



British Airways Accelerates Return of Jumbo Jets After Traveling Rebounds

By Steve Rothwell - Sep 29, 2010

[British Airways Plc](#) will return to service two of the eight [Boeing Co.](#) 747 jumbo jets it grounded during the recession as demand for travel rebounds faster than the company had anticipated.

The 350-seat [747-400s](#) have been retrieved from storage and are undergoing maintenance checks, with one to be reinstated at the end of January and the other a few weeks later, Chief Executive Officer [Willie Walsh](#) said today in an interview.

British Airways is among carriers that responded to the slump by idling jetliners near Victorville on the southern edge of the [Mojave Desert](#) in California, where the dry conditions hamper corrosion. The retrieval of the 747s reflects an outlook for demand that's "more positive" than before, Walsh said.

"In some cases we're just putting capacity back in where we had taken it out, but we are also looking at new destinations and will probably make some announcement in relation to that in the near future," the CEO said on the sidelines of the MRO Europe aviation maintenance conference in London.

One of the 747s will be used instead of a Boeing 777 for flights from the U.K. capital's Heathrow airport to Dallas, freeing up the smaller plane to operate a seventh daily flight to New York John F. Kennedy International Airport, as disclosed in August, British Airways spokesman [James von der Fecht](#) said.

"The second 747 is expected to be introduced into our summer 2011 schedule, but the destination it will serve hasn't yet been decided," he said.

Jumbo Fleet

British Airways has 49 Boeing 747s in its fleet, including the eight grounded, which are used for long-haul services to cities including Los Angeles, Johannesburg and Sydney.

Wide-body planes accounted for about 25 percent of the 200 [aircraft](#) retrieved from storage in May and June as carriers sought to tap rising demand for long-haul trips and a leap in cargo shipments.

The number of 747s recalled in June exceeded those mothballed for the first time since January 2009, data compiled by aviation consultant Ascend Worldwide Ltd. shows.

Walsh said in the interview that he is “optimistic about the outlook for 2011,” with British Airways poised to begin services to Cancun in Mexico in November before adding Tokyo Haneda in February and Buenos Aires in March.

Europe’s third-biggest carrier is lifting winter capacity about 7 percent from a year earlier but says it will only add seats where it can do so without depressing prices.

CEO Calls

Walsh said his revelation earlier this month that British Airways and Iberia Lineas Aereas de Espana SA have identified 12 merger candidates they might pursue once their own combination is completed has provoked huge interest from industry leaders.

“I’ve had an incredible number of telephone calls from airline CEO’s asking if they are on the list,” Walsh said. “The pace of consolidation is going to accelerate.”

British Airways and Madrid-based Iberia have agreed to form a new company, International Consolidated Airlines Group SA, subject to the approval of both sets of shareholders, with votes planned for later this year.

The U.K. carrier, Iberia and AMR Corp.’s American Airlines have also signed an agreement to start their trans-Atlantic alliance next month, they said today.

Under the deal, approved by antitrust regulators in July, the three carriers will share revenue from flights between the European Union, Switzerland and Norway and the U.S., Mexico and Canada, irrespective of which of them takes the booking.

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