Administration (FAA), Transport Airplane Directorate, ANM–103, Attention: Rules Docket No. 94–NM–221–AD, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055–4056. Comments may be inspected at this location between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

The service information referenced in the proposed rule may be obtained from Boeing Commercial Airplane Group, P.O. Box 3707, Seattle, Washington 98124–2207. This information may be examined at the FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steven C. Fox, Aerospace Engineer, Airframe Branch, ANM–120S, FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, Seattle Aircraft Certification Office, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055–4056; telephone (206) 227–2777; fax (206) 227–1181.

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 shall 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 summarizing 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 Number 94–NM–221–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, Transport Airplane Directorate,

ANM-03, Attention: Rules Docket No. 94-M-21-D, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056.

Discussion

The FAA has received reports from operators that, during scheduled deployment tests of a main entry door slide, corrosion was found on the floor structure supports for the escape slides of the main deck entry doors on Boeing Model 747 series airplanes.

In three reported incidents, the escape slides disconnected from the lower door sill and fell to the ground. In all three incidents, the girt bar supports were found to have moderate to severe corrosion. In two cases, the fasteners that attach the serrated plate assembly to the girt bar supports were corroded and broken. One of these incidents occurred at Main Entry Door (MED) 2 and the other two incidents occurred at MED 5. These airplanes had accumulated 15 to 20 years of service since date of manufacture.

In three other reported incidents, corrosion was found on the support fitting and the fastener. The corrosion was so severe that the escape slide would have fallen off the airplane, if the slide had been deployed. Two of these incidents occurred at MED 1, and the other incident occurred at MED 4. These airplanes had accumulated 11 to 20 years of service since date of manufacture.

Additionally, four more reported incidents of corrosion were found on the girt bar supports at seven doors on six other airplanes. One of these incidents occurred at MED 2, two occurred at MED 3, three occurred at MED 4, and one occurred at MED 5. These airplanes had accumulated 9 to 18 years of service since date of manufacture.

Following these reports, the manufacturer conducted a structural review of all entry doors on Model 747 series airplanes. This review found that corrosion could occur at any main deck entry door. Each main entry door has two girt bar chock support fittings; when the escape slide is deployed, these fittings attach the escape slide to the sill of the MED. Corrosion on these fittings, if not detected and corrected in a timely manner, could result in separation of the escape slide from the lower door sill during deployment, which would prevent proper operation of the escape slides at the main entry doors during an emergency.

The FAA has reviewed and approved Boeing Service Bulletin 747–53A2378, Revision 1, dated March 10, 1994, which describes procedures for repetitive detailed visual inspections to

detect cracks and/or corrosion of the girt bar support fitting at MED's 1 through 5, inclusive; repair or replacement of the support fitting; and reinstallation of the threshold assembly. This service bulletin also describes procedures for replacing the support fittings with new support fittings having new fasteners; refinishing uncorroded support fittings; and removing the corrosion and refinishing corroded support fittings. When accomplished, these actions eliminate the need for the repetitive visual inspections. (The new support fitting has inserts of cadmium plated alloy steel that are less susceptible to corrosion.)

Since an unsafe condition has been identified that is likely to exist or develop on other products of this same type design, the proposed AD would require repetitive detailed visual inspections to detect cracks and/or corrosion of the girt bar support fitting at MED's 1 through 5, inclusive; repair or replacement of the support fitting; and reinstallation of the threshold assembly. The proposed AD would also require, under certain conditions, replacing the support fittings with new support fittings having new fasteners; refinishing uncorroded support fittings; and removing the corrosion and refinishing corroded support fittings. When accomplished, these latter actions would constitute terminating action for the repetitive visual inspections. The actions would be required to be accomplished in accordance with the service bulletin described previously.

As a result of recent communications with the Air Transport Association (ATA) of America, the FAA has learned that, in general, some operators may misunderstand the legal effect of AD's on airplanes that are identified in the applicability provision of the AD, but that have been altered or repaired in the area addressed by the AD. The FAA points out that all airplanes identified in the applicability provision of an AD are legally subject to the AD. If an airplane has been altered or repaired in the affected area in such a way as to affect compliance with the AD, the owner or operator is required to obtain FAA approval for an alternative method of compliance with the AD, in accordance with the paragraph of each AD that provides for such approvals. A note has been included in this notice added to this final rule to clarify this requirement.

There are approximately 868 Boeing Model 747 series airplanes of the affected design in the worldwide fleet. The FAA estimates that 169 airplanes of U.S. registry would be affected by this proposed AD.