detected and corrected, could result in loss of control of the airplane.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before February 23, 1996.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Central Region, Office of the Assistant Chief Counsel, Attention: Rules Docket No. 90–CE–63–AD, Room 1558, 601 E. 12th Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64106. Comments may be inspected at this location between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, holidays excepted.

Service information that relates to the proposed AD may be obtained from The New Piper Aircraft, Inc., Customer Services, 2926 Piper Drive, Vero Beach, Florida 32960. This information also may be examined at the Rules Docket at the address above.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Christina Marsh, Aerospace Engineer, FAA, Atlanta Aircraft Certification Office, Campus Building, 1701 Columbia Avenue, suite 2–160, College Park, Georgia 30337–2748; telephone (404) 305–7362; facsimile (404) 305–7348.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Comments Invited

Interested persons are invited to participate in the making of the proposed rule by submitting such written data, views, or arguments as they may desire. Communications should identify the Rules Docket number and be submitted in triplicate to the address specified above. All communications received on or before the closing date for comments, specified above, will be considered before taking action on the proposed rule. The proposals contained in this notice may be changed in light of the comments received.

Comments are specifically invited on the overall regulatory, economic, environmental, and energy aspects of the proposed rule. All comments submitted will be available, both before and after the closing date for comments, in the Rules Docket for examination by interested persons. A report that summarizes each FAA-public contact concerned with the substance of this proposal will be filed in the Rules Docket.

Commenters wishing the FAA to acknowledge receipt of their comments submitted in response to this notice must submit a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which the following statement is made: ''Comments to Docket No. 90–CE–63–AD.'' The postcard will be date stamped and returned to the commenter.

Availability of NPRMs

Any person may obtain a copy of this NPRM by submitting a request to the FAA, Central Region, Office of the Assistant Chief Counsel, Attention: Rules Docket No. 90–CE–63–AD, Room 1558, 601 E. 12th Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64106.

Discussion

The FAA has determined that reliance on critical repetitive inspections on aging commuter-class airplanes carries an unnecessary safety risk when a design change exists that could eliminate or, in certain instances, reduce the number of those critical inspections. In determining what inspections are critical, the FAA considers (1) the safety consequences if the known problem is not detected during the inspection; (2) the probability of the problem not being detected during the inspection; (3) whether the inspection area is difficult to access; and (4) the possibility of damage to an adjacent structure as a result of the problem.

These factors have led the FAA to establish an aging commuter-class aircraft policy that requires incorporating a known design change when it could replace a critical repetitive inspection. With this policy in mind, the FAA conducted a review of existing AD's that apply to Piper Models PA31–350 and PA31T3 airplanes. Assisting the FAA in this review were (1) The New Piper Aircraft, Inc.; (2) the Regional Airlines Association (RAA); and (3) several operators of the affected airplanes.

From this review, the FAA has identified AD 80–14–06, Amendment 39–3805, as one that should be superseded with a new AD that would require a modification that would eliminate the need for short-interval and critical repetitive inspections. AD 80–14–06 currently requires the following on Piper Models PA31, PA31–300, PA31–325, and PA31–350 airplanes:

—Repetitively inspecting the outboard flap tracks, wing rib flanges, and the rear spar web at Wing Station (WS) 147.5 on each wing and modifying the area at WS 147.5 on both wings if any cracks are found as terminating action for the repetitive inspection requirement; and

—Allowing for the provision of modifying the area at WS 147.5 on both wings as terminating action for the repetitive inspection requirement.

Piper Service Bulletin (SB) No. 647A, dated November 24, 1980, references Kit 763 986, which, when incorporated, provides a modification of the area at WS 147.5 on both wings that would eliminate the need for the repetitive inspection requirement of AD 80–14–06. Kit 763 986 also contains procedures for incorporating this modification.

Based on its aging commuter-class aircraft policy and after reviewing all available information related to this subject including the referenced service information, the FAA has determined that AD action should be taken to eliminate the repetitive short- interval inspections required by AD 80–14–06, and to prevent structural failure under certain load conditions caused by cracked areas at WS 147.5, which, if not detected and corrected, could result in loss of control of the airplane.

Since an unsafe condition has been identified that is likely to exist or develop in other Piper Models PA31, PA31–300, PA31–325, and PA31–350 airplanes of the same type design, the proposed AD would supersede AD 80–14–06 with a new AD that would (1) retain the requirement of repetitively inspecting the outboard flap track, wing rib flanges, and the rear wing web at WS 147.5, and, if any cracks are found, modifying the area of WS 147.5 by incorporating Piper Kit 763 986 as terminating action for the repetitive inspection requirement; and (2) require incorporating Piper Kit 763 986 at a specified hours TIS time-period for airplanes where no cracks were found during the inspections as terminating action for the repetitive inspection requirement. Accomplishment of the proposed modification would be in accordance with the instructions included with Piper Kit 763 986, as referenced in Piper SB No. 647A, dated November 24, 1980.

The FAA estimates that 2,906 airplanes in the U.S. registry would be affected by the proposed AD, that it would take approximately 30 workhours per airplane to accomplish the proposed modification, and that the average labor rate is approximately $60 an hour. Parts cost approximately $468 per airplane. Based on these figures, the total cost impact of the proposed modification on U.S. operators is estimated to be $6,590,808 or $2,268 per airplane.

Piper has informed the FAA that parts have been distributed to enough owners/operators to equip 234 of the affected airplanes. Assuming that each set of parts has been installed on an affected airplane, the cost impact of the proposed AD upon U.S. owners operators of the affected airplanes would be reduced by $530,712 from $6,590,808 to $6,060,096.

The intent of the FAA's aging commuter airplane program is to ensure safe operation of commuter-class