

EasyJet Aims to Cut Fares for London-Moscow Flights

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Travel between London and Moscow might soon get cheaper if easyJet wins the contest to become Britain's second operator for flights on this route.

Europe's second-largest budget airline is promising to introduce lower rates than the current operator British Airways, company spokeswoman Catherine Lynn said Tuesday.

EasyJet has applied to Britain's Civil Aviation Authority with a request to operate flights to Moscow, and has discussed options with managers at the city's three international airports, company spokeswoman Celine Prenez said.

British Airways and Virgin Atlantic are also in the running to win rights to the remaining flights from London to Moscow.

"We've proved over the years that when we enter a new market we open it up, bringing

in competition and lower fares and enabling more people to travel on the route," Lynn said. "The fares on the Moscow route are currently excessively high and we believe that the award of traffic rights to BA or Virgin would be a continuation of the status quo."

British Airways' lowest one-way fare between London and Moscow in September is 3,560 rubles (\$110), but it will rise in the coming months. Aeroflot and Transaero also fly to London, with Transaero's one-way flights starting from \$382.

EasyJet has not yet set a potential price for the Moscow-London flights. However, the airline's one-way flights for similar distances start at \$96.

In addition to Moscow, easyJet plans to operate flights from St. Petersburg to Britain and Switzerland as early as summer 2013, RBC Daily reported. Reports have also indicated that the airline is looking to add Edinburgh, Manchester and three Russian cities to its connections list, although Prenez could not confirm these plans.

The Civil Aviation Authority will meet on Oct. 1-2 to decide which of the three applicants will get rights to become the second operator on the route, according to David Kendrick, an official at the authority.

The slot for a second operator opened up when British Airways bought its competitor, BMI, in the spring. Both companies had operating rights for the London-Moscow route, but the European Commission ruled that the joint company should surrender 14 of the 56 slots from Heathrow Airport that previously belonged to BMI, RBC Daily reported.

The winner will be selected based on which airline provides the greatest benefit to consumers, Kendrick said. This criterion doesn't necessarily give an advantage to low-cost airlines, he added, because other factors, such as the airline's baggage services and effective use of airports within the United Kingdom, are also considered.

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