

Southwest may be heading to the islands

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

Southwest Airlines could be heading as far southwest as the U.S. goes – to Hawaii.



The airline's chairman, president and CEO said in New York on Wednesday that Southwest would substitute 20 of its Boeing 737-700 aircraft orders to 800-series jets, opening the door to potential long over-water and international flights.

Addressing the Wings Club of New York City, Gary Kelly said the 175-passenger 800-series planes "set the stage to bring more destinations into the realm of possibilities for Southwest to operate a more economical aircraft and to offer better scheduling flexibility in high-demand, slot-controlled or gate-restricted markets."

Southwest expects to take delivery of the first of its larger jets in March 2012. The current plan is to deliver the planes in an Extended-range Twin-engine Operational Performance Standards configuration. ETOPS-configured jets are certified to fly over large bodies of water, putting the Hawaiian Islands and the Caribbean in play as potential destinations for the discount carrier that is McCarran International Airport's busiest airline.

The airline also has indicated that the larger jets could be used at airports where it has a limited number of gates or takeoff and landing slots, like LaGuardia International and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, to maximize the number of passengers it can fly to those destinations. Alaska, Mexico and Canada also have been named as potential

destinations with the flexibility and range of the larger aircraft.

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