

Cascade to buy 8 new planes: 'state of the art'

By Sandra L. Lee
of the Tribune

Cascade Airways has signed a \$22 million contract for eight new airplanes that will allow conversion to a totally pressurized fleet within six months, E. S. (Brook) Fox, president of the Spokane-based airline, said Friday at Lewiston.

The first pair of 1900 Airliners is scheduled for delivery in January, and Lewiston probably will be among the first cities to see them in service, Fox said.

"At the risk of drawing a few frowns, these are made by Beech Aircraft," Fox told the Greater Lewiston Chamber of Commerce Aviation Committee at Volare restaurant.

Beech's tubby little unpressurized 99s, which for years flew the majority of Cascade's routes, also generated the most passenger complaints because of size, comfort and susceptibility to bouncing around in rough weather.

But the new Beechcraft 1900s are state of the art, and Cascade was selected by the manufacturer to "showcase" them because of the airline's 14-year history with the 99s, Fox said.

Each will seat 19 passengers, the same as the Metroliner IIIs also flown by Cascade, but the seats themselves are larger — identical to those used on major airlines — with space beneath for carry-on luggage, an extra foot of cabin height and squared interior walls rather than the old rounded style that kept passengers tilted toward the center aisle.

Their cargo capacity exceeds that of the Metros by more than a ton, allowing Cascade to fulfill freight contracts without dumping someone's luggage, Fox said.

Fuel efficiency is less than with the Metros, but maintenance also should be less because the engines are larger than necessary and will operate at only 70 percent of their rated capacity.

The 1900s will be able to climb out of the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley several minutes faster than the old 99s or the Metros, reaching cruising altitude of 25,000 feet in 20 minutes, meaning passengers will have to endure the buffets of turbulence created by the surrounding hills for a shorter time, he said.

The airline initially planned to replace the three 99s still flying regularly as soon as the first two 1900s arrived from the Wichita assembly plant. "But to be completely frank," Fox said, "business is so good we may have to keep some of

problems with that," Fox said.

"It's certainly not outside the realm of possibility" for Cascade to begin looking at small jets seating about 80, Mark A. Nilson, vice president of marketing, added.

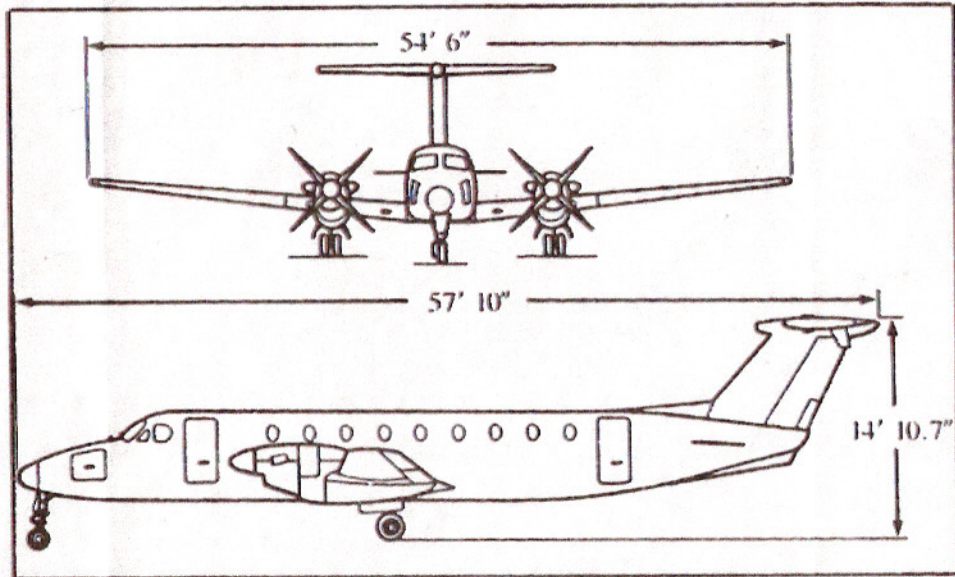
Nilson said that one of Cascade's problems at Lewiston — people who drive to Spokane to catch flights — probably is caused as much by the desire to fly aboard large jet aircraft as by the additional fare between the two cities.

But adding jet service would require a totally different scheduling concept based on fewer flights, and Lewiston might find that it can be better serviced by the smaller, feeder aircraft, he cautioned.

The airline wants input from its customers, particularly on what direction future service should take, he said.

Fox noted that Lewiston, like many communities, has a "small aircraft syndrome." But if the smaller planes are pressurized, jets offer little more than a few minutes less flight time and some of the standard amenities, such as flight attendants, he said.

The regional, or commuter air-



lines that use aircraft with a 15 passenger or larger capacity also have a safety record equal to or better than the major airlines, he said. "When you get down to a single engine, it's a different ballgame."

And the cost of expanding service is substantial, he reminded.

Northwest Airlines announced Thursday that it's withdrawing from Butte, and Cascade intends to fill in the gap between the Montana city and Spokane. That type

of expansion takes a large investment — about \$2.5 million for an aircraft plus air and ground personnel at the new station, he said. The cost per seat averages out higher than on a 727, 737 or DC-9, he said.

When Cascade looks at expanding, it also has to look at whether that community is trying to attract jet service. "Our dilemma is: Can we afford to go into a community where we're not getting 100 percent backing?"

Backing has been "superior" from Lewiston, Fox said.

Fox said he expects employment to grow about 10 percent during the next year because of gradual expansions within the system, some of which he believes will be generated by the new aircraft. The second pair are scheduled for delivery in May, the third in September and the last before the end of 1984, he said.

The two years of confusion created by deregulation, particularly in the area of fares, are slowly smoothing out, and within two to three months Cascade will have substantial joint fare agreements with most of the major airlines in the nation, Nilson said.

The aviation committee, prior to Fox's announcement, voted to make the promotion of flying directly out of Lewiston, rather than driving first to Spokane, its number one project of the year.

Boardings last year were half those of eight or 10 years earlier, and the airport was notified last month that it no longer qualifies for federal emplanement funds, which require boardings of at least one-tenth of 1 percent of the national total.