent dispute with engine-maker Rolls-Royce.

The Airline Observer first reported that United had “removed its order for 45 Airbus A350s from its long-term fleet plans”. That has yet to be confirmed by United itself.

What is the dispute between United Airlines and Rolls-Royce?

United Airlines' latest SEC filing – a financial statement submitted to the US Securities and Exchange Commission – notes that the Chicago-based airline is in a dispute with Rolls-Royce, the sole engine supplier for the hugely popular A350 programme.

“In 2010, [United] entered into agreements with Rolls-Royce for engine purchases and related maintenance services for certain widebody aircraft,” reads the filing.

“In 2017, [United] paid Rolls-Royce a \$175 million commitment payment under those agreements. In December 2025, following a breach by Rolls-Royce, [United] issued a demand for payment representing the commitment payment plus contractual escalation.



Rolls-Royce Trent XWB. Photo: Rolls-Royce

“Rolls-Royce did not make the demanded payment. Rolls-Royce subsequently terminated the referenced agreements with [United] and asserted that [United] breached the agreements. [United] has disputed that Rolls-Royce properly terminated the agreements. Each of the parties contends that the other owes it damages.”

The filing goes on to suggest that the dispute may affect other parties involved in the contractual agreement, suggesting Airbus and the A350 order could be at risk.

“[United] has taken steps to recover the amounts it believes Rolls-Royce owes [United], along with other damages to which [United] believes it is entitled,” it continues.

“No assurance can be given that [United] will recover the funds it believes it is owed, or to the ultimate outcome of this matter. [United] is also considering further implications of this dispute with respect to other parties.”

Airbus and United have yet to comment on the report. AirInsight Group quoted Rolls-Royce SVP and Head of External Communications James Banks as saying:

“We’re aware of the issue and are confident in our position. We have complied with our obligations under a series of agreements that stretch back to 2010.

“Due to the ongoing legal proceedings, we are unable to comment further at this time. United Airlines is a valued customer. We look forward to resolving this historic issue and strengthening our strategic partnership in the future.”

When did United order its A350s and how many was it expecting?

In 2009, United signed contracts with Airbus and Rolls-Royce for a new fleet of Airbus A350-900 aircraft powered by Rolls-Royce Trent XWB engines.

The contract, for 25 Airbus A350 XWB plus TotalCare long-term service support, was said to be worth \$2 billion at engine list prices.

In addition, the airline also announced future purchase rights for a further 50 aircraft.

The aircraft had been due to be delivered between 2016 and 2019, but delays have beset the programme, and United has still not received a single airframe.

In 2013, United announced an order with Airbus for new A350-1000 aircraft. The agreement converted United’s existing order for 25 A350-900s into A350-1000s and added 10 firm orders for A350-1000s, giving the airline a total order of 35 aircraft.

At the time, United said the increased seating capacity of the A350-1000 would enable the carrier to replace older, less efficient aircraft.





Photo: Markus Mainka | Adobe Stock

United said at the time that it expected delivery starting in 2018.

Then in 2017, United updated and expanded its previously existing order for 35 A350-1000 to 45 A350-900 widebody aircraft.

“For the past year, United has done a complete review to ensure that we have the right long-term fleet strategy, and it was clear that the A350 aligns with our replacement needs and our network,” Andrew Levy, Chief Financial Officer of United, said at the time.

More recently, the airline was understood to have delayed its A350 deliveries beyond 2030.

Doubts cast over United’s Airbus A350 order

In September, Scott Kirby, United’s CEO, told the Airline Observer that the airline was reconsidering its A350 order.

The latest SEC filing sheds more light on the Rolls-Royce dispute and its potential impact on the wider A350 order.

United’s current widebody fleet is made up exclusively of Boeing airframes, including the 767, 787 and 777.



United is a loyal 787 Dreamliner customer. Image credit: Boeing

The carrier has not placed an order for the yet-to-be-certified Boeing 777X, instead concentrating future orders on the Dreamliner family.

In 2022, United placed an order for 100 787 aircraft, with the option to purchase 100 more. The deal was the largest 787 Dreamliner order in Boeing history

The airline’s current orders for Boeing jets have surpassed 530, including more than 430 737 MAX aircraft.

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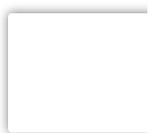
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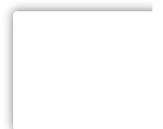
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