FLYDUBAI WILL MOVE TO DWC IN 2017, DUBAI AIRPORTS SAYS

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Flydubai will move its entire operations to Dubai's second airport, Al Maktoum International at Dubai World Central (DWC), by the end of 2017, freeing up space for Emirates to expand at Dubai International.

Operator Dubai Airports confirmed the move on Thursday in its quarterly DWC traffic report. Traffic will continue to grow in part because of the "planned move of flydubai's entire operation to DWC by end of 2017," chief executive Paul Griffiths said in the release.

This is the first official confirmation of when flydubai would move to DWC. However, it is understood that Shaikh Ahmad Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman of Dubai Civil Aviation and flydubai Chairman, told reporters in April the airline would move next year. Gulf News has been unable to verify his exact comments.

It has long been understood that flydubai would be the first major airliner to shift over to DWC and there have been murmurs that would take place in 2017.

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In October, Suzanne Al Anani, the chief executive of state-owned Dubai Aviation Engineering Projects, said there would be a major relocation of flydubai's operations to DWC in 2017. Then, in February, Shaikh Ahmad, became the most senior official to-date to confirm the airline would one day shift all flights over.

Flydubai declined to comment on Thursday's release from Dubai Airports and has previously avoided directly commenting on plans to move to DWC. Since October, it has split its operations between DWC and Dubai International. The move is likely to free up space at Dubai International for Emirates, the world's largest international airline, who have complained about increasing congestion and slot constraints. Dubai International is the world's busiest airport for international passengers.

"Clearly, Emirates will be the biggest beneficiary," of flydubai moving to DWC, Will Horton, senior analyst at CAPA — Centre for Aviation, told Gulf News by email.

This summer, flydubai's operations account of 19 per cent of all landings and take-offs at Dubai International, only second to Emirates who account for 40 per cent, according to Horton. "That is huge growth that is being unlocked," he said, "flydubai's slots … during peak periods … will be significantly beneficial to Emirates."

Without directly commenting on the flydubai shift, Emirates told Gulf News in a statement it has "a bit of breathing room" following the opening of Concourse D at Dubai International earlier this year, allowing the airline to move into Concourse C.

Emirates will also move its operations to DWC but not until the mid-2020s. DWC, located near Jebel Ali, could one day handle as many as 250 million passengers a year, according to previous comments.

By comparison, Dubai International can handle today up to 90 million passengers a year and will have an eventual capacity of 118 million by 2023.

Capacity at DWC is to increase to around 25 million passengers a year by the end of 2017 when flydubai move over, up from 5 million today. The next stage of expansion will be to increase capacity to 120 million passengers a year ahead of Emirates' planned move.

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