

Boeing Commercial Airplanes President and CEO Kevin McAllister discussed the new airplane... more

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Boeing may formally unveil plans for the 797 widebody at the Dubai Air Show in November, AeroDefenseNews reported Thursday.

Gulf airline Emirates could be the launch customer for the new mid-sized model, the French aerospace newsletter suggested, but it did not identify the source of its information.

"I'm somewhere between, 'What?', and, 'No comment,'" Boeing Commercial Airplanes President and CEO Keven McAllister told the Business Journal after a luncheon speech in Seattle Thursday.

While McAllister would not confirm or deny the report, Sean McCormack, an aide by his side, said to "heavily discount" the rumor.

Boeing opened an office in Renton for the potential new aircraft model this week and named a boss: Mark Jenks, until now the 787 Dreamliner manager.

McAllister told employees in a note that the action "moved us one step closer to a decision" on the new airplane, but emphasized it was not a program launch.

The 797 could carry between 220 and 270 passengers, replacing the Boeing 757. It would compete with Airbus' A321neo (new engine option), currently popular in that market space among airlines.

The Business Journal also learned from an aerospace industry source that

Boeing executives recently held a secret meeting with a small group of top executives from companies considered key suppliers for any new jet, according to a confidential aerospace industry source who requested not to be named to preserve business relationships.

Addison Schonland, an analyst at AirInsight Research, was skeptical of the French report, saying questions remained about the range, size, and new jet's engine technology.

"While there is some level of news suggesting there is a definite level of activity at Boeing in this space, it would be premature to support this theory at this juncture," he told clients Thursday. "The Dubai show (Nov. 15-17) is rather early in the launch window, and Emirates could indeed be interested in the aircraft, but the reality may be different altogether."

Boeing executives have been in discussions with 57 different airlines, gathering feedback to determine if there is business case for the new plane, Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg has said.

Wells Fargo aerospace analyst Sam Pearlstein said after a recent meeting with Boeing executives any new airplane won't be launched until 2018.

"Airlines and Boeing want an airplane with 'single-aisle economics and wide-body comfort,'" Pearlstein wrote in a report. "We expect a new aircraft to be larger than 757, but still be able to replace both the 757 and 767. The 'footprint' for production has not been determined i.e., Puget Sound, South Carolina, or a new location."

Schonland and Pearlstein said engine availability from suppliers could be a key factor in Boeing's decision.