

**REGIONAL LEADERSHIP**

**TEWOLDE GEBREMARIAM**



Ethiopian Airlines

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**TEWOLDE GEBREMARIAM**  
 Chief executive, Ethiopian Airlines

**E**thiopian Airlines is the first African carrier to be recognised by the Airline Strategy Awards, and its success this year is deservedly so. The airline has delivered consistent profits while developing its fleet, network and business infrastructure and, in doing so, shown leadership to a continent.

When Tewolde Gebremariam took over as chief executive in January 2011, his predecessor Girma Wake had laid solid ground for the carrier’s development. Over the previous five years revenues and profits had tripled, and Gebremariam set about leading Ethiopian on the next phase of its expansion.

The fact that the airline’s success is in one of the most difficult regional markets, where airline liquidations are all too frequent, was not lost on the judges, with one saying that given Ethiopian is operating in a “difficult region”, to achieve what it has is “very impressive”.

The contribution made to Ethiopian’s success by Gebremariam’s predecessor was recognised by the judges, who were keen to give credit to Wake for steering the airline onto its profitable growth trajectory.

While issues such as government ownership and the lack of a liberalised aviation environment have proved millstones around the necks of many fellow African carriers, Ethiopian has developed the most extensive network on the continent with services to 45 cities, enabling travellers to connect to destinations within Africa via its Addis Ababa hub rather than transferring via Europe or the Middle East.

Ethiopian has supplemented its own base in east Africa by teaming with Togolese carrier ASKY, giving it a presence in west Africa. Under its growth strategy, Gebremariam envisages similar developments to strengthen its presence elsewhere in Africa.

Under the “Vision 2025” strategy, Gebremariam hopes to grow revenue to \$10 billion – plus a challenging 10% margin in targeting \$1 billion profit – by 2025. He believes this achievable by focusing on cost, diversification into a wider aviation group and

growth potential of the region.

He says the airline is well situated to tap into growth: “We are located in one of the fastest growth areas. We can still continue to grow and fast growth is projected – but it has to be profitable.”

Ethiopian’s milestones include joining Star Alliance in 2011 and becoming the first African carrier to receive the Boeing 787. “The fact that we are the first airline outside Japan to receive this ultra-modern aircraft is an affirmation of our continuing pioneering role in African aviation,” says Gebremariam. “It is also a testimony of our commitment to give our passengers the best possible travel experience, with the best industry products and services.”

Asia and Latin America are also big areas of expansion for Ethiopian, particularly Brazil, India and China. The carrier began flights to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo on 1 July and is now serving the circular route from Addis Ababa to Lomé, Togo, on to Rio’s Galeão airport, and then to São Paulo Guarulhos and back three times a week using one of its 787-8s.

**ALEX THOMAS**



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\*Until 2008, the Low-cost Leadership and Regional Leadership awards were combined