

AIRPORTS

WORLD CLASS

Mike Martin takes a look at the latest Dubai initiative that will change the shape of travel

The delivery of the first VIP version of the ultra long-haul Airbus A340-600 marked a new milestone in that sector of the market. That the customer – SAAD Air – was based in Arabia was no surprise.

The Arabian Gulf is the land of superlatives and nowhere more so than Dubai. Home to the world's first seven star hotel and soon to boast the world's tallest skyscraper, Dubai has used aviation to put itself firmly on the world map.

But its current "mega-project" is arguably the most audacious yet. With the \$4 billion extension to Dubai International Airport already well-advanced, the government of Dubai announced it was building the world's biggest airport (by land size).

With a price tag somewhere north of \$30 billion, Dubai World Central (JXB) will eventually have sufficient capacity to handle 120 million passengers a year. Although the grand name gives a clue to Dubai's long-term aviation ambitions, it does not actually do justice to what it actually is. To call Dubai World Central an airport is to call a Rolls-Royce a car. This will be a city.

The huge project, with work on the first runway – there eventually will be six – well advanced, is of interest to the bizjet community for two reasons.

It will be home to a comprehensive Executive Flight Centre (EFC) which is being designed as a one-stop centre for all business jet operations. It is due for completion next year.

The other reason is that future MEBA events are likely to be staged at the recently-announced Dubai Exhibition World, located at the airport. The biennial Dubai Air Show is already scheduled to move there in 2009.

Business aviation will form a key part of the Dubai World Central strategy. Its one-stop-shop philosophy will see it offer leasing and charter of business aircraft, ground handling, VIP handling, ground support, aircraft and equipment maintenance, fuel, catering, landing clearances and special VIP lounges.

"When completed the centre

will lead the region in terms of VIP and executive passenger handling and compete with world-wide business aviation facilities," said HH Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman, Dubai Aviation Corporation, Dubai World Central. "It will be outstanding from an architectural perspective, taking into account passenger comfort and privacy and, at the same time, ensuring airport security is maintained."

Designed with a handling capacity of in excess of 100,000 aircraft movements a year, the EFC will be completed next year. Apart from duty free facilities, business centre, fitness room, food outlets and crew rest area, the EFC will also feature a special area for executive helicopter and heli-taxi operations.

Abdulla Ahmed Al Qurashi, Chief Executive of Dubai World Central says: "One of the advantages of the Executive Flight Centre is that it is directly connected to a landside heliport which will enable VIP passengers

to fly their helicopters to their final destination, such as the Burj Al Arab or The World islands.

"This synergy between the Executive Flight Centre and the heliport is a key factor for VIPs."

The EFC will also boast specific areas for Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) and hangars.

"The masterplan for the MRO area is flexible," said Al Qurashi. "A customer might lease a plot for one hangar or a series of plots attached together to accommodate a large MRO centre for multiple aircraft."

"We also have facilities to accommodate different aircraft sizes, from single-engine Cessnas up to the Airbus A380."

According to Al Qurashi industry interest in the EFC is already running high.

"We have received enormous interest on three different fronts – light aviation, including a flying academy, corporate and business aviation both for aircraft and helicopter operations and for MRO.

"Discussions are ongoing with a number of parties and resulting initiatives will be announced in due course."

Business aircraft will be operating at an airport designed on a vast scale. In size it will be bigger than London Heathrow and Chicago O'Hare together. It will have the capacity to handle 12 million tonnes of cargo a year. Its six parallel runways will each be 4,500 metres long. Work has been underway on the first runway since last year and will open later this year.

The strategic role in Dubai's future development that will be played by Dubai World Central was summed up by Sheikh Ahmed who is also President of Dubai Civil Aviation and Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Group. He said: "Dubai World Central will not only cater to economic growth but will be a strong catalyst for our next wave of development."

The airport architects are promising a hassle-free, passenger-friendly experience. This "new model" airport will then be exported world-wide.

Dubai Aerospace Enterprise (DAE), the \$15 billion aerospace business launched in 2006 has put it on record that Dubai World Central will be the test-bed for inventing a new kind of airport.

DAE Chief Executive Bob Johnson said: "Airports are what

■ An overhead view of the World Central model shows just how vast the complex is with its six parallel runways, logistics facilities and staff accommodation.

■ (Left) How the new executive terminal/FBO will look

clogs up travel. So what we want to do in Dubai is make a new model for the airport in terms of what needs to happen at an airport.

"This airport will be efficient to get through and get on the plane. We will use technology and processes to ensure that. We are going to make a world-class airport in Dubai that has not been done by anybody else."

He added: "This airport will have great technology so passengers will not have to queue. They won't have to take off their shoes or open their computer for security checks. We won't need to see people's paper tickets."

"Other people build airports but we will build them better."

MEBA exhibitors and visitors probably will not have to wait too long before seeing the real thing – part of the Dubai World Central masterplan will see the creation of the \$2.1 billion Dubai Exhibition World. The huge exhibition trade centre will become the new home for Dubai's \$3.27 billion a year exhibition industry. With the transportation infrastructure being built around it, it promises to offer that rare thing – a hassle-free journey to and from the show!

And you may not be surprised to learn that Dubai Exhibition World will be the biggest exhibition centre in the world – the planet, that is.



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