

Riyadh Air plans new orders ahead of 2025 take-off: CEO

March 15 2023, by Rania Sanjar and Robbie Corey-Boulet



Riyadh Air, which was officially unveiled on Sunday, has since announced an agreement to purchase 39 Dreamliners, with options for 33 more jets.

Saudi Arabia's new national airline plans more aircraft orders as it prepares to operate its first flights in early 2025, its CEO told AFP on

Wednesday.

The [carrier](#), Riyadh Air, was officially unveiled on Sunday, and on Tuesday announced an agreement to purchase 39 Boeing Dreamliners, with options for 33 more jets.

Those acquisitions are part of a bigger deal—which could reach as many as 121 planes with options—that also involves the kingdom's other national carrier, Jeddah-based Saudia.

The White House said the value of the deal could reach \$37 billion. It is the fifth largest deal by value in Boeing's history.

"These aircraft are being assembled in the United States of America and they'll be delivered to us with the kind of timetable that allows us to prepare to go into service in early 2025," CEO Tony Douglas, the former head of Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways, told AFP.

"It will be added to with further orders during the course of this year, and that will give us a sizeable fleet that will allow us to connect to over 100 different destinations," he said.

Asked about the possibility of contracts with Airbus, Douglas praised the firm's product and said "the same rigorous campaigns and no doubt the same global manufacturers will be at the table" during future bids.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman sees aviation as a key component of his "Vision 2030" reform agenda to remake the petroleum-centred country, eyeing a more than tripling of annual traffic to 330 million passengers by the end of the decade.



Tony Douglas, the CEO of Riyadh Air, speaks at an event in April 2021.

'Brand of Riyadh'

Riyadh Air hopes to turn the Saudi capital into a regional travel hub to rival Dubai and Doha.

Saudi officials in November 2022 announced plans for a giant new airport in Riyadh, with a hoped-for doubling of the city's population.

Analysts have questioned the feasibility of this aspiration, with some describing the regional market as already "saturated".

Yet the Saudi strategy hinges partly on tapping the [domestic market](#) in a country with a population of around 35 million, which officials see as a major advantage for national carriers over rivals Emirates and Qatar Airways.

"Riyadh Air will be an international carrier, it will be a regional carrier and it will be a national carrier within obviously the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia itself. So we'll touch all points within the network," Douglas said.

"This is a statement of intent by the kingdom. This is about a brand of Riyadh. This is about the hub being here in the capital city. And this is about allowing the kingdom to have better connectivity to the world and, as importantly, the world to have better connectivity to the kingdom."

Sunday's announcement about the launch of Riyadh Air said it would create "more than 200,000 direct and indirect jobs" and "add \$20 billion to non-oil GDP growth".

Douglas said that as of Tuesday night 73,000 people had submitted CVs via the company's website to signal interest in working there.

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