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Biden Transportation Department Zeros in on Aviation Emissions in Climate Push

Edward Russell • March 5, 2021

President Joseph Biden has promised a buffet of initiatives aimed at combating climate change, ranging from an expected investment in high-speed rail to an emerging focus on sustainable aviation fuel.

Climate change is a “huge priority” for the new administration, FAA Administrator Steve Dickson told the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) during a [virtual town hall](#) on Wednesday. Sustainable aviation fuel, which in most cases refers to biofuels, is a “big part of that,” he added.

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Dickson's comments come less than a week after the CEOs of the largest U.S. carriers — American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines — [urged White House officials](#) and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg to support sustainable fuels. Their aim was to garner subsidies for the emerging sector in Biden's pending \$1.9 trillion coronavirus stimulus bill.

Sustainability has come to the fore at U.S. airlines in recent months. In December, United made the audacious announcement that it would [go "100 percent green"](#) by 2050 with an investment in carbon capture and sequestration technology. The carrier has since unveiled a [deal for electric aircraft](#) with Archer Aviation, and launched a new [bus service at its Denver hub](#) that gives travelers an alternative to driving to the airport.

Not to be outdone, American and Delta separately unveiled sustainability partnerships with Deloitte during the past week. Both deals aim to reduce carbon dioxide emissions related to the consulting firm's business travel through market-based sustainable aviation fuel initiatives.

One big stumbling block for biofuels is supply. During the past decade, Alaska Airlines, United and others have unveiled biofuel commitments with ambitious goals promising thousands-of-gallons of supply within a few years. While some supplies have started flowing, none in the volume promised in those earlier deals

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Dickson acknowledged these scalability issues, saying Wednesday that sourcing sustainable supplies of biofuel was one of the biggest challenges facing the sector.

Support from the U.S. government would almost certainly be a boost — potentially a big boost — to biofuels. Similar support to the wind and solar industries in then President Barack Obama's 2009 stimulus bill is partially credited for the boom in both renewable energy sectors during the past decade.

"We are committed to working towards reducing the [aviation] sector's greenhouse gas emissions in a manner consistent with the goal of net zero emissions for our economy by 2050," Dickson said.

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Need support? Have Questions? Email Lindsay at lyb@skift.com