

EasyJet pledges net-zero carbon on all flights

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Transport correspondent

EasyJet is to become the world's first major airline to operate net-zero carbon flights across its entire network, after announcing it would offset all jet fuel emissions.

The British budget airline said it would start offsetting all flights from yesterday, at a cost of about £25m in the next financial year, through schemes to plant trees or to avoid the release of additional carbon dioxide.

Johan Lundgren, easyJet's chief executive, said longer-term solutions were also needed. "We recognise that offsetting is only an interim measure, but we want to take action on our carbon emissions now. Aviation will have to reinvent itself as quickly as it can."

EasyJet's move surpasses the recent pledges of rival airlines, including British Airways, whose parent company, IAG, promised last month to be carbon-neutral by 2050 and to start offsetting all domestic flights next year.

The German airline group Lufthansa has launched a business fare where European flights are automatically offset for corporate customers from 2020.

There is mounting pressure on the aviation industry to address its environmental impact. The UN agency the

International Civil Aviation Organization has launched a limited global offsetting programme whereby governments have agreed to offset any growth in emissions, but campaigners say this does not go far enough.

Lundgren argued that easyJet was "together, all in all, doing more than any other major airline within this area. Customers increasingly expect

companies to do something about it, and it is fundamentally the right thing to do."

The airline said it had secured a relatively low price as it had signed a three-year contract for wholesale offsetting, equating to less than £3 per tonne of CO₂ - about £25m a year.

Lundgren said the 17 different projects involved were "verified to the highest standards ... audited and monitored to deliver actual offsets". The airline plans to develop its own schemes to continue offsetting after the three-year period.

EasyJet's move, however, is unlikely to assuage environmental criticism, in a year during which it has launched domestic flights between Birmingham and Edinburgh, which are linked by fast rail routes, and expanded its airline capacity by more than 10%.

The airline also said it had signed a memorandum of understanding with

the manufacturer Airbus to work in partnership to develop electric and hybrid electric planes for short-haul European flights.

Lundgren said he hoped it would be "an important step towards making electric planes a reality".

EasyJet said it would continue working with Wright Electric, a US firm that has developed a nine-seater electric plane that is expected to start flying in the coming weeks.

Lundgren said easyJet would take further measures including reducing the number of empty seats flown, although the proportion left empty on the average flight increased to 8.5 in every 100 seats last year.

EasyJet reported pre-tax profits of £427m for the year ending 30 September, in line with previous guidance but down 26% on 2018. It ascribed the drop to rising fuel prices and a tough operating environment.

'All in all, easyJet is doing more than any other major airline within this area'

Johan Lundgren
EasyJet chief executive





▲ *EasyJet's boss says it plans to develop its own offsetting schemes*

PHOTOGRAPH: DOUGLAS CARR/ALAMY

◀ *A Cambodian forest protection project, part of BA's offsets programme*

£25m

Yearly cost of the offsets deal. EasyJet has also partnered with electric plane developer Wright Electric (below)

