Bombardier To Supply Aircraft For WestJet Airlines

The Associated Press

CALGARY — WestJet Airlines has selected Bombardier to supply the propeller aircraft it requires for a new regional service, putting to rest any doubt that the high-profile order would go to the Montreal-based plane manufacturer.

The Calgary-based airline announced Tuesday that it will take delivery of up to 45 of the Bombardier Q400 turboprop planes over the next six years. They will be used for a new regional service that WestJet expects to launch next year.

Until now the Calgary-based airline has exclusively used Boeing jets in its fleet.

There had been some speculation the order could go to a European rival of Bombardier (TSX:BBD.B), which is Canada's largest aerospace company and the world's third-largest aircraft maker after Boeing and Airbus.

"We are very impressed with the Q400," said Gregg Saretsky, WestJet's president and chief executive.

He acknowledged that WestJet had looked closely at planes by the European manufacturer ATR but ultimately chose the Bombardier planes due to their combination of range, speed and seating.

"We look forward to working with another great Canadian company," Saretsky said.

The pricetag for the planes wasn't immediately announced but it will be welcome news for Bombardier's operations in Toronto, where the Q400s are assembled at the company's Downsview factory.

WestJet says it has placed firm orders for 20 Bombardier Q400s and taken options on 25 others.

The order was announced as WestJet released its latest financial report, which included a record first-quarter profit.

Its net income was $68.3 million, or 49 cents, per diluted share; up from $48.2 million, or 34 cents per diluted share in the first quarter of 2011. Revenue was nearly $891 million, up from $772.4 million a year earlier.

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