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Transaero Adding Vnukovo to Destinations

By Roland Oliphant

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Transaero is creating a third base in Moscow at Vnukovo, with infrastructure for wide-body planes guaranteed.

Transaero Airlines has set up a third base of operations in Moscow at Vnukovo Airport, southwest of the city.

Operations will start in May under a 10-year partnership deal the airline, Russia's second largest, signed with Vnukovo late last week.

"Eventually we hope to be putting 2 million passengers a year through Vnukovo," Transaero communications director Sergei Bykhal told The Moscow Times by telephone. That would equal about 30 percent of total passenger traffic the airline flew in 2010, the last full year for which figures are available.

The partnership memorandum signed by Vnukovo chairman Vitaly Vantsev and Transaero

general director Olga Pleshakova will give Transaero guaranteed infrastructure including slots, parking areas and passenger-boarding jetways for wide-body aircraft, according to a Transaero statement.

The two sides have also agreed to build a new hangar suitable for Airbus A380 and Boeing 747-8 intercontinental aircraft. Transaero is the only operator of Boeing 747s in Russia.

The airline will also get its own check-in area, separate sales and information offices, self check-in kiosks and other passenger service facilities.

"There's a great deal of potential for growth at Vnukovo" compared with the other Moscow airports, Bykhal said, explaining the thinking behind the move.

Domodedovo, which is Russia's busiest airport, will remain the airline's main hub, said Bykhal, who described the deal as a "logical balance" of the airline's services to the capital. The deal gives Transaero a third base in Moscow after it started operations at Sheremetyevo in 2007.

Starting in early May, Vnukovo will service flights to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Magadan and Blagoveshchensk in the Far East, as well as Kiev in Ukraine and Tel Aviv in Israel, the airline told The Moscow Times.

"These are principally business routes," Bykhal said.

Vnukovo, the smallest of Moscow's three airports, is currently undergoing a merger with state-owned Sheremetyevo. The Transportation Ministry has hinted that this could be a precursor to an eventual merger of the two with privately owned Domodedovo to create a single Moscow airport company.

DME, the company that owns Domodedovo Airport, is trying to sell the airport for $4 billion to $5 billion. The company extended a deadline for bids for the airport until March 1 after finding it difficult to attract buyers willing to pay that price, Kommersant reported at the end of January.

State technology holding Russian Technologies is ready to sell its share in Aeroflot when there will be a market upturn, Interfax reported.

"At the moment, we have no plans to sell, but in the future I think that when the market improves, we may sell because there is no point in keeping that stake," company head Sergei Chemezov told reporters Friday.

Russian Technologies holds 3.5 percent of Aeroflot, where Chemezov is on the board of directors.

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