

OnAir mulls bid of rival in-flight connectivity firm Aeromobile

14.01.10 Air Transport Intelligence News reports:

In-flight connectivity provider OnAir is considering making a bid for rival AeroMobile, which has been placed into administration in the UK as additional funding is sought for the Arinc/Telenor partnership.

"Yes we could [bid] because it could make sense to share the operating expenses but I need to know what they bring exactly," reveals Benoit Debains, CEO of OnAir, a joint venture between [Airbus](#) and SITA.

Debains says AeroMobile's technology, currently operated over Inmarsat's 'Classic' and Swift64 aeronautical services, "is behind ours" and still needs to upgrade to Inmarsat's higher-bandwidth SwiftBroadband (SBB) service or Ku-band. OnAir's in-flight GSM/GPRS and light Internet solutions, meanwhile, are already offered via SBB. [Ryanair](#) is among over 20 airline customers of OnAir.

"We have a better roaming and regulatory coverage and therefore what they bring [is] a portfolio of deals," claims Debains, adding that OnAir needs to "understand what Panasonic has left them [AeroMobile] as Panasonic is now systematically fronting their commercial activity and, de facto, promoting Wi-fi."

Panasonic markets AeroMobile hardware under the brand eXPhone, as part of a suite of connectivity solutions that includes the in-flight entertainment giant's Ku-band-based airborne Internet offering, eXConnect. [Lufthansa](#) last year signed on as a customer of eXConnect in a bid to reignite its defunct Connexion by [Boeing](#) service. Mobile services, courtesy of eXPhone, are also included.

AeroMobile says Boeing is close to making eXPhone line-fit offerable via Inmarsat Classic and SBB aeronautical services. Emirates, meanwhile, is in the process of equipping its entire fleet with AeroMobile's solution.

Should OnAir bid on AeroMobile at auction, the company is likely to face a competing bid from Telenor, the Norway-based telecommunications firm that now owns 99.88% of AeroMobile compared to partner Arinc's 0.12% holding.

"Telenor believes in the viability of the company [AeroMobile] after re-structuring and we have expressed our intent to put in a bid for the company and secure further funding, which means there is at least one investor committed to taking the company forward," says the firm, which has guaranteed ongoing funding during the administration period.

Some industry observers believe Panasonic may also prove a possible contender for AeroMobile, although a spokeswoman for the company says she is not aware of any Panasonic bid activities.

Arinc says "it is business as usual as far as AeroMobile goes" and that there are "no Arinc services that will be affected by the AeroMobile situation".