Hawaiian Airlines To Buy 16 New Airbus Planes

Audrey McAvoy, The Associated Press

HONOLULU, Hawaii - Hawaiian Airlines said Monday it plans to buy more than a dozen new Airbus planes to help it meet demand for travel between the West Coast and the islands.

The airline signed an agreement with the Toulouse, France-based airplane manufacturer to buy 16 new A321neo jets, each seating about 190 passengers in first and economy class.

The planes — to be delivered four to seven years from now — will allow Hawaiian to open new markets and boost service to cities it already flies to, the airline said. The Honolulu-based airline plans to add 1,000 jobs as part of the expansion.

"It's an exciting new chapter for our business. It underscores the confidence we have in our company and the market in which we operate," Hawaiian CEO Mark Dunkerley said in a telephone interview.

The move also ensures Hawaiian remains the "most competitive carrier in the marketplace," Dunkerley said.

The single-aisle plane will carry fewer passengers than the 294-seat Airbus A330 and 264-seat Boeing 767 jets Hawaiian currently flies between Hawaii and the West Coast.

But it will carry more than the 123-seat Boeing 717 the airline uses on interisland routes. The aircraft is not intended for flights between the islands.

Hawaiian could use it to fly new nonstop routes between Western cities and Kauai, Maui and the Big Island, Dunkerley said.

The airplane's smaller size and fuel efficiency also will give Hawaiian the option of using it fly to "one or two" smaller Western cities the airline currently doesn't serve. Dunkerley declined to mention specific potential destinations, noting the first plane won't be delivered for years. He also said he didn't want any places he didn't name to feel left out.

In line with industry customs requiring varied pay and work conditions for different airplanes, Hawaiian is negotiating with its pilot and flight attendant unions for agreements covering the new Airbus.

Dunkerley said the pilots' union will vote on ratification and the airline is still talking with flight attendants. The Airbus deal is contingent on Hawaiian finalizing agreements with both unions.

Most of Hawaiian's recent growth has been on international routes. Eight of the airline's nine new destinations over the past three years have been in the Asia-Pacific region. New York City was the ninth.

Dunkerley said the new planes will allow Hawaiian to address unmet domestic demand.

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