

Boom time

As Novosibirsk enjoys huge economic growth its airport has embarked on an extensive development programme. Donald Easton talks to Tolmachevo Airport's **Alexander Borodin, Andrey Romantsov** and **Abdul Kusaev** about its infrastructure and route development plans.



It's tricky to make any kind of forecast," says Dr Alexander Borodin, Tolmachevo airport's general director. Despite his reluctance to make any firm prediction about the airport's future, extensive modernisation and the opening of a second runway in 2010 mean that Novosibirsk is well placed to consolidate its position as a central Asian hub and to introduce direct flights to Europe, Southeast Asia and beyond.

Novosibirsk is the third-largest city in Russia, home to 46 research institutes, the Novosibirsk Aircraft Production Association

and to numerous industrial and cultural organisations. In recent years, the city has enjoyed an economic boom. For 2001-07, while the overall GDP in Russia grew by 56.6%, the Novosibirsk region increased by 87.3%, and its airport has grown with it.

From despair to hope

In 2008, for the first time since the 1990s, Tolmachevo's total passenger capacity almost doubled and passenger throughput exceeded 2.1 million. In 2006, the airport embarked on an intensive development

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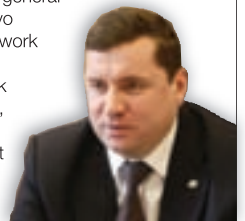
In 2008, Tolmachevo Airport received over 2.1 million passengers.

programme, including the reconstruction of its international and domestic terminals. In 2008, its 148-room Skyport hotel opened, outclassing all other hotels in the city, and a luxurious VIP facility opened in 2009.

The economic recession during 2009 brought setbacks to Tolmachevo, as it did to most airports. Passenger numbers fell by 15% and fares to Moscow dropped by 30%. On the tarmac, a line of engineless

Dr Alexander Borodin

Alexander Borodin is general director of Tolmachevo Airport. His previous work experience includes Kamaz, Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works, Svyazinvest, Sheremetyevo Airport and Transstroy.



IL-86s and Tu-154s stands like a row of rotting teeth, silent testimony to the effects of high fuel prices and low revenues on Siberian Airlines, Tolmachevo's principal hub partner. The collapse of Dalavia and of AirUnion, Russia's first airline alliance, added to the problems, resulting in the loss of services to destinations such as Samara and Chelyabinsk.

Despite these misfortunes, 2010 will mark another step forward with the opening in the first half of the year of a second runway. The 3,605m Cat II (potentially Cat III) runway can accommodate 36 movements per hour and is a keystone in Tolmachevo's traffic development plans. Its north-south orientation means that the flight path will avoid the city, which should make it easier to ensure continued 24-hour operations in the future. ▶

Equally important will be the opportunity to increase long-haul traffic. What Tolmachevo sees as the natural traffic for Runway 2 is larger aircraft: big cargo carriers and long-haul passenger jets. Regional traffic may be concentrated on Runway 1.

Logistical heart

That cargo should form a large part of Tolmachevo's throughput reflects the situation of Novosibirsk itself. The city was founded by Tsar Nicholas II at the point where the Trans-Siberian Railway was to cross the River Ob with its network of navigable tributaries and distributaries criss-crossing western Siberia. Today there is also a Trans-Siberian motorway down which hundreds of long-distance lorries

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thunder from Moscow to Baikal. This and the railway are served by a growing logistics park only 7km from the airport.

The airport's own existing cargo warehouse currently handles about 50t per day and is equipped to process livestock, refrigerated goods and all kinds of dangerous materials. Staple cargos are consumer goods – clothes, mobiles, computers and computer ancillaries – car parts, medicines. Some of these come from west to east across Russia, but more comes from the east, especially consumer goods, fish and caviar. Siberia, too, has its own products. Pallets loaded with Beluga vodka are shunted around the warehouse on fork-lift trucks.

“As we are in the middle, we both receive and send,” says cargo terminal chief manager Andrey Romantsov. “2008 was an extraordinary year – we processed 21,000t.”

Time to grow

Now expansion is planned. An international cargo terminal is under construction and is scheduled to open in March 2010. This is just one part of a whole new facility that will be completed in two to three years' time and will have a capacity of at least 50,000t. Plans also exist for an eventual rail link to connect the terminal with the Trans-Siberian Railway.

“Once we have a railway line near the warehouse, we will become a really inter-modal terminal,” says Romantsov.

Technical stops are an important part of Tolmachevo's offering – not surprisingly, given its position half way across the continent. There are plans for Air France to use Tolmachevo as an emergency stop for its A380s on the Trans-Siberian route. The airport will also provide Lufthansa Cargo with alternative technical stops on long-haul flights from Southeast Asia to Frankfurt. Deputy general director Abdul Kusaev wants to build on this.

“We are very good for transit stops and technical stops, because the airline will have the opportunity to increase its load,” he explains. “By starting out with half-full

tanks and refuelling at Tolmachevo they can actually increase their payload by 5-10%.”

Market potential

But this is only a first step. Twelve million people living within 600km of Novosibirsk is a big potential market for passenger traffic and cargo. Kusaev thinks that an airline already making technical stops will soon consider taking on cargo or passengers.

More airlines upgrading from technical to transit stops would boost Tolmachevo's role

as a regional hub. Its primary catchment area probably extends to a radius of 300km. But beyond this there waits an additional market consisting of travellers in cities such as Tumen and Omsk, which connect to European or Southeast Asian flights through Moscow, but who might prefer to do so through Novosibirsk if the long-haul flights were available. Kusaev calculates that more regional flights would, in turn, enable him to open new direct flights to other hubs in Europe and Southeast Asia.

“We are already a hub, but we want to develop it further, make it bigger; and we definitely need to widen this regional network,” he says.

Looking further afield, Kusaev hopes to re-open the route to Prague soon and sees scope for more direct flights to Frankfurt. Regular flights, and not just the present charters, are needed to Turkey, Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh.

“In the distant future, if we have really good demographic and economic growth, the idea is to have Dreamliners fly to Novosibirsk... with Siberians travelling to, say, South America or the Caribbean for winter holidays in the sun, and people from North Africa or Australia flying here for skiing in the Altai Mountains,” he says.

Of course, the intended increase in passengers and cargo needs to be coordinated with further investment in equipment and infrastructure.

“It's not enough just to have a runway,” says Kusaev. “In time, as passenger numbers rebuild, Tolmachevo will be able to revive its plan for a new 'C' class terminal to replace the present two and be situated between the two runways.”

So, what will Tolmachevo be like in 20 years' time?

“I want it to be one of the biggest hubs in Central Asia,” says Borodin. “It will be at least a gateway to Southeast Asia for all of the European hubs. It will be an airport with a very wide network and connections with nearby cities in the whole Siberian region, and will have direct flights to, say, Australia, and over the North Pole to the US, using long-range aircraft like the 787 – who knows? Maybe the A380. Hopefully, we will be as big as Domodedovo, Sheremetyevo or Frankfurt.”

On the airport's present trajectory, Borodin's hope could be fulfilled. ■

