

# Corporate Air Shuttles



Challenger 890

Corporate air shuttles are taking off as companies seek to minimise the amount of time their employees spend in transit. **Dan Smith** looks at the reasons why companies choose to operate corporate air shuttles and at the aircraft they use.

In an increasingly globalised world, many companies find themselves with operations scattered around the globe. While email and video conferencing make it possible for employees to communicate across borders, the need to have key people on the ground is a constant.

Scheduled air services are one option for moving people around. That's fine if you are only moving a few people and if both locations are close to airports with good scheduled services. For many companies, the sheer number of people to be moved or the location of one or more of their facilities rule out this option.

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Scheduled air services are not the only option for moving large groups of people around

## Why Use a Shuttle?

Corporate shuttles are typically used by large, multinational industrial corporations. One such company is Airbus. With 57,000 employees at 16 sites in four European countries, Airbus cannot afford to rely on the vagaries of scheduled services.

For many years Airbus has run a daily corporate shuttle linking their plant in Broughton, Wales with the final assembly centre in Toulouse, France. Another daily service operates between Hamburg, Germany and Toulouse. Both shuttles are scheduled to land in Toulouse at the same time. According to Greg Thomas, CEO of PrivatAir, the company that ran the shuttle service for Airbus until recently: "Morning meetings in Toulouse are scheduled to start an hour after the arrival of the shuttles. They are that important to the operation of the company. You could not have that certainty with scheduled services."

PrivatAir used two Airbus A319 aircraft in a 126 seat, all business class configuration for the shuttle services. Hot breakfasts were served in the mornings and a light dinner was provided on the return journeys. It should be noted that not all companies are as generous as Airbus. "I know of one organisation that limits on-board service to making sure there is coffee in the coffee machine," said Thomas.

Airbus recognised that travel for employees must be as comfortable as possible if they are to perform at their best. Without the stress, endless security checks, and delays of a busy airport, their employees arrive refreshed and ready for work.

Security of information is another reason why many companies choose shuttles. If two employees are holding a meeting on a scheduled service there is a chance that conversation may be overheard and passed on to a competitor. On a shuttle service the only people that are likely to overhear the conversation are other employees.

## What's on the Market?

A number of manufacturers offer airplanes that are specifically targeted at the corporate shuttle market. In reality almost any aircraft can be used. Bombardier set out to deliberately target this segment of the business aviation market when they launched their range of Challenger Shuttle jets in May 2005. The Shuttles are based on Bombardier's existing Challenger Regional Jet (CRJ) models and are available in three models, the 850, 870 and 890. The 850 is available in a deluxe (all business class) configuration, while the 870 and 890 are available in both the deluxe and a standard (all economy class) configurations.

The Deluxe 890 will carry 52 passengers up to 1,971 nautical miles (3,650 km), while in the Standard configuration the jet will carry 90 passengers up to 1,669 nautical miles (3,091 km). The Challenger 890 has a maximum operating altitude of 41,000 feet (12,497 m) at a cruise speed of Mach .82.

The first Challenger 890 was delivered to Suncor Energy in late February this year. The aircraft will be used by Suncor to shuttle employees over 700 kilometres from the company's headquarters in Calgary, Canada to their oil sands operation near Fort McMurray in the north of Alberta province.

Airbus launched its Airbus Corporate Jetliner (ACJ) in 1997. Since then it has added the A318 Elite and the A320 Prestige to its corporate jet range. Together the three aircraft are known as the ACJ Family. To date Airbus has sold more than 100 planes in this group.

The A320 Prestige has almost 100 m<sup>2</sup> of cabin space which can be configured in any number of combinations. The plane is also fitted with two additional belly tanks that increase the range of the aircraft to 4,100 nm (7,593 km) making a flight from New York to London possible. Perhaps recognising the limited resale appeal of a corporate shuttle, Airbus has designed the tanks so they can be removed at the end of the jet's corporate shuttle life. Removing the tanks turns the aircraft back into a standard A320, thereby increasing its resale value.

The Boeing Business Jet (BBJ) range is also targeted at the corporate shuttle market, though Boeing would not disclose how many aircraft it had sold for this purpose. The BBJ is available in three models, the BBJ, BBJ2 and BBJ3. The aircraft are extremely popular in the Middle East with more than 25% of the worldwide BBJ fleet based in the region. The jets are based on Boeing's 737-airframe. They can be fitted with up to five additional tanks to increase their range, in the case of the BBJ up to 6,198 nm (11,480 km). >>



A320 Prestige

Embraer's Legacy Shuttle is their main offering in the corporate shuttle market, though some of its other models are also used for this purpose. The Legacy Shuttle has a balanced field length of 4,610 feet (1,405 m) enabling the jet to operate out of smaller airports. After takeoff it can climb directly to a cruising altitude of 37,000 feet (11,277 m). The direct transition from takeoff to cruise avoids step climbing and affords passengers a comfortable ride. The jet has a range of 1,910 nm [3,537 km] with 16 passengers on board.

These are just a few of the options that are available. It is worth restating that almost any aircraft can be used for the task, depending on the mission profile. "PrivatAir use a number of different aircraft for our corporate shuttle services," say Thomas. "The choice of aircraft really depends on the passenger load and the locations to be served."

### Third-party Help

Corporate shuttle services are operated both by companies themselves and charter companies. Typically organisations with their own flight department and a long-term need for the shuttle service will purchase and operate the aircraft themselves. Charter firms are also used by companies with their own flight department. Airbus contracts their corporate shuttle operations out to charter companies, although they do operate their own transport fleet.

One of the key reasons companies operate shuttle services is reliability of schedules. Events such as the breakdown of a key aircraft can, however, compromise those schedules unless the company has many planes in its fleet. Charter operators normally have some spare capacity and are able to provide back-up aircraft.

Using a third-party also enables an organisation to negotiate a fixed price for the shuttle service for a set number of years, typically five. This protects the travel budget and eliminates most of the risks associated with owning and operating your own aircraft. Variable costs, such as fuel, are normally charged separately.

The market for corporate shuttles is difficult to define, simply because any aircraft can be used. From time to time a manufacturer tries to bring focus to the area by targeting a model or range for use as a shuttle. However, the airplane used must fit the long-term needs of the organisation and the people that are flying. There is no doubt that corporate shuttles will go on being valuable business tools long into the future. ■

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## Some of the Options

The following table shows just some of the many aircraft that are targeted at the corporate shuttle market.

Manufacturer	Model	Maximum range*		Passengers
		(nm)	(km)	
Airbus	ACJ	6,500	12,038	19 to 50
Airbus	A318 Elite	4,000	7,408	14 to 18
Airbus	A320 Prestige	4,100	7,593	30 but configurable (100 m <sup>2</sup> cabin area)
Boeing	BBJ	6,198	11,480	8 to 50
Boeing	BBJ2	5,734	10,620	8 to 50
Boeing	BBJ3	4,765	8,825	Various (104 m <sup>2</sup> cabin area)
Bombardier	Challenger 850	2,231	4,131	27
Bombardier	Challenger 870	2,232	4,133	42 or 70
Bombardier	Challenger 890	1,971	3,650	52 or 90
Embraer	Legacy Shuttle	1,910	3,537	16 to 37

\*Maximum range is based on an aircraft fitted with the maximum number of additional fuel tanks and the lowest number of passengers shown.

