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United Bought Hundreds Of Lie Flat Seats For Its Delayed 737 MAX 10—Now They May Not Fit

by Gary Leff on August 31, 2026

United Airlines has hundreds of lie flat business class seats sitting in storage for an aircraft that was supposed to enter service six years ago. The Boeing 737 MAX 10 still isn't certified. And now it may turn out that the seats United bought for the plane can't actually be installed.

CEO Scott Kirby told CNBC that United has "a bunch of lie-flat seats" it doesn't know what to do with because they don't fit on other aircraft.

[Enliria flagged the predicament](#) and suggested that United could use the seats on MAX 10s flying to Hawaii. But [AirInsight reports](#) that United may have a more fundamental problem: the MAX 10's floor beams might not be able to support the weight and mounting loads of United's planned premium cabin.



United Boeing 737 MAX

How United Was Supposed To Use These Planes And Seats

United became the MAX 10 launch customer in 2017, initially converting orders for 100 smaller MAX aircraft. Deliveries were expected to begin in 2020.

In 2018, then-United President Scott Kirby said they were testing lie flat seats for some of the planes. The idea was to replace premium Boeing 757s on routes such as Newark–Los Angeles and San Francisco and to expand lie flat service to markets such as San Francisco–Washington Dulles.

The reported plan eventually developed into a dedicated subfleet with about 22 direct aisle access lie flat seats in a 1-1 configuration. At one point as many as 50 MAX 10s were expected to receive the premium cabin.

By 2023, patent drawings showed the seat concept: an extremely dense herringbone design with passengers facing the aisle at a 49-degree angle. The design shared space between adjacent passengers, one received shoulder room above space used by the next passenger's arm, in order to squeeze direct aisle access into a 737 fuselage.

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AirInsight identifies the stored seats as Elevate Altitude seats, adapted at a slightly different angle from the product United now uses on its Airbus narrowbodies. If the original 50-plane plan called for 22 seats apiece, that would have meant more than 1,100 seats before accounting for spares.

The MAX 10's certification slipped year after year. They switched several orders for MAX 9s, and shifted their premium transcontinental strategy to the Airbus A321neo. United's new [Coastliner fleet](#) will have 20 Polaris suites, 12 Premium Plus seats and 129 economy seats. Forty of the 50 aircraft are supposed to be flying by early 2028.



Kirby says the stored seats don't fit these aircraft. Seat tracks, attachment geometry, cabin curvature, electrical systems, monuments, seat angles and certification assumptions are all specific to an installation. United can't simply bolt a 737 seat into an A321. And the MAX 10 doesn't have the range to take over the transatlantic missions planned for United's A321XLRs.

The MAX 10 Is Finally Nearing Certification

The MAX 10 completed its [final planned certification flight](#) on July 28 after 976 flights and more than 2,060 flight hours. The smaller MAX 7 received [Federal Aviation Administration certification](#) on August 3, including changes to the engine anti-ice system and cockpit alerts that are also being incorporated into the MAX 10.

Boeing expects the MAX 10 to be certified this year, with deliveries beginning in 2027. WestJet, not United, is expected to get them first though United still has 167 MAX 10s on firm order. Its latest schedule calls for up to about 20 in 2027.

Most of those planes can receive United's standard domestic interior, reportedly with 20 first class recliners (American says they're putting in 24), 64 Economy Plus seats and 105 regular economy seats.

United's Lie Flat Seat Is Approved, But The Installation Isn't

Enliria reports that the seats themselves received Federal Aviation Administration approval but that changes to the MAX 10 may prevent their installation. That distinction is entirely plausible.

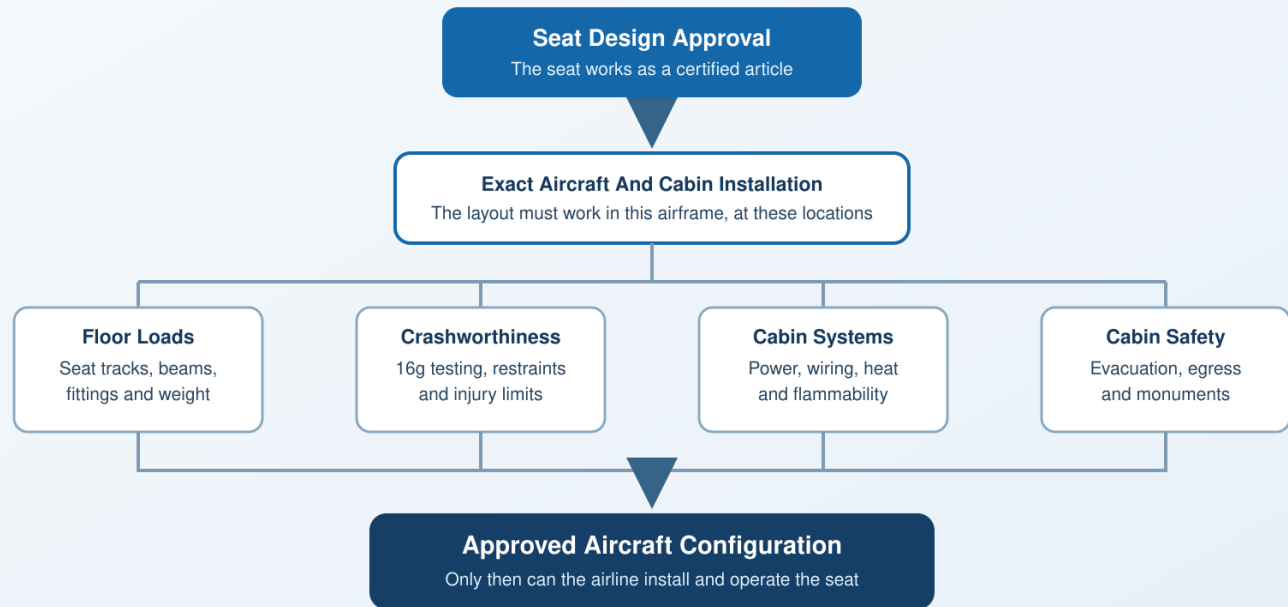
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- A seat manufacturer can demonstrate that its product satisfies dynamic crash testing, restraint and injury requirements.
- The airline and aircraft manufacturer still have to prove that the exact installed configuration works in that aircraft—at that angle, attached to those seat tracks and floor beams, surrounded by those monuments and wired into those systems.

Why An Approved Seat Still May Not Be Installable

The seat and the exact cabin installation require separate substantiation



If AirlInsight's report is correct, potential fixes include revised fittings, spreader plates, relocating the seats, changing their angle, reducing weight or reinforcing part of the floor. Each could require new engineering, testing and regulatory approval.

Flydubai and Copa already operate lie flat products on smaller MAX variants. Thompson markets its VantageSOLO direct-aisle seat for both Airbus A320-family and Boeing 737-family aircraft. The problem with this seat, in this layout, seems to be transferring loads through this installation. That could still be costly enough that United decides not to bother.

Enilira explains that,

- The seats have to withstand significant force during an emergency landing so that seats don't break loose. Lie flat seats are heavy with myriad moving parts and in the event of a forward impact, they can be pulled forward.
- The MAX 10 is the longest version of the 737, and uses lightweight material to compensate. A thinner structure might have difficulty supporting these seats.
- And the FAA has taken an exacting approach to MAX certification after the grounding of the aircraft and the door plug issue at Alaska Airlines.

They seats themselves could be certified, but installation on this aircraft might become a problem without reinforcing how they're attached which becomes its own cost and certification issue.

Delta Has Certification Problems With Its 44-Seat First Class A321s

Delta's premium Airbus A321neo program provides a remarkably close comparison.

Delta planned seven A321neos with 16 Delta One flat-bed suites, 12 Premium Select seats, 54 Comfort seats and 66 regular economy seats. But its planned Safran VUE suite wasn't certified. The first aircraft intended for the premium layout arrived in 2024 and sat rather than entering service.



Delta eventually filled the otherwise empty space with an absurd 44 domestic first class recliners: 11 rows, more than twice the usual 20 seats. That allowed the seven aircraft to earn revenue between Atlanta and Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and San Diego rather than continuing to sit in storage.

Delta called this a temporary response to a supply chain problem. But it now appears to have abandoned the Safran seat entirely in favor of the already-established Thompson VantageSOLO, pushing the intended premium product back at least another couple of years.

The difference is that Delta's planned seat wasn't certified. United's seat reportedly is, but may not be approved for a MAX 10 installation. Either way, that could mean standard first class seats that aren't as heavy, and using the aircraft on missions appropriate for that product.

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About Gary Leff

Gary Leff is one of the foremost experts in the field of miles, points, and frequent business travel - a topic he has covered since 2002. Co-founder of frequent flyer community InsideFlyer.com, emcee of the Freddie Awards, and named one of the "World's Top Travel Experts" by *Conde' Nast Traveler* (2010-Present) Gary has been a guest on most major news media, profiled in several top print publications, and published broadly on the topic of consumer loyalty. [More About Gary »](#)

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Tim Dunn says:
August 31, 2026 at 1:50 pm

You have to wonder if UA ordered the lie flat seats without verifying that the floors of the MAX 10 were capable of supporting the seats (hard to believe they would be so impulsive) or if Boeing lightened the floor.

Either way, it is probably too much to redesign the seat attachments to redistribute the load.

and, no, this isn't at all comparable to DL's 321NEO D1 seat issue; that is a manufacturer issue and DL, as has been reported, apparently does have a fallback plan



Anish says:
August 31, 2026 at 2:13 pm

Elevate is a Boeing subsidiary, it's extremely suprising they got this far into the process, wiht seats manufacutred for a plane they wouldn't be able to fly on. Elevate would have know about all the 737-10 characteristics it needed to – for the safe installation and operation of seats on it. I do not think we know everything about this yet, moreover I do not think United would choose and buy seats if they were not told it was able to safely fly on the 737-10.

Perhaps just a big jumble up Boeing, before management and this new culutre started to take shape.



Homer says:
August 31, 2026 at 2:17 pm

Sell them at unitedshop.com or skyart.com and next time get better contract terms from the aircraft manufacturer and seat supplier. If there is non-performance of existing contracts regarding the interior of MAX-10, lawyer up.

I would probably prefer recliners for my TV room.



Brent says:

August 31, 2026 at 2:18 pm

How much of a worthless sloth does someone have to be to actually lay down on a flight to Hawaii? This is one of the most ridiculous things I have ever heard of. Disgustingly pathetic type Of self inflated ego and worth.



1990 says:

August 31, 2026 at 3:15 pm

@Brent — Wuttt? EWR-HNL, for example, is like 10+ hours, redeye on east-bound. I'd prefer a bed. (Now, we're talking 737, so, I doubt UA or anyone's gonna push range on that, but even for 5+ hours from LAX-OGG, I'd prefer the bed than a recliner.)



This comes to mind says:

August 31, 2026 at 3:52 pm

So, Brent, a pax flying 5 hours HNL(10pm) to SFO(6am) is a sloth for wanting a lie-flat seat? The MAX10 could do it, but us manly, manly, men should request an all 3-3 coach seating in the plane with 28" pitch? If you ain't raw-dogging, you must be a sloth.



1990 says:

August 31, 2026 at 4:18 pm

@This comes to mind — Swell use of 'raw-dogging,' Ohio!



JCW says:

August 31, 2026 at 5:39 pm

All J 73M7 will be the answer.



Nick says:

August 31, 2026 at 6:18 pm

The Boeing Max 10 is not the aircraft of today and its certainly not the aircraft of tomorrow. I'll let everyone else think about that for a minute. It doesn't compete with the Airbus A320 family



jns says:

August 31, 2026 at 7:12 pm

Lie flat economy seats are on the way. Have a yard sale for the premium seats that don't fit.



Mark says:

September 1, 2026 at 11:48 am

This is among the worst euphemisms you've ever used:

"And the FAA has taken an exacting approach to MAX certification after the grounding of the aircraft and the door plug issue at Alaska Airlines"

After the grounding? How about "after two fatal crashes cause by a design and engineering flaw that was entirely the responsibility of Boeing. Those crashes killed 346 people."

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About Gary Leff



Gary Leff is one of the foremost experts in the field of miles, points, and frequent business travel – a topic he has covered since 2002.

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emcee of the Freddie Awards, and named one of the "World's Top Travel Experts" by *Conde' Nast Traveler* (2010-Present) Gary has been a guest on most major news media, profiled in several top print publications, and published broadly on the topic of consumer loyalty. [More About Gary »](#)

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