SPANISH GHOST AIRPORT "PAID RYANAIR 420,000 POUNDS TO FLY THERE"

News / Airports / Routes

A "ghost airport" in Spain that waited four years for its first commercial flight has been accused of paying Ryanair, now its sole airline, EUR600,000 (420,000 pounds) a year to fly there.

Castellon was finished in 2011 at a cost of more than 100 million pounds but had not seen a single passenger through its gates until March this year when the Irish low-cost airline arrived.

At the time, Kenny Jacobs, Ryanair's chief marketing officer told Telegraph Travel that there was a strong demand to the east-coast region of Spain, with the routes to and from Stansted aimed at young Spanish migrants looking for work in London.

The airport, run by Canadian firm SNC-Lavin, agreed to pay Ryanair EUR600,000 a year in return for flying there, according to Spanish news website El Confidencial.

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Ryanair pledged to provide the airport with 60,000 seats a year, which would suggest that each seat may be subsidised to the tune of EUR10.

Both Ryanair and SNC-Lavin deny the payment. A spokesperson for Ryanair said: "This is untrue. Ryanair does not receive any such payment. We negotiate commercial agreements with all of our airports, which we do not comment upon."

The airline operates three weekly flights from London, and two weekly seasonal from Bristol. A second airline, Blue Air, is due to begin flights to Bucharest from the airport next June.

El Confidencial reported that SNC-Lavalin is currently being supported by the local government of Valencia, to the point where it pays nothing to run the airport until 2034 and has access to EUR25 million of public funds for investment, having bought the airport for just EUR6 million. SNC-Lavalin will begin to pay the regional government once the airport is handling 1.2 million passengers a year.

Castellon Airport became a symbol of Spain's reckless spending on construction in the 1990s. It features a prominent statue of Carlos Fabra, the local politician who championed its construction but who last December began a four-year jail term for tax fraud.

In 2012, a year after the airport was finished, the State Agency for Air Security found that its main runway was too narrow for planes to turn around on, so had to be dug up and widened.

The city itself, also known as Castellón de la Plana, sits on the coast between Valencia and Barcelona. Its cultural attractions include the Santa Maria cathedral, Unesco-listed rock art and a museum dedicated to the cultivation of oranges.

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