

**British European eyes LCY role for its Q400s**

LONDON CITY Airport's (LCY's) largest operator, British European, is pressing Bombardier to increase its efforts to clear the Dash 8 Q400 turbo-prop for operations at the airport.

The Exeter, UK-based airline is set to receive the first of four of the 78-seaters in July, and says that it may expand the fleet if approval can be gained for LCY operations with a maximum passenger load. British European understands that calculations carried out by the manufacturer to date conclude that the payload would be reduced by around 10 passengers.

Bombardier says the Q400 could be certificated to operate into LCY's short 1,199m (3,934ft) runway, but there are no plans to seek approval. "We think it can be done, but it's really not a high priority," says the company. It says flight trials to demonstrate the Q400's ability to demonstrate a 5.5° approach (plus a 2° buffer) would be required. The manufacturer also acknowledges that the stretched fuselage of the Q400 may create a challenge for pilots in avoiding tail scrapes at London City "during the transition from approach, through the flare to touchdown".

Augsburg Airways, which flies the smaller Dash 8s into the airport, recently took its first two Q400s, but has no immediate plans to operate the model into LCY. □

# AirTran ponders 717 orders to speed DC-9 phase-out

RAMON LOPEZ/WASHINGTON DC

AIRTRAN AIRWAYS is considering accelerating the replacement of its McDonnell Douglas DC-9-30s with Boeing 717s. Meanwhile, the airline is lobbying for 100 or more slots at Washington National Airport as the US Government considers the pending mega-mergers involving American Airlines/TWA and United/US Airways.

Orlando, Florida-based AirTran, which has achieved eight consecutive profitable quarters and ended last year with net earnings of \$47 million, plans to grow at about 20% per year for the next three years.

The airline has received 16 of its 50 717s on firm order which operate alongside 33 DC-9-30s and four Boeing 737-200s. Chairman Joe Leonard says he is in talks with Boeing about acquiring additional 717s to allow him to accelerate the DC-9 retirements.

AirTran had slowed the retirement of its remaining DC-9s because of strong traffic and continues with a May agreement with Boeing to stretch out deliveries of the remaining 717-200s on firm



Boeing could soon be building more 717s for AirTran if it exercises options

order. The DC-9 phase-out should resume by the end of this year, with up to five aircraft retiring from service each year. The low-fare carrier aims to move to an all-717 operation by 2005.

The current 717 delivery schedule calls for 12 to be received this year, 12 next year and the last 10 by the end of 2003. Leonard may exercise some of AirTran's 50 options early to pick up additional aircraft late this year or early next year.

Delivery positions could become available should American decide against taking over TWA's 717 orderbook. "There's been no decision, but we're talking to

Boeing about locking those in," says Leonard.

For now, AirTran will stick with the 106-passenger 717-200, but "at some point we will want an aircraft with a little better range...and we've asked them to consider stretching the 717 so we could get more seats," he says.

Lobbying for slots at Washington National, Leonard says the US Departments of Justice and Transportation should "look very closely at requiring the divestiture of landing and take-off slots, gates and other public facilities to successful low-fare airlines" as a pre-requisite for approving the mergers of US majors. □

## FAA blamed for failure of airlines to phase out noisy aircraft

THE TRADITIONALLY strong partnership between US airports and airlines is weakening, with airports warning carriers to phase out noisy aircraft or lose the ability to expand operations.

Meanwhile, in the ongoing aircraft noise debate, the Geneva, Switzerland-based Airports Council International (ACI) has revealed that, despite using its influence in the International Civil Aviation Organisation's (ICAO's) Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection (CAEP) to press for quieter aircraft, its recommendation was outvoted in favour of allowing noisy aircraft to remain in

service indefinitely (*Flight International*, 23-29 January, P8).

US airports have failed to deliver on promises of lower noise, says the body's North American council (ACI-NA), which blames the US Federal Aviation Administration for allowing airlines to sidestep the 1990 Airport Noise and Capacity Act by hushkitting old aircraft and continuing to fly them.

"We've been promising people quiet operations for a long time but we have not delivered," says ACI-NA president David Plavin, adding that the oldest 20% of the USA's jet fleet produces 60% of aircraft noise at airports.

The catalyst for Plavin's comments has been the CAEP failure to recommend a phase-out date for Chapter 3 aircraft noise standards.

Plavin - in harmony with ACI Geneva - insists that the CAEP should have proposed a 14dB cumulative approach/departure noise reduction for the new Chapter 4 standards, instead of the 10dB reduction recommended to the ICAO Council. Most modern aircraft can meet the 14dB cumulative reduction target, he says.

ACI Europe is meanwhile struggling to combat what it regards as potentially draconian environ-

mental legislation emanating from the European Parliament. A range of policy issues once solely the province of the European Commission - with which ACI says it has a good working relationship - are now subject to a co-decision process, meaning that MEPs can amend proposals with potentially sweeping results.

ACI Europe director general Philippe Hamon says it recently staved off an amendment that was "staggering, with no scientific basis whatsoever. It was asking that by 2020 nobody in or around an airport be able to suffer noise greater than that of a public library." □