

Supersonic nonsense?

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↳ If you ask me how fast supersonic is, my response will be: “Supersonic speed is when I switch off the light in the bedroom and I’m already in bed before it’s dark.” Imagining me in my pajamas at superfast speed speaks more to the imagination than stating it is ‘the rate of travel of an object exceeding the speed of sound’.

I am convinced that it is entirely possible to design a supersonic aircraft that overcomes fuel costs, reduces noise, and removes the supersonic boom. Computer models prove it. Yet, the processor eliminates many real-life ‘ifs and buts’. Only a prototype and test flights can prove what concerns are unfounded and what worries are unnecessary. At the same time different issues may arise and new regulations may be imposed. The question is, who really wants a supersonic aircraft?

Considering an US\$80 million plus investment for the jet, the potential owners may be in the same league as owners of mega yachts. Would a supersonic jet be found in the fleet of a corporate flight department? It is not the time saved on an individual flight that justifies the purchase, but rather the frequent use of the aircraft.

Supersonic point-to-point flying in the air undoubtedly means time savings. However, you still need to use an airport. Traffic congestion at an airport and in its airspace will not allow anything at a pace faster than common. Not to mention that scheduled commercial traffic often has higher priority than ad hoc general aviation flights; supersonic flights will be no exception. In addition, airport landing and handling fees may be considerably higher, special routes must be followed, and flying faster than the speed of sound will be allowed only over certain areas.

Governments may ban supersonic overflights in its sovereign airspace and permit only subsonic speeds. Security may also become a concern. A plane at supersonic speed that turns out to be a threat, such as one with a remote-controlled explosive device on board, could represent a true danger as air defenses may not have time to react.

One aircraft developer claims that its supersonic jet will be so fast that traveling from New York to Sydney will be cut from 20 hours on a commercial airliner to just five hours. Let’s try it: you leave the house at 10:00am on Monday, which means it is already Tuesday in Australia, to catch your 1:00pm supersonic jet from JFK to Sydney. So, your jet leaves New York at 03:00am Sydney time and arrives in Australia at 08:00am. Wow, great planning! You may be ready for your first meeting in Sydney at 09:00am. Breakfast and sleep? You just had lunch on the plane and you slept the night at home. The fact is that your flight may be 15 hours shorter, but no matter what you do, you’ll always arrive the next day due to the 14-hour time difference. At least flying back seems to be better. You depart Sydney at 07:00pm on Friday after a productive business day in Australia. And, like using a time machine, you are in New York 11 hours earlier at 08:00am that same day.

But how does the human body deal with this? Ever heard of desynchronization, the physiological condition which results from alterations to the body’s circadian rhythms resulting from fast long-distance transmeridian travel on an airplane? Does jetlag ring a bell? Will there be a regulation aimed at combating pilot fatigue caused by supersonic jetlag? How about CEO fatigue? Gaining all that extra time means that you live longer when counting the hours; chances are that because of the time stress, you may live fewer days. Those people that are fascinated by supersonic flying will insist that, ‘It will revolutionize the way we travel in the future!’ and, ‘Mankind was always inspired to do things faster!’

How about traveling even faster than supersonic, such as faster than light? How much faster is light than sound? When people appear bright until you hear them speak! ↳ **Commander Bud Slabbaert is an expert in strategic communications and business aviation development. He is also the initiator and chairman of BA-Meetup.**

S L A B B A E R T

