Boeing’s MQ-25 Prototype Will Save the Navy 18 Months of Development

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The existence of a working prototype of the Navy’s MQ-25A Stingray carrier-based aerial refueling UAV will save 18 months of development time and could be a factor if the Navy decides to move up the date of the aircraft’s Initial Operational Capability (IOC), currently planned for 2024.

“Eighteen months of early learning is the biggest step” to pushing up IOC, said Dave Bujold, Boeing’s MQ-25 program director, speaking to reporters April 29 at Boeing’s facility in Arlington.

Boeing built its company-owned prototype, called T-1, for the canceled UCLASS (Unmanned Carrier-Launched Aerial Surveillance and Strike) UAV program and, unlike its competitors, had the prototype on hand for the MQ-25 competition. T1 has not yet flown but has participated in taxi tests and overnight on April 28 was transported from the St. Louis, Missouri, plant to Mid-America airport in southern Illinois for additional ground tests and eventually its first flight.

Boeing expects to fly T-1 later in 2019.

Bujold said that T-1 is a “very strong representation of the EMD [engineering and manufacturing development] aircraft” and that waiting for the first EMD aircraft to emerge from the factory would add 18 months to the program.

At Mid-America, T-1 will receive the aerial refueling system of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighter and the Joint Precision Aircraft Landing System. The plan includes, in addition to more ground testing, a “couple hundred flight

hours," Bujold said.

Eventually, T-1 will be transported to participate in risk-reduction deck handling trials on board an East Coast aircraft carrier.

Testing is planned to continue through fiscal 2021, the year the first EMD MQ-25A is completed. Bujold said the design will be frozen sometime in 2020.

He said that a factor that could help speed up development is the fact that Navy program officials are embedded with Boeing officials in a common government maritime acceleration team. Rather than having to communicate with stacks of documents, Boeing and Navy officials operate through a shared network drive, a method that, he said, "speeds up acquisition," using "rolling [program] reviews."