MANCHESTER TARGETS 25 MORE LONG-HAUL ROUTES, LED BY AIR CHINA

News / Airports / Routes

Manchester Airport said it could support 25 more long-haul routes, almost doubling the current number, after Air China Ltd. became the latest major carrier to seek flights to the biggest British hub outside London.

The airport, which has a catchment of 22 million people within two hours' travel, achieved a rolling 12-month passenger tally above 23 million for the first time in its 77-year history Monday, owner Manchester Airports Group said in a statement. Almost 6 million flew on inter-continental services.

As the only leading British airport with two runways other than London Heathrow, Manchester is operating at half its capacity and could support 20 to 25 more long-haul destinations based on current demand, Managing Director Ken O'Toole said in an interview. A long-running political row over expansion of airports serving the U.K. capital is making it easier to attract new airlines.

"With no new runway capacity coming into the southeast in the next 15 years, if ever, Manchester

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is now the focus for growth," O'Toole said. "We'll reach 25 million passengers in the short term, and we think the airport has the potential to get into the mid 30 millions by the late 2020s or early 2030s."

Shanghai Application

Air China, which ceased scheduled flights to London Gatwick in 2013, last week applied to the Civil Aviation Administration of China to serve Manchester from Shanghai four times weekly starting in March with Airbus Group SE A330 jets.

That's after Hainan Airlines Co. said last month during a visit to the airport by President Xi Jinping that it would offer four flights a week from Beijing from June 10, with a view to going daily. Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd. began serving Manchester from Hong Kong in December 2014.

Britain's third-busiest air hub has direct flights to more than 30 long-haul destinations. It's busiest route of any kind is to Dubai, with three daily services operated by Emirates, two using A380 superjumbos.

Los Angeles and Boston will be added by Thomas Cook Group Plc next year, with San Francisco, Dallas and Detroit among other U.S. targets for the airport, O'Toole said. Further objectives include Bangkok, Mumbai, Delhi and possibly Guangzhou in Asia, as well as Cape Town or Johannesburg in South Africa.

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