

Flexible decarbonisation solutions aid smart sustainability in air cargo

28/09/2022

By Rebecca Jeffrey



The panelists with moderator Robert Fordree, executive vice president - cargo, Menzies Aviation

Powering operations and machinery that will increasingly rely on electricity as a fuel source is one of the biggest decarbonisation challenges facing the air cargo industry, according to an industry sustainability expert.

The electric grid isn't sufficient to accommodate initiatives to run airfreight buildings and machinery on electric, Huw Phillips, vice president, global head of real estate excellence and sustainability at DHL told *Air Cargo News*.

Phillips, speaking during the IATA World Cargo Symposium (WCS) Sustainable Cargo Facility of the Future session, said that one way to combat the issue was to for companies to generate power themselves.

The use of batteries to store the energy generated is also important.

“The key is looking at what we can control,” he said. “We can control our site. We can put more solar on our sites, we can put more battery storage that collects that solar so we can use it at night time.

“That helps us become less dependant on the grid. And as we increase our demand for electricity, for electric vehicles etc. then we’re more able to deal with challenges.

“When the grid is at peak demand we can reduce demand by utilising our batteries.

“It gives us flexibility to use our solar at night and also flexibility to move around and support the grid.

“As well as battery storage, it’s important to invest in intelligent electric infrastructure that enables us to switch the load around.”

Investment in air cargo ground operations is just as important as investing in aircraft when it comes to working towards air cargo decarbonisation, Philips, along with James Golding, head of cargo, Heathrow Airport, and Jos Jacobsen, eastern Hemisphere managing director global leasing, ACL Airshop, agreed during a panel discussion in the session.

Golding said that Heathrow Airport aims to reduce emissions from airport operators on the ground by 45% by 2030.

“Automation and digitalisation are also incorporated in Heathrow’s sustainability vision,” he said.

Phillips explained that DHL plans to spend \$7bn on decarbonisation.

The company aims to achieve net zero by 2050, but also has a 2030 plan that anticipates 60% of vehicles to be electric and will incorporate a carbon neutral design for all new buildings.

He said: “The challenge is how to apply sustainability principles to existing buildings, including heating and electrification, such as second-generation batteries, plus automation.”

Most of DHL’s technologies drive efficiencies not emissions, with the aim of lowering emissions-producing power sources.

Meanwhile, ACL Airshop's goal is to enable fast turnaround of ULDs to maximise efficiency.

Collaboration is also important, said Golding.

It is prioritised at Heathrow because the airport doesn't own the majority of cargo facilities, he explained.

"We have to collaborate to support the sustainable transition. We are willing to share our property building knowledge with the facility owners."

He added we need to focus on policy change and how that can fuel decarbonisation.

"We need policy change to be more efficient. Noeverything is an infrastructure-related issue.