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2010 Light Jets Europe
By Captain Bill Minkoff, Co-Chair

The fourth Light Jets Europe has ended without a single game-changing disclosure. This year's event reflected the glacial change of the host City of Oxford looking much as it did last year.

MIU Events did a good job of matching speakers to relevant topics, urging lively discourse over such topics as airspace usage, environmental impact and demand drivers. However, this year's event, dented by the vacillating mood of the world's economy, appeared to be "going through the motions". The dearth in development of new products and services was a long way from just 3 years past when everyone it seemed was going to conquer the world of air taxi. I still hold hope that air taxi will differentiate itself from on-demand charter. I believe that ultimate success will surface when internet technology allows the customer to drive demand and social networking drives schedules.

The cheerful exuberance of the would-be air-taxi operators in years past has been replaced by the sobering though of actually operating at a profit. This year's program was one of validation that private air charter and corporate use continue to be the mainstays of light jets. The fledgling light jet segment of a sluggish private jet industry hasn't gone away, but we shouldn't expect a rally soon.

Consensus among the operators present at the event is that the light jets are "sized right" for the Western European marketplace. The average stage length of business trips and the average number of travelers per flight mesh perfectly with the capabilities of light jets. While the operators universally agree, I would like to see next year's event include corporate travel planners who might reflect a consumer's viewpoint on the viability and future of light jet air taxi. I believe corporate buy-in is absolutely necessary for the critical mass of the light-jet charter market to grow. This is especially true when considering the regulators who seem intent on limiting the utility of light jets.

Are there game changers? Private jet traffic will be slow to recover in the Middle East. At the moment they are overbuilt with economic hurdles to overcome. Longer range a recovery in these markets leading to a demand for light jets in the training environment. Finnish Aviation Academy has taken delivery of two Phenom 100 aircraft for use in their Ab-Initio training program. Elsewhere programs are planning to employ light jets as the capstone of their training syllabi.

The future of light jet proliferation depends on the viability of practical employment in real world operations where operators have fiscal accountability and a true desire to "right size" the aircraft for the mission. This generation of light jets is not the silver bullet but the next round is already in the chamber.