

Podcast Transcription

Fly by Night: Captain Marty Harrington – Scheduling Committee Chairman

Captain Chris Lee My guest today is Captain Marty Harrington. Marty is the Scheduling Committee Chairman. Thanks for coming, Marty.

Captain Marty Harrington Yeah, thanks, Chris.

Captain Chris Lee Tell everybody a little bit about your background before coming to FedEx and what you've been doing since you've been at FedEx.

Captain Marty Harrington So, I was in the Navy for 10 years, learned how to fly there and afterwards, I came to FedEx. I flew engineer on the 727, on the DC10, then flew right seat in the 727, then moved to right seat in the MD11 and now Captain MD11 out in L.A. I've been there for 16, 17 years.

Captain Chris Lee Talk a little bit about your union experience.

Captain Marty Harrington Out in L.A., I was the Pilots for Kids coordinator for about five years. I ran that and I got interested in scheduling. I reviewed pairings for a little while. I started back in 2006 with the Scheduling Committee. Then I became a member of the PSIT a few months afterwards. I did the PSIT for five years, then SIG Vice Chairman from 2011 to 2016, six years, and I've been the Chairman of the SIG for about four years now.

Captain Chris Lee The Scheduling Committee has different parts to it. You have the Scheduling Improvement Group, also known as the SIG, and you also have the Pilot Scheduling Improvement Team, known as the PSIT. Talk about the roles and responsibilities of each of these.

Captain Marty Harrington We have a Scheduling Improvement Group and the Scheduling Committee, of which I'm the Chairman of both. The SIG is the group that works with the Company on publishing bidpacks and creating lines and the Scheduling Committee works all the other issues outside of the planning and prep for the bidpacks. The PSIT is a group of about 30 volunteers. They review the pairings and every month they come to Memphis and utilizing the Company software, they put the lines together. We also have a dozen or so reviewers, who are purely voluntary. They just review the pairings every month and they give input to the PSIT for the pairing group.

Captain Chris Lee So it's important for especially the new pilots to understand, your group does not build pairings.

Captain Marty Harrington Actually, very important to understand. The Company builds the pairings. We review those pairings that they build and we give feedback to the Company on a month-to-month basis.

Captain Chris Lee Talk about that process.

Captain Marty Harrington The monthly procedure starts 13 days prior to bidpack publication. The entire group gets the preliminary set of pairings that they review and look over every month, deadheading, the connections, all the things that a line pilot would know

about and we give input back. We give feedback back to the Company over that weekend. We send a file back to them and it has a bunch of change requests, possibly how to design a pairing differently in the future. And on that following Monday, they take the input and either fix the pairing how we request it or they'll say no fix. That following Wednesday, which is 8 days prior to bidpack publication, we'll have a conference call with all the PSIT and the Company SIG and review the feedback and the fixes that the Company gave to us. If we have any major issues with how we think the build is going to go together, how the pairings will go together for lines, we make our case at that point in time on that conference call. That following Friday, which now is 6 days prior to bidpack publication, we'll get the final set of pairings. The PSIT will review that weekend, they'll review all those pairings and, on that Sunday, the builders will come to Memphis and we'll begin build week. Monday, we have a meeting. It's called the in brief. We give our final pitch to the Company on pairing changes. We go over targets, the Company has a basic line guarantee target that they'll request for us to build lines to and typically we try to hit that within plus or minus 30 minutes. On the in brief, we'll talk about if we think there are any other issues with the lines being put together. At that point in time, the PSIT get busy starting to build lines. They'll build lines all day Tuesday and Wednesday and in that two-day period, Mike Percy, my Vice Chairman and I will have meetings with the Company to go over any disputed pairings that we bring up. On any given month, the week starts with dozens, if not hundreds of disputed pairings. And during the disputed pairing process, we have inputs from the PSIT and we'll recommend different fixes to pairings or how they should be built going forward. And at the end of that week, during the disputed pairing process, if we can't come to some resolution, we'll designate a pairing as disputed. In the 2015 CBA, there was a change in that procedure. It added a new path for a disputed pairing to go down. So right now we call them there's two paths, one is the traditional dispute and one is the FERC dispute. If the only rationale, underlying reason for the dispute is fatigue, it should go down the fatigue path. If there are other reasons for a dispute, they'll go down what we call the traditional dispute. Since 2015, we've had very few pairings go down the traditional dispute because most of our disputed pairings really are focused on fatigue. So not only do we do the month-to-month build, but we also have a number of other things that we deal with in the Scheduling Committee. Every quarter we run a SIG quarterly meeting where we have managers from all the different departments across FedEx; charters, airline scheduling, airplane acquisitions, crew resource scheduling, crew resource planning. And at the meeting, we try and get a feel for where the Company is going, what the demands to the crew force may be going forward, or how the schedule will change in the future. We also do a number of [Scheduling Matters communications](#). We have a PSIT guy, Ted, he has rewritten all the Scheduling Matters that we had and now he's creating new Scheduling Matters. It talks about how to bid when you're in training. It talks about how to utilize vacation. We have a number of these they're on the website. They're PDFs so you can download them. So for any new guys, they have a question on how to bid, how to bid during training, how to bid vacation, they should look into those [Scheduling Matters articles](#). They're really good, really informative.

Captain Chris Lee Talk a little bit about how the pandemic has impacted your committee.

Captain Marty Harrington That's a great question. So, I want to say back in February of 2020, we knew in our group that COVID was a thing. The average person in the United States had no idea, but we knew what was happening, the issues over in Hong Kong, because it affected their lives earlier on than it did here. And I wrote in the [February SIG notes](#) what a difference a month makes. The previous build, we'd never heard the term coronavirus. In your FedEx ALPA SIG opinion, we now find ourselves in the largest challenge ever faced in flight operations. And it has gotten more and more difficult since

that time. Almost every month brings a new challenge on a restriction of a quarantine, deadhead we can't get to, a country we can't get into, testing requirements, hotel requirements. It's gotten more complicated and difficult for, I want to say, just about everyone at the airline.

Captain Chris Lee Are there any recent developments you've had with COVID?

Captain Marty Harrington I would have expected by this time things would have gotten easier, but they seem to get more and more difficult even on a month-to-month basis. Just recently we're bypassing Hong Kong now. We're not laying over in Hong Kong, and that's due to the government restrictions there. We have been bypassing Shenzhen and Shanghai but the problem is it's led to multiple two-leg longer RFO trips and some of these are very difficult. Some of the other issues, obviously, the Hong Kong base has temporarily relocated to San Francisco. We've had a number of European lockdowns and quarantine requirements where we had to alter pairing design. And, just recently, we've had a complete overhaul of the domestic system due to the new sunrise sort in Indianapolis.

Captain Chris Lee The sunrise sort is definitely a hot topic with the pilots. What exactly is a sunrise sort?

Captain Marty Harrington So the pandemic has led to an increase in online shipping and e-commerce. Shipping volumes are not expected to slow down anytime soon. So these increases have resulted in adjustments within the domestic system. A third sort was created to handle next-day business-to-consumer packages. And this sort occurs after the night sort in Indianapolis between the hours of 0500 and 0800 in the morning. We first got our indication they were going to change domestic system form back in February. The Company canceled 2 soft parameters. These soft parameters dealt with blended duty time limits and at that point in time, we were told the Company's moving towards a separate sort to address these types of shipments, next day, not time-dependent, they just need to be there the next day. And the concept is a good concept. So they shift that sunrise to the right and now there's less volume going through at any specific time. What we didn't know is how big it would impact the domestic system at that time. So we got the cancellation of the soft parameters back in February and we wrote in the [SIG notes](#), yep, this soft parameter has been canceled, but we weren't sure was the impact. Up until we got those pairings for April, we didn't think it was going to be that big of a deal. We said, yeah, they're just going to add a few more flights and that's what's going to happen and maybe a couple of pairings in some of the domestic bidpacks. But what did happen was they completely revamped the domestic system. The sunrise sort added a lot more flying, much more than we thought there would be, probably a dozen pairings in the three domestic bidpacks. And it gave the Company an opportunity to mix that sunrise sort flying with our other two sorts, our day sort and our night sort. So it actually gave the Company some level of efficiency by adding more pieces to make pairings, but the problem we saw is that they really cranked up optimization that first month. And like a lot of the months during the pandemic, the Company has been late getting pairings to the PSIT. Like I said, we usually get finals on Friday. We were getting finals on Saturday and now over the past couple of months, we haven't been getting finals until Monday. And we still have to review those pairings before we start building lines. So our build week has been shortened probably the past six, nine months we've gotten pairings later than the deadline from the CBA required deadline. But we have that deadline to publish lines and we want to have the most accurate pairings that we can have. So we've had issues with the deadheads changing or airline scheduling is giving late revisions to planning. Recently, we've had the pairings delayed getting to us and we're late with our review, that deadline comes on Thursday. We

have to publish the bidpacks on Thursday. We can slide to Friday, but everybody wants their bidpacks out on Thursday. Even our guys were like, Thursday they're working until seven, eight o'clock at night trying to put lines together so we can publish by Thursday. That week, we had 95 disputed pairings that went through the process, we probably had hundreds that month. We had a number of fixes, but some of these pairings we thought were too difficult, had too many issues system-wide to just let them go. And we published the bidpacks on Thursday. So by the end of that week, we went to the traditional dispute path. These pairings we didn't believe were reliable, had much less purity, buildability was a factor, and quality of life overall decreased quite dramatically month over month. The Company utilized the blended duty exception where you had time in the hub to get a nap and now they could extend their duty beyond the blended limit. You talk about reliability, system-wide domestically, sorts have been late, consistently late month after month, and these pairings relied on pilots getting a nap on the hub turn. And I don't think we could expect that. If we're late an hour or two, is he going to get the time in the hotel or a time behind the door at the hub? That's why we went the traditional dispute path. In the traditional dispute path, these pairings go to the System Chief Pilot. Since the timeline slid a bit and it was such a large number of disputed pairings, the System Chief Pilot didn't get to review the pairings until that Thursday. We published the bid packs and we annotated the disputed pairing list. We gave it out to the pilots and explained our reasons why in a [comm that I wrote up](#). The SCP reviewed those 95 over the weekend. On Monday, we scheduled a conference call with him and this was a two-and-a-half-hour conference call. We went through our reasons why we disputed them and why we thought they were difficult and why we thought they weren't reliable and all those reasons I annotated in that [communication](#). And we were very happy with the outcome of that meeting. The Company has decided to split up a lot of these pairings and they requested that they be built differently going forward. This is a process and it's going to take time. Most of the egregious pairing design that we saw last month has been fixed, but we're not where we need to be as far as the quality of life, having senior pairings. Years ago, when I first got to FedEx, we had a lot of purity in our pairings. You would fly from one city to Memphis, back to that city at night. That's all you did all month, all week, all month. Over time, the Company has gained efficiencies by building pairings, mixing different cities. They do lift to load, which is inbound, might be a certain amount of freight they need to bring in and it's a different amount going out. So they'll fly airplanes around to max lift to load. We've lost a lot of city purity in the time that I've been here. Then we added the day sort in the postal contract and we added day/night. We tried to cordon off the day/night. We want to have senior pairings that fly just during the day. We have other pairings that fly the night stuff. I don't think anyone likes flying a day leg then a night leg then a day leg then a night leg. So we try and hold off between those two. And now there's another sort that they're mixing into. We still need those senior pairings that just fly during the day. In my opinion, domestically, we're not where we need to be yet, but we're working on it. By the end of build week, the SIG group works out some type of understanding or how to go forward with the schedule. This time that didn't happen. We came to an impasse. We disputed the 95 pairings. We had a conference call with pilots the very next week. And I want to say, I want to thank the pilots that showed up for that call. 300 pilots on a conference call in the middle of the week to talk about what just happened with the domestic system. That type of engagement, the Company knows that it's important to us. The response we got from management was very positive. It didn't have to be positive, it could have been negative, and we would be stuck with having disputed pairings for months on end. But I think the engagement of the crew force and the process did work.

Captain Chris Lee Do you expect that the sunrise pairings will increase?

Captain Marty Harrington I do. A couple of months ago, we had our SIG quarterly and at that time we still have 14 767s, we're gaining this year. And I want to say a couple, a 777 or two, maybe two or three. But that's a massive increase. We've delayed MD11 retirements. MD10-10s we're going to be all retired about six years ago and we're still flying them. They said they're going to retire those MD10-10s this year. We have an unbelievable demand for freight. We have a shortage of airframes and pilots. The Company is hiring as many as they can hire and get through training. If they could hire more, they would. The throughput is to the limit on getting pilots on board. I was at a hub turn meeting in January of 2020, and the targets were getting lowered, bid line guarantees, averages were going down. We were doing some buy-ups on lines, meaning we have a minimum of sixty-eight credit hours on a four week and so we would build the line to 66 and buy those two credit hours up to make it a 68. So in essence, the pilots would just be getting two credit hours to make their minimum of 68. They asked me at a hub turn meeting, said are we going to go into [4.A.2.b](#)? Well [4.A.2.b](#) is now is actually [4.A.2.c](#) but [4.A.2.b](#) is actually circuit breakers that pop where the Company how they build the pairings they have to follow this new procedure. We were there. We had lower BLG targets. We had lower averages. We were telling the Company to shorten carry out so that we could build lines above the 68 minimum and we were overmanned. Now we're not going to do an excess because what happens is within a year that can change. Let's say, this year things have changed quite a bit. I want you to think about this, where would we be today if we weren't a little bit fat on manning in January 2020? I would say we're somewhere between five hundred and a thousand pilots short right now. We're still going to have retirements in December but if we were short starting the pandemic, we would be turning down freight, much more freight and we're turning down now.

Captain Chris Lee Can you talk some more about manning?

Captain Marty Harrington Yeah, I would say over the years, FedEx has manned the airline differently. They're a corporation. They're trying to gain more efficiencies. Let's start back in 2015 CBA, they changed the secondary line procedure to allow any reserve drop conflicts to be moved to the secondary line generator. Prior to that, one month to the next, they didn't know how many conflicts would be, are they going to wipe out their whole reserve line with vacation and training or shift their vacation to not touch any of their reserve. So on any given month, the Company likes clarity, they want to know, they want to be able to plan ahead. And before the 2015 contract, they had to guess. So they overestimated a little. So they were going to carry a little bit more reserve. So now they changed that. They can carry a little bit less reserve. Something else, back in March of 2017, the Company reduced field domestic standbys from eight to three, and each one of those standby pairings would require two crews. A reduction of another ten or twelve crews across the system. Pairing design efficiency increases. If you build the most efficient pairing, there's no margin for error. There's no margin for any type of delay, a maintenance delay, a weather delay. If you were to build right to the contractual limits, once you go past, you go a guy times out on 8 in 24 or max duty time, or the potential for a fatigue call as well. If you make the airline ultimate efficiency, any little hiccup, guys will start dropping out for whatever it might be.

Captain Chris Lee If a pilot wants to reach out to you, what's the best way they can do that?

Captain Marty Harrington The best avenue would be through [Dart](#). Dart is a database that we keep all the questions and answers, everyone knows that the question is being answered and perhaps maybe a question that comes to me would be better answered by

contract enforcement or the fatigue group. And then whoever gets it can forward it on to the correct person and then we can track the answers too. Right now, there's a lot of eyes on darts and if a question doesn't get answered, it will remind you after a couple of days saying, hey, you need to answer this guy, we didn't get a response.

Captain Chris Lee Any final thoughts?

Captain Marty Harrington I talked about the SIG quarterly earlier. The last Sig quarterly we had a couple of months ago, we have a number of managers on the call from all the different aspects of the Company, all different departments. These are Senior Managers and Managing Directors. And I thank them for coming, and I said, yeah, it's been a rough year for all of us. I appreciate all the extra work, thanks. The conference call doesn't have to be a one-way street. I said, do you have anything you want to pass along to the pilots? And I would say all of them, it was really heartening. They said they understand the hardship the pilots have gone through this year and they wanted to say thank you. So I'm passing that along to all the pilots. I know it's been tough. COVID has taken the fun out of this job but we're still doing the job and there's a lot of the hotel quarantines, the government-mandated hotels. The trips have definitely become harder because of COVID, but I will tell you that on the management side, these managers that were on the conference call with me, they said, yeah, we appreciate what the pilots have done. So it's been a rough year for, I think, everybody. We talked about the silver lining. We're getting more freight. We're getting more work. We're bringing more pilots on. That's the plus. But the negative is flying has become more of a job this past year. I will say AVA, the draft/volunteer, the vacation buyback, all that, I expect to continue for a long time. The group I work with, the Pilot Scheduling Improvement Team, and the reviewers that work on a purely voluntary basis, I want to say thank you for the extra work they put in. They've dealt with me. It's been, I think all of us have been stressed out this year, but these guys have responded. I've called them up on a weekday out of the blue and said, we need you to review pairings today and without any compensation, they jump on it and they've been doing this like we all have since April of last year. The Hong Kong reviewers and builders, I can't even tell you how many different sets of pairings they have reviewed. One build week I think they hit seven sets of pairings that they had to review. And typically they review two sets of pairings. So I just want to thank all the guys on my team. I think they've been doing an outstanding job. They've been putting a lot of extra effort in without compensation and I just want to say I appreciate that.

Captain Chris Lee Well, thanks for coming Marty, and thanks for listening. If you have any questions, please go to our website, fdx.alpa.org and utilize the [DART link](#). And as always, be safe out there and we'll see you next time.