

# Denel to service South African Express planes after grounding

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16 May 2016

State-owned South African Express, which last month had its entire fleet grounded for safety reasons, has roped in Denel for the maintenance of its aircraft, CEO Inati Ntshanga says.



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South African Express had been in talks with South African Airways (SAA) Technical and Denel regarding the maintenance of its fleet, but had fast-tracked the process following the grounding of its aircraft, in a move to improve the airline's reputation, Ntshanga said on Friday.

South African Express had been doing its own maintenance, despite misconceptions that this was being done by SAA Technical, he said. "The skills are still sitting at South African Express, but my job is to fly people and look over operations, and Denel has a section called Denel Aviation, which focuses on aircraft maintenance... so it makes sense," Ntshanga said.

South African Express was investigated on April 19 and 20 after an aircraft computer malfunctioned in the air. The investigation found deficiencies in the airline's safety monitoring system, which affected its entire operations, according to the South African Civil Aviation Authority. The airline was given until 29 April to respond to the findings. When its response did not tackle the concerns raised, the airline was grounded.

South African Express maintained that it had been grounded due to differences in incident-reporting procedures. Following meetings soon after the grounding between executives and the aviation authority, the airline was back in the air in 42 hours.

South African Express flies to 29 destinations and has 37,287 flights a year, according to its annual report. The airline is looking to replace its fleet of 24 aircraft over the next 10 years.

Denel spokeswoman Vuyelwa Qinga said Denel Aviation, a division of state-owned Denel Group, had been in talks with South African Express regarding maintenance services. Denel Aviation provides aircraft maintenance repair and overhaul services to local and international organisations. Services had focused mainly on military aircraft, with the South African Air Force being the main client, but Denel Aviation was looking to enter the civil aircraft services market, she said.

Transport economist and aviation expert Joachim Vermooten said there were "synergies" between South African Express and Denel, as it conducted maintenance on aircraft similar to the airline's fleet.

*Source: Business Day*

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