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Emirates in Dh204m deal to sponsor UK cable car

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System to run between Greenwich Peninsula and Royal Victoria Docks

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Image Credit: Supplied

Called Emirates Air Line, the cable car system will run between Greenwich Peninsula and the Royal Victoria

Docks. It is expected to carry two million passengers annually when completed next year, with the stations pre-fixed with Emirates.

Dubai: In its biggest UK sponsorship deal since the one with Arsenal, Emirates has inked a Dh204 million deal with the office of Boris Johnson, the London Mayor, and Transport for London (TfL) to sponsor a new cable car system across the River Thames.

Called Emirates Air Line, the cable car system will run between Greenwich Peninsula and the Royal Victoria Docks. It is expected to carry two million passengers annually, when completed next year, with the stations pre-fixed with Emirates.

They will also carry a specially designed roundel — the familiar symbol of the London Underground, and both branded stations will be shown on the British capital's Underground map, Emirates said in a statement.

Analysts believe this move by Emirates is a lucrative one.

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"Hopefully an urban cable car will prove to offer a more reliable return on sponsorship than a football club," says Peter Morris, chief economist at Ascend Worldwide, a provider of consultancy services to the global air transport industry.

"At one level this is a surprising thing to see. Few airlines have sufficient profitability to be able to sponsor such a public transport facility, but Emirates has not built its business by doing 'the usual thing'," he said, adding that the only parallel is British Airways' sponsorship of the London Eye.

According to Emirates, the cable car will take around six minutes to cross the river and there will be 20 to 34 cabins operating at any one time depending on demand, with each able to accommodate 10 passengers seated. They will be able to carry up to 2,500 people per hour in each direction.

Perfect fit

"As one of the world's most innovative airlines, the link with this new form of air travel in London is a perfect fit for us," said Tim Clark, president of Emirates, in a statement.

"The Emirates Air Line will take off as an iconic landmark for London."

Describing the multi-million pound deal as "tremendous news" for London, Boris Johnson said: "The UK's first urban cable car will also act as a vibrant catalyst for the further regeneration of east London, helping to attract jobs and investment for the benefit of Londoners."

According to Mike Brown, managing director of London Underground and London Rail, with the main construction having begun in July, the cable line is on track to open next summer.

It is anticipated to be operational in time for next year's Olympics.

The deal for Emirates — which operates 15 daily flights to the UK, with eight to London — is the most significant sponsorship since its Dh567 million shirt and stadium naming deal with Arsenal in 2004. It is estimated that the airline contributes over \$400 million to UK tourism annually, Emirates said.

The airline, meanwhile, said it is hoping to renew its partnership with Arsenal Football Club when its current deal expires in 2021.

The deal — a 15-year contract implemented two years later — was the biggest in English football history at the time.

"Londoners will definitely be grateful for the sponsorship without which this transport project would probably not have gone ahead, and it is sure to become a tourist attraction in a similar way to the London Eye and the Millennium bridge," Morris said.

He added that the move is bound to attract a lot of attention, and will be a "highly visible brand statement" for Emirates in the commercial heart of a major capital city.