

STRETCHED A350-1000 MUST NOT BE 'ME TOO' PROJECT – LEAHY

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Airbus is closely examining the potential market for a larger version of the **A350-1000**, but wants to avoid distancing itself from the core A350 market.

The airframer has been talking to a “handful” of potential customers to explore whether there is a sufficient market for an aircraft with 50-60 more seats than the -1000, says Airbus chief operating officer for customers John Leahy.

He argues that Boeing has pursued the rival 777X simply to cut seat-mile cost figures, and Airbus wants to avoid proceeding with a further A350 development without a clear indication that there is market demand.

“This is not going to be a ‘me too’ airplane,” insisted Leahy, speaking to Flightglobal at the Dubai air show.

While Airbus is “very carefully” looking at a stretched -1000, he says, the airframer still believes the “sweet spot” in the market is the sector occupied by the Boeing 777-300ER, and that a “large percentage” of that market will fall within the -1000’s capability.

The potential stretch would probably require modification of the wing – although not the undercarriage – and Leahy indicates that Airbus is discussing the options for a powerplant with Rolls-Royce, which provides the Trent XWB-97 for the -1000.

Flight-testing of the XWB-97 engine commenced earlier this month.

Leahy would not be drawn on the discussions, and whether Rolls-Royce could squeeze further performance from the XWB-97, acknowledging only that “maybe” a different engine would be necessary – without elaborating on the nature of any change.

“We think we could come up with a very good airplane,” he says, adding that – in comparison with the 777X – it would be “essentially clean-sheet”.

Airbus has secured orders for 175 A350-1000s following the conversion in October of six -900s by an undisclosed customer.

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