

Preliminary Design of a Wing Considering Transonic Aerodynamic, Weight and Aeroelastic Behavior

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This paper describes an effort to bring wing structural stiffness and aeroelastic considerations early in the conceptual design process with an automated tool. A stochastic model can represent the high level of uncertainty and variability in wing non-structural mass, its stiffness and its aeroelasticity due to the impact of fuel loading. To accomplish this, an improvement is made to existing design tools utilizing rule based automated design to generate wing torque box geometry from a specific wing outer mold-line. Simple analysis on deflection and inferred stiffness shows how early conceptual design choices can strongly affect the stiffness of the structure. This work discusses the impact of design topology and buckling on structural mass. The model is then carried further to include a finite element model (FEM) to analyze resulting mode shapes and frequencies for use in aeroelastic analysis. The natural frequencies of several selected wing torque boxes across a range of loading cases are compared.

I. Introduction

AIRCRAFT designers typically use empirical methods to predict structural weight as a function of detailed geometry ahead of detail design. This presents a problem, as these empirical methods do not capture many important effects within their complex, yet single line algebraic formulation. When we consider wing design, we need to consider the effect of the desired structural stiffness upon the “as-built” weight of the wing. In the absence of such a control, aeroelastic design considerations are usually left off the table until they are determined through high-fidelity analysis in detail design; this occurs after many design choices have already been fixed. This often leads to problems with aeroelasticity of wings, which is patched up with a fix late in detailed design rather than mitigated throughout the design process. Stiffness analysis is difficult to achieve early in the design process because of the level of uncertainty and the lack of specificity in the equations commonly used for design.

We believe that existing empirical models simply do not provide a complete answer.

In this work, we seek to understand and document the impact of important preliminary design decisions upon both wing structural weight **and** aeroelastic properties (stiffness and modal frequencies). This paper extends the legacy of several rapid, rule-based structural design systems, developed previously at Arizona State; see works by Takahashi & Lemonds[1][2], Anderson & Takahashi [3] and Allyn & Takahashi[4].

In this new work, we enhance an existing wing structural synthesis model [1] with a lumped-mass / beam-element model to estimate structural stiffness, static load-deflection and frequency / modal analysis. It is then possible verify the static and dynamic behavior using higher-fidelity structural analysis tools. The early results of this model enhancement limited to load and deflection (static aeroelastic effects) were published by Miskin & Takahashi[5] earlier in 2018, leading up to the culmination of this work.

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II. Objectives of This Work

An empirical weights approach to conceptual and preliminary design requires the detailed design team to engineer a production structure to a weight requirement determined in preliminary design.

To improve the design process of a wing structure to include stiffness analysis and predictions, we employ a rule-based structural synthesis tool, enumerating many possible torque box configurations. We combine an initial modeling (by enumeration of a multitude of feasible design choices such as rib and stiffener spacing) with uncertain non-structural mass estimates to provide a stochastic modeling prediction of the aeroelastic effects.

Our work can examine the impacts of:

- 1) rib spacing
- 2) stiffener spacing strategy
- 3) design aerodynamic loads
- 4) non-structural mass (inertial relief, and flight specific loads – i.e. fuel on-board)

on the predicted structural mass of the primary wing torque box, its transverse stiffness, and its structural response to forces (simple oscillatory loads and aeroelastic) for any given wing geometry (planform and thickness distribution).

By developing this capability, we will document:

- 1) system level trends in weight and overall stiffness
- 2) the detailed structural layout resulting from a specific material, rib and stiffener spacing strategy
- 3) the spanwise distribution of “stiffness” of the equivalent beam formed by the torque box
- 4) the free natural frequencies and mode shapes exhibited by this beam under various loading conditions

This innovation lets us use rapid computational methods and modeling tools to provide insight that allow the engineer to “design for stiffness” and hence “design around aeroelastic constraints” earlier in the system life cycle.

The need for structural analysis in conceptual design with a rapid turnaround time is apparent because it is impractical to work the time-intensive detailed design on more than a very few discrete designs. Schedule and cost limitations on most engineering programs will limit even large design teams from developing more than a few designs out to reasonable confidence. Hence, a good conceptual design which can incorporate structural elements will prevent the burden on aircraft designers being locked into a point-design where any weight shortfall will directly and negatively impact system performance.

III. Prior Art

It is not a new idea to use a computer to help produce a reasonable structural layout based upon a simple, conceptual sketch of an aircraft. Over the years, many programs have been developed to help streamline structural design of aerospace structures; we discussed many key papers that informed our reasoning in our earlier paper [5]. Here, we will briefly summarize the high points of the literature review.

We must remember that weight estimation in aircraft design and production is not an easy task. [6] However difficult it may be, it is equally important, because many of the performance parameters are based on weight. The amount of fuel on board to accomplish a mission, the range of allowable missions, the maximum payload, and many other performance parameters will largely depend on the Operational Empty Weight (*OEW*) of the aircraft. It may seem simple enough, but for the fact that this weight estimation is needed far before the time when the aircraft weight can be accurately determined by scale. When an initial structural weight estimation is incorrect, the as-built weight often rises; these negative impacts ripple through the performance measures.

A. Empirical Methods

Past aircraft manufacturers have published their production aircraft weight breakdowns; from this data authors have constructed empirical prediction models. One of the famous sets of equations, and one we see as being particularly useful, are the equations first published by Torenbeek[10] and later revisited in Niu's[8] famous text, *Airframe Structural Design*. Included in these equations, and of particular interest to this work is the prediction equation for the overall weight of a wing, see Equation 1.

$$W_{\text{WING}} = 0.81 \cdot \left(\frac{\text{ULF} * \text{MTOW} * \text{Sref}^{0.6}}{\text{TCE}} \right) * \left(1 - \frac{W_{\text{BMR}}}{\text{MTOW}} \right) * (1 + \text{TR})^{0.4} \\ * \left(\frac{\text{AR}^{0.5}}{\text{TS}^{0.2} * \cos(\Lambda_{c/2})^{1.2}} \right) + 3.3 * S_{\text{spoiler}} + 3.28 * (S_{\text{LEflaps}})^{1.13} \quad (1)$$

where:

- ULF = Ultimate Load Factor $N_{z\max}$ multiplied by the design factor of safety
- $MTOW$ = Maximum Takeoff Weight in lbm
- S_{ref} = Wing Planform Area in $ft^2 = b * (1/2)(c_{tip} + c_{root})$
- b = Wing Span in ft (tip to tip)
- c_{tip} = Wing Tip Chord in ft
- c_{root} = Wing Root Chord in ft
- TCE = Effective Thickness Ratio = $4/5 (t/c_{root} + t/c_{tip}) * 100$
- W_{BMR} = Weight of inertial bending-moment-relief items in lbm - Includes the weight of wing mounted engines and pylons, the weight of wing stored fuel, the weight of wing mounted landing gear (an amount that can easily comprise 30% of the $MTOW$ of the aircraft).
- TR = Wing Taper Ratio = c_{tip} / c_{root}
- AR = Wing Aspect Ratio = $b / ((1/2)(c_{tip} + c_{root}))$
- TS = Design Tension Yield Stress of the Wing (Typically $48,000\text{-}lb_f/in^2$)
- $\Lambda_{c/2}$ = Wing Half Chord Sweep Angle (remember to convert from degrees to radians)
- $S_{spoiler}$ = Spoiler Area in ft^2 for the entire wing
- $S_{LEflaps}$ = Leading Edge Flap Area in ft^2 for the entire wing

Although it is clear from the complicated form of this regression based equation that it does not have a basis in classical structural mechanics. Takahashi pointed out the following trends found in Torenbeek's equations:

“the wing grows heavier as 1) the planform area increases, 2) the aircraft grows heavier, 3) the wing thickness decreases, 4) the aspect ratio increases, 5) the wing sweep increases, 6) the aerodynamic complexity increases (bigger spoilers and larger, more complex flaps).”[9]

In the results section we will examine how this famously used weight estimator applied to one test case compares with the results from our model.

B. Medium Fidelity Rule Based Methods

In rule based automated structural design, the wing torque box is sized based on the shear, tension, compression, and buckling that the wing is expected to experience throughout the flight envelope, to include both high gee loading and hard landing, with transport category required factor of safety applied. As described by Takahashi & Lemonds [1],

skin thickness, transverse wing stringers, and wing spar caps are selected to carry the different loading cases at a minimum weight design. These parameters are changed on a bay-by-bay basis, to remain constant between sequential rib sets.

One of the challenges in designing a wing structure is understanding the loading conditions, especially considering the highly interdependent nature of the loads with wing structural weight and total aircraft *MTOW*. The basic inputs to the design tool are the aircraft geometry such as wing planform, taper, *t/c* distribution. However, to capture the structural requirements, the designer must also provide aerodynamic and inertial flight loads. In addition to flight loads, the ground loads due to the limiting case of hard landing, which load the wing structure in the opposite direction, must also be considered. Additional loads working as inertial relief in the flight loaded case include lumped masses representing non-structural mass on the wing such as engines, control surfaces, and fuel weight. Additionally, material properties of tensile and compressive yield strength, modulus of elasticity, and density must be provided, as can be found in Military Handbook 5J [10] and are enumerated in a later section of this work. Material yield properties will be de-rated by the required factor of safety (1.5) as defined in 14 CFR § 25.303 [11].

The input geometry, loading, and material properties are then run through automated calculations based on equations presented in Niu's Airframe Structural Design textbooks[8] and well known structural equations for column, panel, and stringer buckling. The underlying coded algorithm determines if the geometry is feasible and introduces thinner or thicker elements as needed to produce the lightest weight geometry that satisfies all the equations.

IV. Extended Rule Based Methods

Building upon the many precursory tools and methods, we can now take the next step in conceptual design level structural analysis. Firstly, an algorithm for sizing specific wing structure elements from a chosen planform is used to determine the number and sizing of stringers and the skin thickness of the torque box. After these are known, we can begin to analyze the resulting structure for wing stiffness. Moving beyond the basic modeling elements, the specific geometry can then be extended to finite element modeling (FEM) for resulting natural frequency consideration.

A. Stiffness vs Weight trades

In a paper published in 2014, Bai[12] et. al. presented a software-based method for estimating wing weight during the conceptual design phase. They also use parametric modeling of a wing constrained by strength and stiffness to optimize structural mass. Their method used automated CAD and FEM applying parametric inputs to quickly perform the analyses. In addition to analyzing the wing structure, they also provide for early design of the wing fuel tank as part of their automated modeling. They use advanced but cost-efficient methods for computing the aerodynamic and inertial loads to prepare the finite element model.

The strength and rigidity constraints used in the Bai model are stress and displacement. Although this would seem to provide the necessary checks for the wing, it neglects the important buckling constraints that can drive wing structure design. They do assert that additional failure modes would be considered in future research. For Bai's the example case, comparable to an Airbus A320, the solution may be largely driven by the allowable stress. However, we have found that in smaller wing structures such as the example test case used for this paper, the solution is driven significantly by buckling.

B. Vibration and Flutter Analysis Using Stick Models

To quickly analyze the structural dynamic properties of the wing, a rapid construction and analysis method for vibration and flutter is needed. The full detail of a finite element model (FEM) may be cost prohibitive in early design. Fortunately, it has been demonstrated that much simpler models can be capable of producing comparably accurate results. A so-called "stick model" derived by reduction of the stiffness matrix to grid points representing the wing can be used to obtain structural dynamic response. In a paper by Panza & Suci [13], a detailed examination of the performance of the historically used "stick model" is performed. They conclude based on a comparison of a swept-wing transport category aircraft FEM and stick model that the stick model is adequate for structural dynamic and flutter analysis for so long as the aspect ratio is medium to high, and not a low aspect ratio or delta wing.

The development of rapid analysis design tools for aircraft using low to medium fidelity modeling is not new. Cavagna, Ricci & Ricobene [14] present the development of a tool for applying stick model analysis for aeroelastic analysis of aerospace structures. In their work they also detail the necessity of accurately estimating aircraft weight early and the penalties that can arise from weight growth during later design phases. The limitations of the classic analytical weight equations are again stressed, especially in the case of innovative or unconventional configurations. This led to a large scale software development for accurate early design optimization tools. The Next-generation Conceptual Aero-structural Sizing Suite (*NeoCASS*) tool takes user inputs to generate an airframe structure model and run preset weight and balance studies, stability, static and dynamic aeroelasticity, and flutter analysis. The software is licensed as Free and Open Source Software (*FOSS*) and operates in the *MATLAB* environment. The software was developed at the Dipartimento di Ingegneria Aerospaziale of the University "Politecnico di Milano" for research purposes and has been shared with the research community as *FOSS* available at *neocass.org*. The website also advertises consulting services for training users or specific problem solving, with the recognition that the software is not trivial to use. However, for those capable of applying the full functionality of that toolset, structural models such as the example in FIGURE 1 are possible.

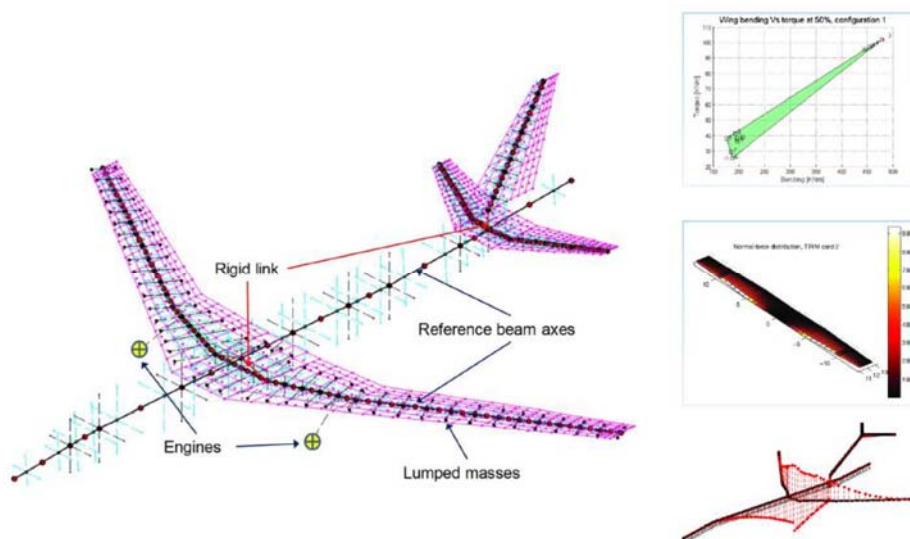


FIGURE 1: *NeoCASS* example Structural Stick Model

V. Test Case – Defining the Basic Wing

The specific design example case cited in this effort is the *FlighterJet* [15], a student designed light aerobatic jet designed to fill the civilian market gap for a pilot-oriented jet aircraft for those wanting to punch holes in the sky.

The design requirements may be summarized as:

- The aircraft must carry 2 pilots plus 2 passengers with their luggage,
- It must fly unrefueled for a 1,250-nm mission, with basic 14 CFR § 91 45-minute loiter fuel reserve,
- It must have Level 1 longitudinal and Level 1 lateral-directional piloted handling qualities (in accordance with MIL-STD 8785C),
- It must takeoff and land on a short 3,099-ft runway
- It must be able to climb at least 10,000-ft/min from sea-level on a standard day,
- It must be able to sustain an instantaneous maximum load factor of +6 gees,
- It must be able to maneuver with at least 3-gees of sustained turn rate at 30,000-ft altitude ,
- It must ensure safety and redundancy by having at least two (2) engines.

As a clean-sheet design, there was a lot of freedom with this aircraft and many of the main design considerations were tailorable to give the customer the most desirable aircraft on the market. The following design parameters were set at the beginning of the design as goals and were tailored along the way in order to meet or exceed all non-tailorable requirements while maintaining a quality design:

- Design maximum operating speed for structure, M_{MO} : 0.92 Mach (Subsonic)
- Design Cruise Mach >0.8 (we found a reasonable cruise point at $M\sim 0.86$)
- Negative structural load factor of -3-gees
- Design cruise altitude of 48,000 ft.
- Fuselage length and diameter commensurate with reasonable comfort and luggage space
- Stick fixed Dutch Roll frequency > 1 rad/sec
- Low stall speed with flaps deflected (less than 100-KIAS)

The following design parameters were chosen along the way

- Wing loading (W/S)
- Wing span, sweep, thickness-to-chord ratio (t/c), taper (TR) and commensurate aspect ratio (AR)
- Thrust loading (T/W)
- Horizontal and vertical tail area
- Control surface sizes (ailerons, rudders, elevators)
- Off the shelf engine choice (existing commercially certified engines)
- Engine disposition

The student MDO project, eventually configured an aircraft, the specifications of which we will summarize below.

TABLE 1 – “*FlighterJet*” Basic Sizing:

Parameter	Value	Units
<i>MTOW</i>	22725	lbs
<i>Nz max</i>	+ 6	gees / -3 gees
<i>Sref</i>	472.7	ft²
Span	50.5	ft
Λ	31.4	deg
<i>TR</i>	0.295	
<i>AR</i>	5.4	
<i>t/c (average)</i>	10.1%	

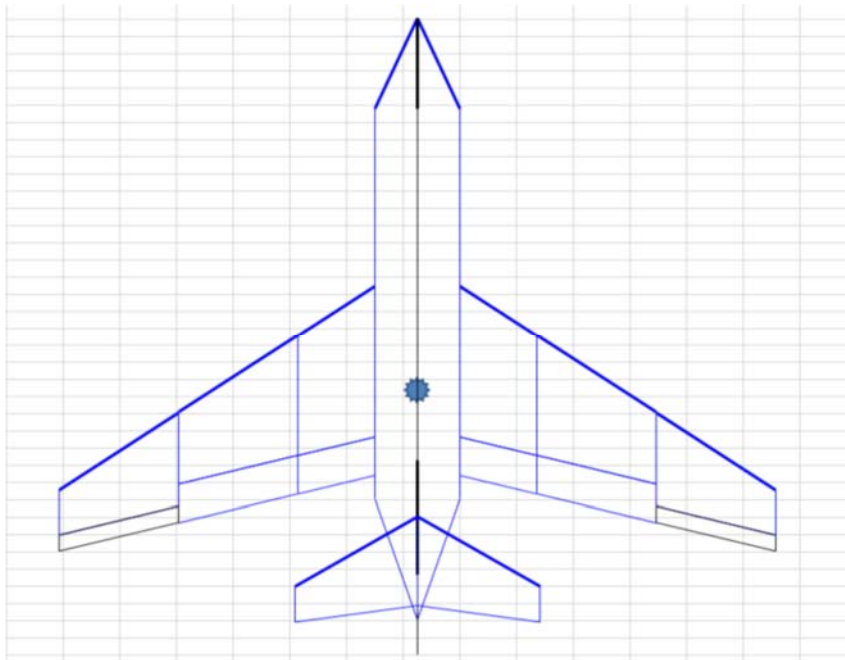


FIGURE 2 – Planform Drawing of “*FLIGHTERJET*”



FIGURE 3 – RENDERING OF “*FLIGHTERJET*”

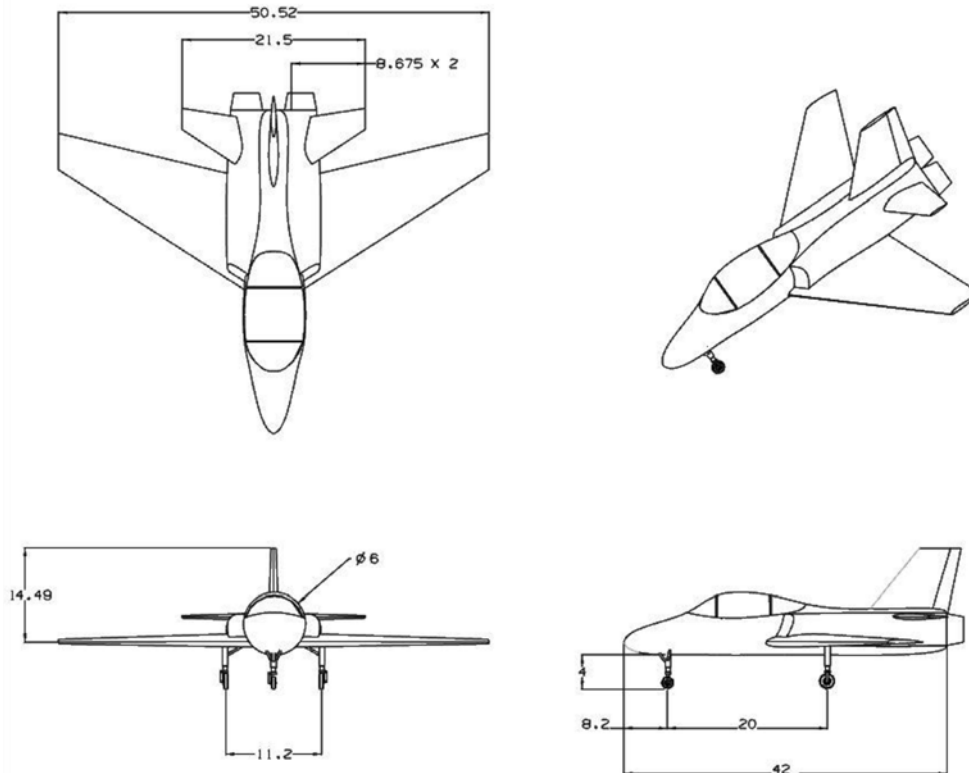


FIGURE 4 – Detailed Dimensions of “FlighterJet” – reference model

The wing planform being studied for design optimization comes from the preliminary design of the *FlighterJet*, whose basic planform is shown in FIGURES 2, 3 and 4.

One critical element that is interconnected in the planform design covered in the capstone project [21] is the thickness to chord ratio. The swept wing version of the Korn equation: $(Mcr=k-0.1*CL-t/c)$ [9][16] is used to size the thickness of the wing, which is largely driven by transonic effects. The need for high altitude and high maneuverability for the *FlighterJet* drives the mean thickness of the wing down. Relief from this comes from the trade of design Mach number, wing sweep, and section CL to allow for a final thickness choice. As a design driver, a higher wing thickness is desirable to allow for maximum room for fuel storage and landing gear in the wing. The extensive trade performed in the capstone project resulted in the wing thickness to chord distribution shown in FIGURE 5.

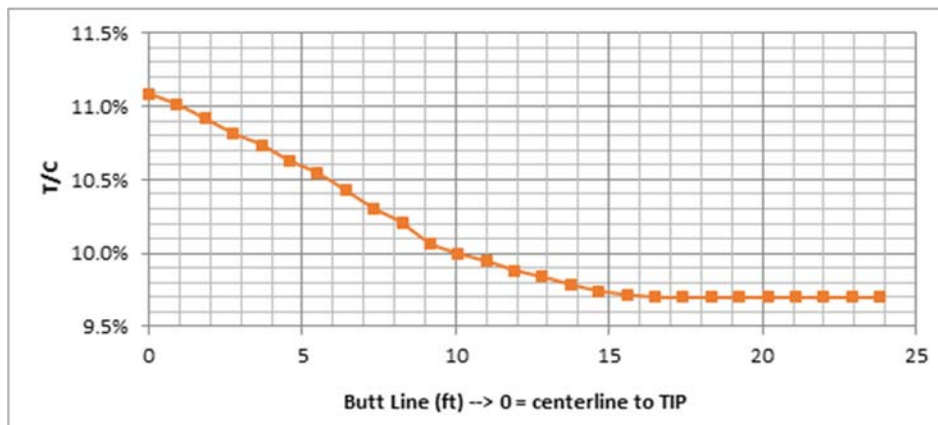


FIGURE 5 – Span-Wise t/c distribution of Reference Wing

The modeling tool which provides structural geometry takes inputs of customary wing planform variables as well as inertial loading and landing gear information to set up the wing design. Additionally, materials choice and resulting properties such as elastic modulus, yield strength and density are also needed. A choice of rib and stringer spacing is also taken as a user input for conceptual design. The algorithm leverages rule-based methods discussed to find a plausible wing design with the lowest weight, unless none can be found, which the tool is capable of reporting. When a design does exist, the tool provides the geometry of the wing structure to include the skin thickness, spar cap sizing, and number and size of stringers.

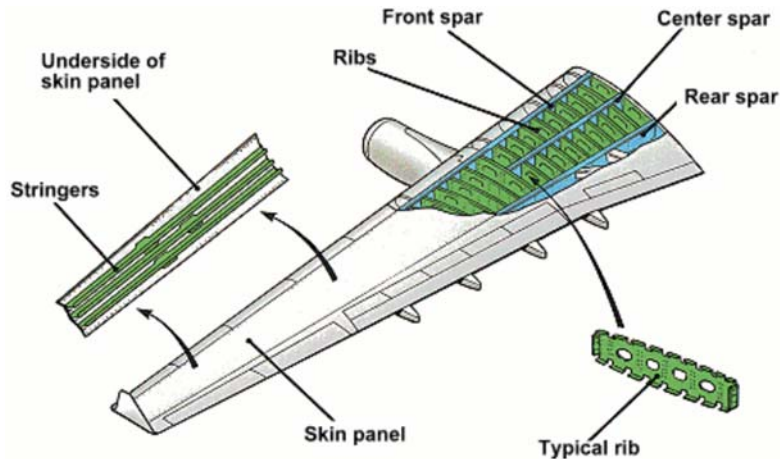


FIGURE 6: Example Conventionally Configured Wing Structure (Airbus). Retrieved from <http://www.aerospaceengineeringmagazine.sae.org/aeromag/techupdate/06-1999/06.htm>

The wing geometry is defined in primary variables of the wing span (tip to tip), reference area (S_{ref}), taper ratio (TR), and mid-chord sweep. These constraints provide the basic trapezoidal wing planform. The geometry is further defined by secondary variables including the span-wise thickness to chord ratio, location of landing gear, and placement and mass of engines and fuel weight providing inertial relief on the structure. Further structural parameters which impact the resulting design are left open as trade variables, including the spacing of ribs and stiffeners. These are selected for trade because they are otherwise free from directly impacting the flight characteristics, where the other variables would be selected for their direct performance characteristics. The purpose of the tool is then to size the structural elements of the wing, based on the inputs, to minimize the structural mass that will withstand the three limiting load cases: ultimate yield strength of the selected material in both compression and tension (de-rated by necessary factors of safety), local strip buckling, and stiffened panel buckling.

The limiting loading conditions considered by the design tool are guided by the regulations set forth in 14 CFR § 25.337 for maneuvering load factors. [17] These include both the flight loads at $MTOW$ scaled by the load factors of positive or negative gee forces (based on the design flight envelope) and the ground loads at MLW applied at the landing gear locations.

The critical buckling load constraints used in the design tool come from Niu's *Airframe Structural Design*[8].

For stiffened panel buckling:

$$P_{cr.stiffened.panel} = \pi^2 E \left(\frac{\rho^2}{L^2} \right) A_{stiffenedpanel} \quad (2)$$

where

$$A_{stiffenedpanel} = thickness_{skin} dist_{spar.to.spar} +$$

$$\#_{stringers} (height_{stringer} thickness_{stringer})$$

$$L = dist_{rib.to.rib}$$

and the radius of gyration, ρ , is described by

$$\rho^2 = \frac{\left(b^2 \left(\frac{d}{b} \right)^3 \left(\frac{Ts}{t} \right) \right)}{\left(12 \left(1 + \left(\frac{d}{b} \right) \left(\frac{Ts}{t} \right)^2 \right) \right) \left(4 + \left(\frac{d}{b} \right) \left(\frac{Ts}{t} \right) \right)^2}$$

with the following relationships

$$b = dist_{spar.to.spar} / (\#_{stringers} + 1)$$

$$d = height_{stringer}$$

$$Ts = thickness_{stringer}$$

$$t = thickness_{skin}$$

The local strip buckling, also recommended in Niu [8], utilizing the Euler Strip Buckling Equation with NASA factors for a strip with all edges clamped and fully supported:

$$P_{cr.strip} = 6.3E \left(\frac{t^3 W}{b^2} \right) \quad (3)$$

where

$$W = dist_{spar.to.spar} / (\#_{stringers} + 1)$$

$$t = thickness_{skin}$$

$$b = dist_{rib.to.rib}$$

The model "builds" up the wing structure bay-by-bay to design the lightest weight wing that satisfies all constraints. Takahashi & Lemonds [1] gives a fully detailed description of the algorithmic rule based design approach utilized.

The new addition to the wing design model is a prediction of wingtip deflection. Basic beam theory was used to characterize the stiffness of the wing with available design choice data. Based on design choices, the wing weight estimator tool as previously described provides wing structure geometry along span-wise increments. Along each of these increments, or bays, the structure is constant. Because these bays are relatively small compared to the overall span of the wing, they can be used as constant beam elements to numerically approximate the deflection of the wing tip under load.

We begin with Eq. (4) from Hibbler [17] which assumes constant flexural rigidity (EI) along the length of the beam increment.

$$EI \frac{d^2 v}{dx^2} = M(x) \quad (4)$$

We apply Eq. (4) numerically along the semi-span, from centerline to tip, and recognize that the deflection and angle boundary conditions at the centerline are both theoretically zero.

$$\left(\frac{dv}{dx}\right)_i = \frac{M}{EI} \Delta x + \left(\frac{dv}{dx}\right)_{i-1}; \quad \left(\frac{dv}{dx}\right)_0 = 0 \quad (5)$$

$$v_i = \frac{M}{EI} \Delta x^2 + \left(\frac{dv}{dx}\right)_{i-1} + v_{i-1}; \quad v_0 = 0 \quad (6)$$

We apply Eqs. (5) and (6) numerically to determine the deflection at the wingtip as an additional output for trade study examination.

To perform structural dynamic analysis, at least a basic stick model of the wing is needed. For the purposes of this research the low fidelity stick model which represents the wing section by section as an equivalent beam will be used. This low fidelity is considered acceptable in this case for two reasons. The first is that it is necessarily simple to enable multiple designs. In the previous case of the wing tip deflection, tens of designs can be rapidly analyzed, yet the amount of effort required to build a full FEM model for that many designs would be restrictive. A model that can be generated for dozens of designs will be most beneficial for this research. The second reason this low fidelity model is suitable is that at the early stage of design, the wing non-structural mass is largely still unknown.

There is a considerable amount of expected variability in the total wing mass, even when a single wing structure is selected, and the structural mass is fixed. Known variation in the wing non-structural mass includes the large fluctuation in the fuel storage expected in standard operation. In the case of the *FlighterJet* application, over 5000 pounds of fuel will be stored in the wings. There is also significant unknown mass variation due to the lack of design maturity. This includes the subsystems housed in the wing, including anti-icing systems, high-lift devices as leading and trailing edges, and control surfaces, each with complex mechanical and electrical components whose weights can only be estimated. Although significantly less than the fuel weight, this is still a considerable effect, with one estimation formula from Torenbeek putting the wing surface controls as heavy as lbf pounds if the wing includes leading edge flaps and air brake spoilers in addition to the standard necessary controls surfaces of flaps and ailerons; see equation 7:

$$W_{control\ surfaces} = 0.64 * MTOW^{0.67} (1 + 0.2LEF + 0.15SP) + 110 \quad (7)$$

where

LEF = logical 0 or 1 to include leading edge flaps
 SP = logical 0 or 1 to include spoilers

The necessary information to represent the wing structure as an equivalent beam in the simplest of stick models is the material properties, the geometry to include cross section parameters of area moment of inertia at each wing station, and the equivalent lumped masses with locations.

Material properties are selected for a nominal aircraft material, Aluminum 2024; see MIL HDBK 5-J. [10]

TABLE 2 – MATERIAL PROPERTIES FOR 2024 ALUMINUM FROM MIL HDBK 5J

Property	Value
F _{ty}	44000-lbf/in ²
F _{cy}	44000-lbf/in ²
F _{su}	38000-lbf/in ²
E	1.07*10 ⁷ -lbf/in ²
ρ	1.00-lbm/in ³

The calculation of the area moment of inertia is not trivial. Complex geometries and the area integration required is one of the driving factors for CAD and FEM software tool development. However, a simplified and representative geometry of a collection of rectangles to represent the torque box allows for a feasible analytical calculation.

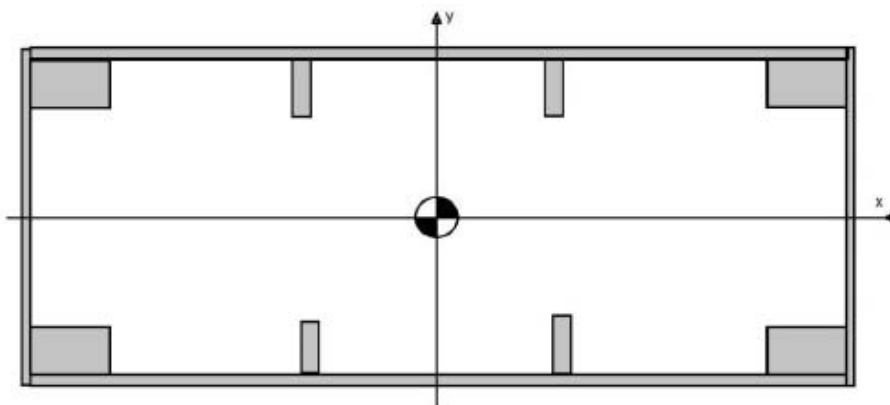


FIGURE 8 – SIMPLIFIED TORQUE BOX CONFIGURATION (SPAR CAPS, STRINGERS, SKINS AND SHEAR WEBS)

The Takahashi & Lemonds tool [1] for calculating wing structures provides the dimensions of each rectangular component. The largest simplifying assumption taken is the treatment of the skin thickness as a rectangle. The actual shape of the upper and lower skin is determined by airfoil choice, which has not been selected. However, the maximum thickness at each station is defined, and an average torque box height can be estimated using a knowledge of the common wing shape. Customary placement of the torque box places the front spar at 15% chord length, back spar at 65% for a total spar spacing of 50% of the chord. NACA thickness form then gives the height of the front spar to be 84% of maximum thickness, with the rear spar at 60%. We will take a simple average and generalize the rectangular height of the torque box to 72% of the maximum thickness at each wing station.

The rectangular components of each wing station torque box are given the naming convention as depicted in FIGURE 9. By applying the second area moment of inertia for a rectangular shape as well as the parallel axis theorem, we can build the composite shape stiffness parameters via the equations shown below.

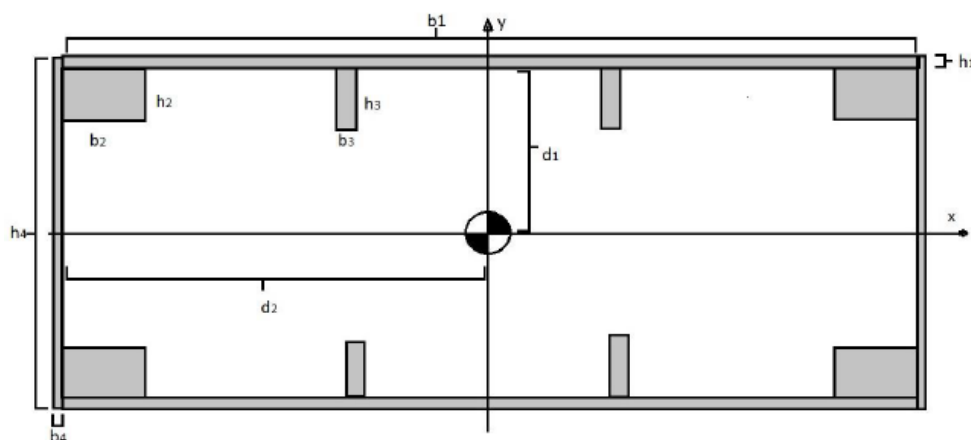


FIGURE 9: Dimension assignment to torque box features

$$I_{rectangle} = \frac{bh^3}{12}, \text{ rectangular solution to second area moment} \quad (8)$$

$$I_{x'} = I_x + Ad^2, \text{ parallel axis theorem} \quad (9)$$

$$I_{xx} = 2 \left(\frac{b_1 h_1^3}{12} + b_1 h_1 d_1^2 \right) + 4 \left(\frac{b_2 h_2^3}{12} + b_2 h_2 d_1^2 \right) + n_{stringers} \left(\frac{b_3 h_3^3}{12} + b_3 h_3 d_1^2 \right) + 2 \left(\frac{b_4 h_4^3}{12} \right) \quad (10)$$

$$I_{yy} = 2 \left(\frac{h_1 b_1^3}{12} \right) + 4 \left(\frac{h_2 b_2^3}{12} + b_2 h_2 d_2^2 \right) + 2 \left(\frac{h_4 b_4^3}{12} + b_4 h_4 d_2^2 \right) \quad (11)$$

$$I_{xy} = 0, \text{ based on assumption of symmetry about centroid} \quad (12)$$

$$J = I_{xx} + I_{yy}, \text{ perpendicular axis theorem} \quad (13)$$

Note that in the calculation of I_{yy} the contribution of the stringers must be neglected because the distance for parallel axes in the y direction is not defined and will change based on the number of stringers and stringer spacing. The stringers have a smaller area compared to the other components, and they will also have a smaller distance from the centroid than the spar caps or spar web, so the neglected contribution is accepted as being a small.

One observation at this stage is that the contribution of the skin dominates the calculation of the stiffness parameter I_{xx} , the stiffness of the wing to resist bending in the primary loading conditions during flight. For a wing configuration nominally chosen with a rib-to-rib spacing of 12-in and spar spacing of 10-in, the skin contribution makes up an average 64% of the stiffness in the x direction, see Table 3 (overleaf) for details. This reveals an interesting aspect of this complex design problem. The choice of spacing and sizing of the minor torque box component have a small contribution on the stiffness, but they will also interact with the optimized skin thickness based on buckling constraints, which will then strongly drive the wing stiffness. This is cross coupling of the results makes this research and design tool necessary, because predicting these complicated interactions becomes challenging.

Finally, the values needed for the equivalent beam model can be used to analyze the frequency response of a modal analysis of the wing. The stiffness and point mass parameters at each wing station are added along the midline representation of the wing. The root of the wing is constrained to be fixed in translations and rotations to represent the center of the wing running through the bottom of the aircraft fuselage. Modal analysis is then performed collecting natural frequencies associated with the first eight mode shapes.

The designer would then have these natural frequencies to perform aeroelastic analysis and design early to avoid destructive flutter of the wings.

TABLE 3 - TORQUE BOX I_{xx} CONTRIBUTIONS

Wing Station	I_{xx} Skin	I_{xx} Spar Caps	I_{xx} Stringers	I_{xx} Spar Web
1	62%	18%	17%	3%
2	61%	20%	16%	4%
3	63%	17%	17%	4%
4	62%	19%	15%	4%
5	62%	20%	13%	5%
6	61%	21%	13%	5%
7	61%	21%	14%	5%
8	62%	22%	14%	1%
9	63%	23%	12%	2%
10	64%	22%	13%	2%
11	65%	20%	13%	2%
12	67%	17%	14%	2%
13	67%	16%	15%	2%
14	66%	17%	16%	2%
15	68%	18%	13%	2%
16	67%	20%	12%	2%
17	65%	21%	12%	2%
18	63%	24%	11%	2%
19	64%	23%	12%	1%
20	66%	25%	8%	1%
21	61%	31%	7%	1%
22	68%	23%	8%	1%
23	64%	29%	6%	1%
24	73%	17%	8%	2%
25	66%	27%	5%	2%
Average	64%	21%	12%	2%

VI. RESULTS

The original tool as developed by Takahashi & Lemonds [1] took into consideration wing aerodynamic and inertial loading and designed to the limiting cases of high gee maneuvers (N_{zmax}) and hard landing. The load-up of the wing for various conditions also considers inertial relief from non-structural mass, such as the fuel in the wing. This non-structural mass configuration is another source of variability for the resulting loading and deflection. The following plots show the subjected loading that is used to determine the needed structural elements and further is used in determining the deflection of the wing.

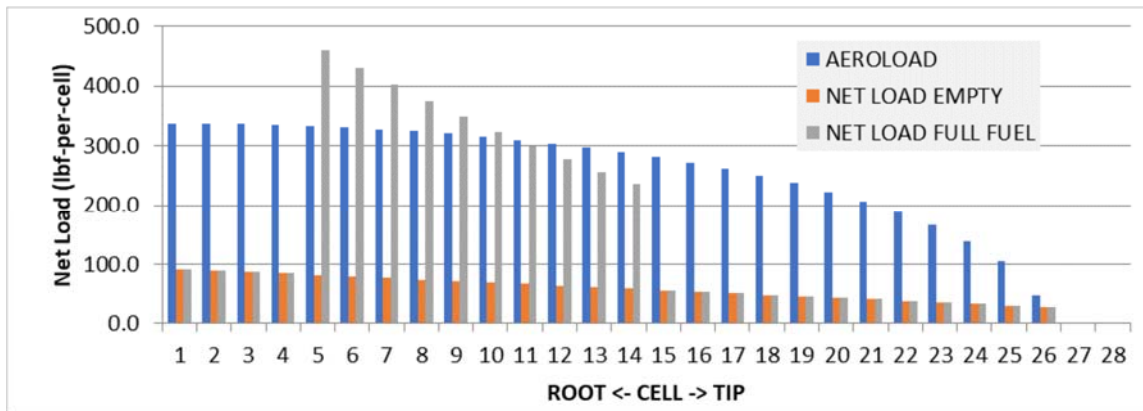


FIGURE 10: Loading case for the wing with full fuel load

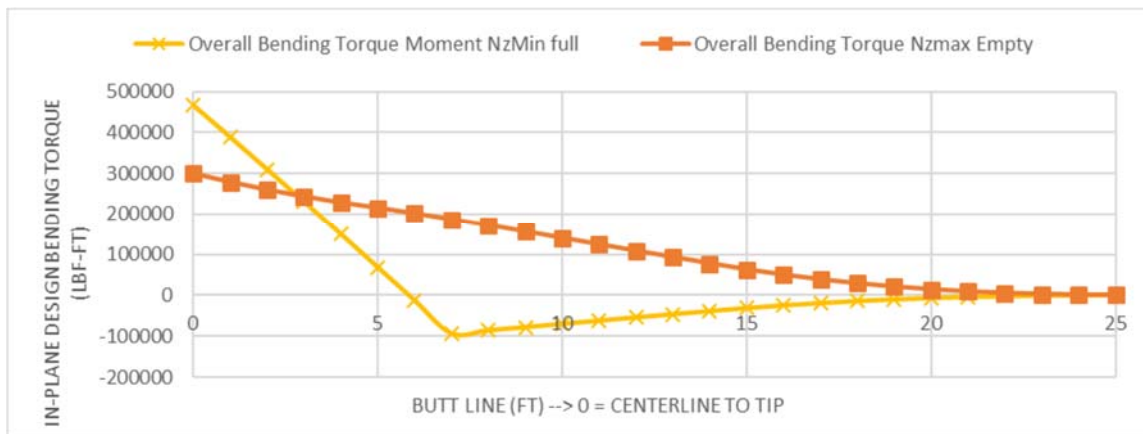


FIGURE 11: Resulting Bending Torque for the Nzmax limiting case

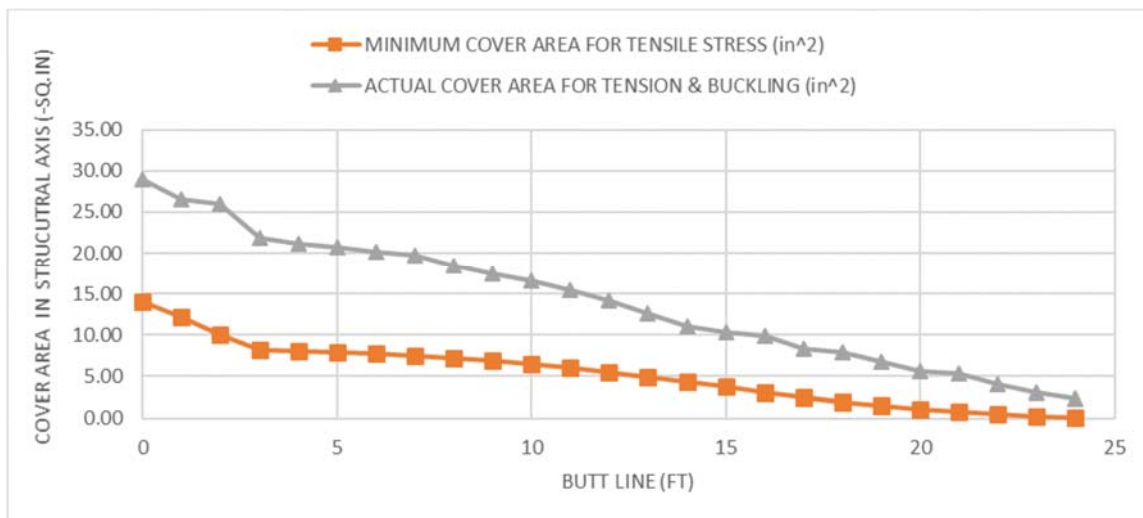


FIGURE 12: Element-wise cover area of Structural Elements

The rule based design tool produces the specific geometry optimized for that wing setup, and the resulting structural cover area is given in FIGURE 12. This cover area comparison shows how much structure would be necessary if tension force and material yield were the only constraints, compared to the actual design constrained by buckling. If we consider the tensile only solution as the “ideal” structural weight, then the ratio of the actual weight to the ideal

can be used as a measure of how much the structure is driven by buckling. In this case, a moderately lightweight aircraft with an *MTOW* below 25,000 lbm, the wing structure is dominated by buckling as seen in this actual-to-ideal ratio which is in the range of 200-300%.

Enumeration of 42 different conceptual structural designs, varying only two simple choices, the rib spacing from 9 to 14-*in* and the stiffener spacing from 6 to 12-*in* produces 42 “optimized” designs, meaning a geometry which can carry the necessary loads with the lowest weight. However, the weights vary widely among the designs for such seemingly trivial choices as the spacing of elements. However, the newly added deflection calculation reveals that those varying weights are closely tied with the wingtip deflection, and therefore the inferred wing stiffness. We can finally begin to see how simple conceptual design choices made early can largely impact the potentially problematic stiffness of the wing. As shown in FIGURE 13, those designs which lead to a lower overall weight also allow more wingtip deflection. Although this is not a surprising result (heavy/more material expected to be stiffer), now we can begin to understand which parameters will drive the stiffness, and predict the outcome to guide decisions.



FIGURE 13: Deflection vs Weight - There is a distinct relationship between the structural weight and the stiffness of the wing from a variety of designed wings.

Of the 42 designs shown in FIGURE 13, there is a variation of 26% in structural weight and 33% in deflection. The comparison of the variability is summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4 - STIFFNESS VARIABILITY

Value	Deflection (in)	Weight (lbs)
Mean	10.8	2440
St. Dev	0.8	150
Min	9.12	2127
Max	12.7	2770
Difference	3.59	642
% Difference	33.1%	26.4%

An additional scan of the design space was performed, running the model for designs with stiffeners spaced at 4 to 14-*in* by one inch, and rib spacing by 8 to 20-*in* by one inch. By examining the resulting ten lightest and heaviest wings and their associated design details (see Table 5), several general trends are revealed.

Table 5: Ten lightest and heaviest wing structure configurations

Stiffener Spacing	Rib Spacing	Actual Weight (lbs)	Wingtip Deflection (in)	Actual / Ideal ratio
14	11	2039.1	10.038	2.041
11	14	2099.1	9.712	2.233
14	10	2146.3	9.707	2.167
12	13	2188.2	9.563	2.224
14	13	2191	9.54	2.227
13	13	2196.3	9.563	2.232
11	9	2222.8	9.125	2.157
14	9	2231.8	9.061	2.166
10	9	2241.7	9.05	2.175
...
14	19	2812.3	6.531	2.937
4	20	2818.3	7.437	2.864
6	9	2846	6.855	2.762
4	11	2863.2	6.702	2.866
10	19	2871.4	6.397	2.999
4	10	2909.4	6.713	2.938
4	17	2939.6	6.427	3.216
6	19	2972.6	6.223	3.105
7	19	3001.7	6.175	3.135
5	18	3080.4	5.898	3.32

To build a light wing, one should:

- Build with larger stiffener spacing resulting in fewer stiffeners,
- Build with smaller rib to rib spacing resulting in more ribs,

The resulting solution will then have the following characteristics:

- Smaller spar caps,
- Thinner skin,
- More equal balance in local and stiffened panel buckling.

The data for the lightest wing at 2039-*lbm* and a resulting wingtip deflection of 10.0-*in* is provided in FIGURE 23.

On the other hand (and in the test case the two are found to be mutually exclusive), to build a stiff wing, one should:

- Build with smaller stiffener spacing resulting in more stiffeners,
- Build with greater rib to rib spacing resulting in fewer ribs,

The solution will have the characteristics:

- Large spar caps,
- Sizing dominated by local buckling.

It is not clear from the current study if these trends are also true of larger wings, on the scale of transport aircraft with an *MTOW* of greater than 100,000-*lbm*. However, in the test case of this business jet sized aircraft, the wing structure tends to be driven by buckling constraints.

A closer look at the structural solution on the heavy end of the spectrum shows that the weight seems to be a result of the larger spacing between ribs, leading to an increase in structure needed to prevent local buckling. The heavy wing sample results in a structural weight of 3080-*lbm* and is relatively stiff with a wingtip deflection of 5.9-*in*; this is about 50% heavier than the lightweight wing.

In this model we have demonstrated an array of wing structural weights based on a few conceptual design choices to get a better weight estimation while also considering wing stiffness. By comparison, the empirical wing weight formula mentioned in the literature survey does not take into consideration the wing structural choices, but can provide a rough order of magnitude weight estimate to begin with. The classic Torenbeek equation applied to this test case results in a relatively light weight prediction for the overall wing weight, at 2520-*lbm* when a full fuel bending relief term is used. However, remove the fuel weight relief and the estimate jumps to over 3200-*lbm*, with no indication of stiffness or structural layout change. In this case, the equation is overly sensitive to fuel weight change because the engines are not mounted on the wing, so nearly all the bending relief term is in the fuel. From the more detailed rule based design and weight-by-volume model demonstrated here, a range of roughly 2000 to 3000-*lbm*'s for the wing structure based on the layout of ribs and stiffeners is feasible, with the resulting stiffness consequences based on design decisions. This allows for a more informed conceptual wing design phase over the classical empirical estimators.

The next step to be completed in this research will be to generate a simple FEM model to perform modal analysis. Previous works such as Lemonds [1] and Bai [12] have performed FEM analysis for strength constraints, so that will not be the focus of future efforts. Rather, our research will focus on obtaining mode shapes and frequencies for prediction and prevention of wing flutter. Additionally, the span-wise distribution of nonstructural lumped masses such as secondary structure, subsystems, and fuel will be included in the model. Because the wing subsystems and control surfaces have not yet been designed, only a basic weight estimate can be given. The design of experiments will include some randomness in the mass distribution to characterize some of the mass uncertainty.

The modal analysis setup included choosing a lumped mass distribution to evaluate. To capture the two most significant sources of variation, a scheme was developed to span the range of fuel loading as well as introduce randomness in the non-structural wing elements. Five loading cases were chosen for each wing design, ranging from fuel full to fuel empty by 25% steps. Additionally, the Torenbeek estimate [7][9] for nonstructural mass is spread across the span weighted according to the structural mass at each wing station. That estimated spread is then scaled up or down by a random variate sampled from a population with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.3, so the nonstructural mass at a wing station may be slightly larger or smaller, but the total nearly approaches the estimate.

The resulting rising of the natural frequencies across all mode shapes comes as no surprise – as the mass decreases the frequency is expected to increase. At this time it is worth pointing out that the frequency gap seen from load case 1, “full fuel” to load case 5, “empty fuel” grows more significant at the higher mode shapes. This trend is observed across the three wing structures.

Three wing designs were chosen for this final analysis. Two represent the opposite extremes of light and heavy, and one is taken from a balanced trade of lightness and stiffness.

For the first analysis, the “heavy and stiff” wing with a chosen rib spacing of 18 inches and a stiffener spacing of 5 inches was used. The results are summarized in FIGURE 14. The resulting eight mode shapes for the full fuel load case is shown in FIGURE 15, and the empty fuel load case in FIGURE 16.

The resulting rising of the natural frequencies across all mode shapes comes as no surprise – as the mass decreases the frequency is expected to increase. At this time it is worth pointing out that the frequency gap seen from load case 1, “full fuel” to load case 5, “empty fuel” grows more significant at the higher mode shapes. This trend is observed across the three wing structures.

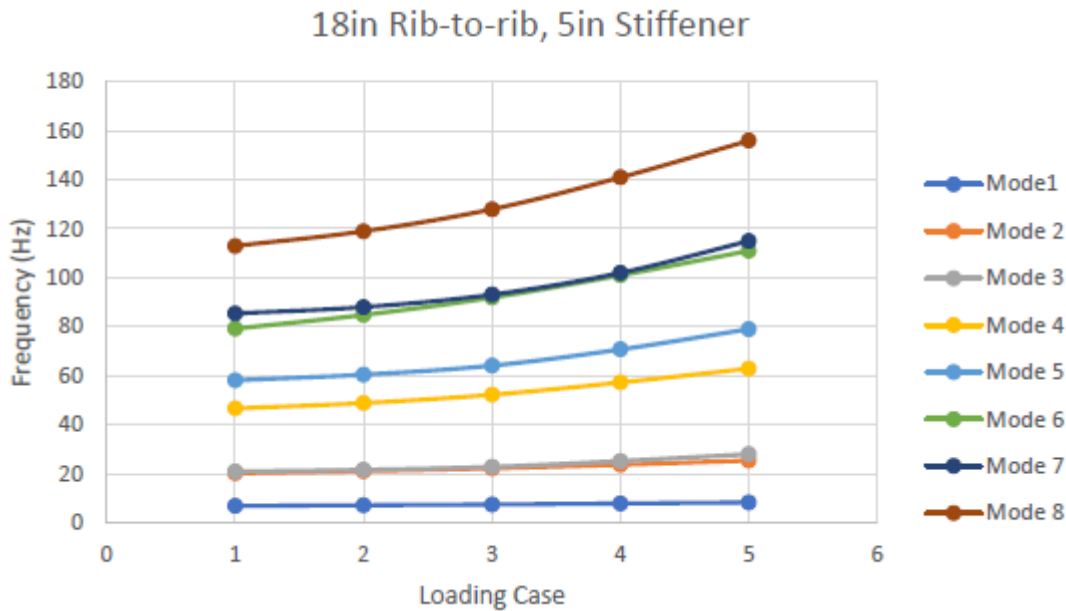


FIGURE 14 – HEAVY WING MODAL ANALYSIS



FIGURE 15 – FULL FUEL LOAD MODAL ANALYSIS (HEAVY STRUCTURAL WING)



FIGURE 16: Empty Fuel Load Modal Analysis (HEAVY STRUCTURAL WING)

Next, the lightweight wing with a chosen rib spacing of 11-in and a stiffener spacing of 14-in was used. The results are summarized in FIGURES 17 through 19.

So far the results have been organized as a single wing design across its expected fuel levels. The key observation to note is that above the fourth mode shape at roughly 40-Hz there is no appreciable gap between the frequencies of one mode shape to the next. This means that, regardless of the design of the torque box, at some fuel levels there will be a resulting natural frequency in the range of 40-140-Hz (within the first eight modes). Hence, if the unsteady aerodynamic forces resonate in that range within the flight envelope, there is potential for flutter.

The next analysis is to show the comparison of the multiple structural designs at a single load case. This is more revealing to what the designer choices can impact.

The “middle-of-the-road” wing structure chosen to represent the balanced selection between weight and stiffness had a rib spacing of 12-in and stiffener spacing of 10-in. The results are summarized in FIGURE 18.

In the first case, the three wings are compared at full fuel weight. The frequencies for the three wings are shown in FIGURE 19. It is observed that the frequencies are relatively similar, although the weights and stiffnesses vary dramatically. This is possible because the ratio of stiffness to weight, which drives the natural frequency, actually does not change as much. Also, due to the fact that the non-structural mass does not scale with the structure changes, the change in stiffness drives the frequency change. In other words, the “heavy” and “stiff” wing has higher frequencies across all mode shapes because although the mass and stiffness both increase, it is only the subset of structural mass that scales, so the stiffness dominates the ratio change. The stiffer and heavier wing has higher natural frequencies than the lighter and less stiff wing.

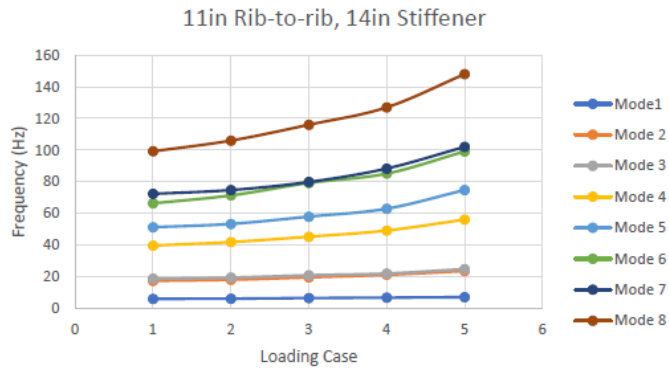


FIGURE 17 - Light Wing Modal Analysis

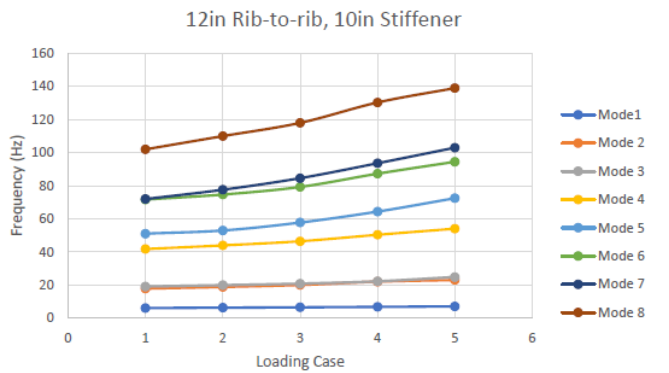


FIGURE 18: Balanced Weight-Stiffness Wing Modal Analysis

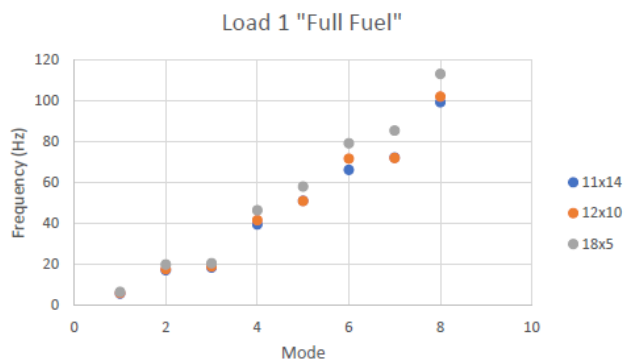


FIGURE 19 - Wing Structural Design Comparison – Heavy Fuel Load

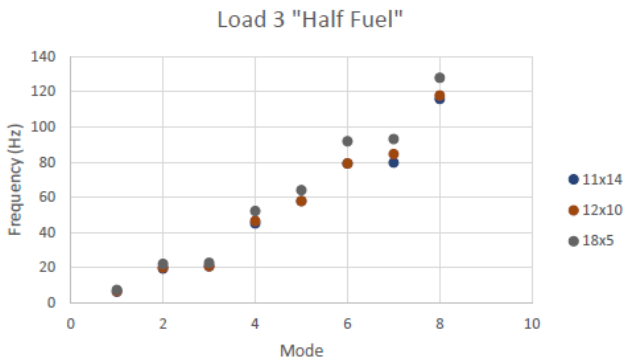


FIGURE 20 – Wing Structural Design Comparison – Mid Fuel Load

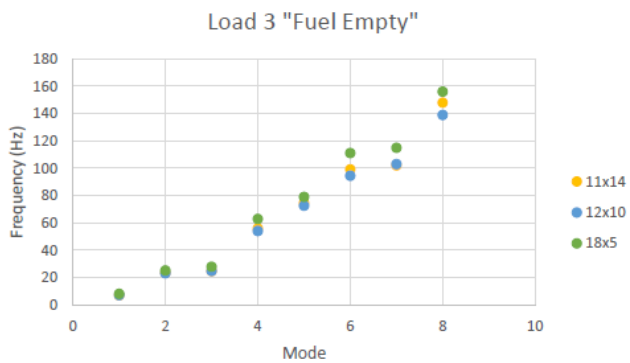


FIGURE 21 – Wing Structural Design Comparison – Minimum Fuel Load

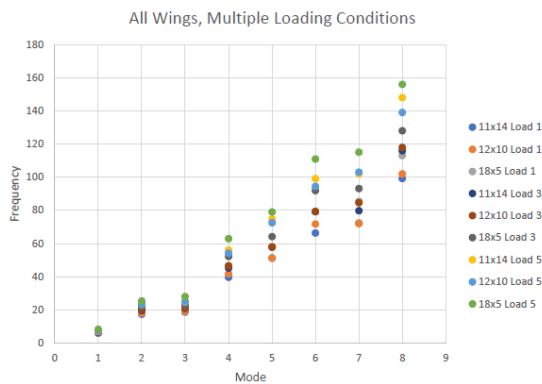


FIGURE 22: Modal Analysis for Three Wing Designs and Three Loading Cases

A similar result is found in FIGURE 20 and FIGURE 21 at half fuel and no fuel, respectively.

Finally, FIGURE 22 gathers the natural frequencies observed on the three wing designs and across the loading conditions. This final view reveals that regardless of design choice or fuel weight, there are pockets of frequencies in the “safe” zone in which there is a relative confidence that flutter will not occur. This includes the low frequencies below the first mode shape, in the range of $0 \rightarrow 6\text{-Hz}$, and the gap between modes three and four, roughly $30 \rightarrow 40\text{-Hz}$. Above that, however, if the unsteady aerodynamic forces drive resonance to a frequency above 40-Hz , there is a high likelihood that at some fuel level, that frequency will result in damaging flutter.

VII. SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

In this specific design problem, a moderately lightweight aircraft, the wing structure is constrained by local strip buckling. Therefore, reducing the unsupported length from rib to rib is one of the most significant ways to reduce the coverage area needed to support limiting loads. However, as demonstrated herein, this lighter weight wing will result in a design with increased wingtip deflection compared to alternate designs. As stiffness and aeroelastic effects are balanced with weight targets, a design trade can be made to determine the most appropriate wing structure.

Computer automation and clever planning can greatly improve the conceptual design of airframes. This paper has demonstrated that rule based automation can be used to enhance the design process to include stiffness results normally left to later design phases. In addition to more accurate stiffness and weight prediction, the added result of basic modal analysis can now be performed. The designer would then perform aeroelastic analysis to determine if the natural frequencies will cause flutter. If so, actions can be taken early to change the stiffness properties of the wing by simple design choices such as rib and stiffener spacing.

Overall, the proposed design presents itself a successful attempt to achieve all design requirements. In this work we see how a roughly 1000-lbm change in structural weight can significantly tailor the aeroelastic modes of the aircraft. We can rapidly assess how changes in wing rib spacing influence the overall structure, weight and structural dynamics of a proposed design.

Acknowledgments

This work began as an unsponsored Senior Capstone Design team design project performed in partial fulfillment of the degree requirements for obtaining a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering from Arizona State University. The system design blossomed into a detail structural design project for Mr. Miskin. This became the basis of his MS Thesis.

Prof. Takahashi wants to give special thanks for Phoenix Integration for supplying Arizona State with *ModelCenter*.

Mr. Miskin wants to especially acknowledge the support of Dr. Timothy Takahashi and Dr. Marc Mignolet who were key in the decision to pursue a graduate degree.

Mr. Miskin also wishes to thank his employer, Raytheon Missile Systems, for providing financial aid for continuing education.

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