



EMIRATES PRESSES PAUSE ON PANAMA HUB PLAN UNTIL MORE AGREEMENTS IN PLACE

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Emirates, the world's biggest long-haul airline, put its plan to establish a hub in Panama connecting cities across Latin America with Asia on hold because government accords permitting cooperation with a key local carrier took too long to put in place.

Dubai-based Emirates has secured approvals from only three or four of the 13 countries from which it needs backing for a wide-ranging code-share deal with Panama City-based Copa Airlines SA, its president, Tim Clark, said at the ITB travel fair in Berlin.

Emirates initially aimed to commence flights to Panama in February, before slipping the date to March and then saying last week that services won't commence until late 2016 or early 2017. The 8,590-mile trip using Boeing Co.'s 777-200LR, the longest-range jet, would set an endurance record of 17 hours and 35 minutes when headed westbound into prevailing winds.

"Panama was a sort of entry point for South and Central America for us and has huge potential, but we needed to get the aero-political structures in place," Clark said. Flights via Dubai would offer access to western Asia, the Middle East and North Africa "in a very clean and easy way," he

said.

International Links

Emirates plans to retain staff already hired in Panama City while working to deliver the accord with Copa, which promotes its base at the capital's Tocumen International Airport as "The Hub of the Americas." The Panamanian national carrier averages daily flights, with the highest number of international services in Latin America, according to its website.

Copa last year ordered 61 Boeing 737 Max single-aisle jets worth \$6.6 billion at list prices in the largest-ever deal between companies in the U.S. and Panama. The planes will replace older 737s among a fleet that numbers more than 70 single-aisle aircraft, according to the website.

"You may wonder why people would travel from Guatemala to Dubai — or from Belize or San Salvador — but we know there is quite a lot of business," Clark said. "Panama itself is like a mini-Dubai when you look at some of the cities in Central and South America."

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