

AVIATION

Nok Air turns to Bombardier

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Nok Air has opted for the upgraded version of the Canadian-made Bombardier Q400 aircraft for the modernisation of its turboprop fleet served by planes made by the French-Italian aircraft manufacturer ATR.

The budget Thai carrier placed a firm order for two Q400 NextGen turboprop airliners and took options for two more as well as securing the purchase rights on four others. Based on the list price of the Q400 NextGen, the firm order is valued at US\$63 million, although Nok Air chief executive Patee Sarasin yesterday told the *Bangkok Post* they will actually cost Nok Air about \$36 million due to discounts.

The ATR 72 was originally the preferred choice for Nok Air's turboprop plane renewal scheme, but ATR was unable to deliver the aircraft soon enough to meet Nok Air's expansion plan. The airline will be the first in Southeast Asia to operate the Q400 NextGen aircraft, which offers an extra-capacity option for 86 passengers.

The airline is expected to take delivery of the two planes in next year's second quarter to replace two leased ATR 72-500s that will be phased out, said Mr Patee.

He said Nok Air selected the Q400 NextGen based on its speed, higher payload, fuel efficiency, low maintenance costs, superior comfort and noise reduction.

Its two ATR 72-500s, in service for six and seven years, were configured differently — one for 66 passengers and the other for 72.

The extra-capacity seating option will give the Q400 NextGen an advantage of up to a 7% fuel burn per seat and an overall operating seat cost advantage of up to 17% compared with its closest turboprop competitor, said Torbjorn Karlsson, the vice-president for Asia-Pacific sales at Bombardier Commercial Aircraft.