

Planes powered by landfill waste could help cut carbon emissions

Graeme Paton, Transport Correspondent

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The Department for Transport will spend £22 million on developing sustainable “waste-based” fuels for aircraft and lorries

GARETH FULLER/PA

Passenger planes could be powered by rubbish under a scheme to cut emissions, it was announced today.

The Department for Transport (DfT) said that £22 million would be spent on developing low-carbon “waste-based” fuels for aircraft and lorries in response to growing concern about poor air quality and environmental damage.

The government is also preparing to introduce “real world” emissions tests for cars in response to the Volkswagen scandal.

The new tests will start across Europe on Friday. Until now, vehicles have been tested on a rolling road in a laboratory, in a system that is open to manipulation, leading to fears that real-world emissions can be far higher.

The government has already said it will ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2040. The DfT said today that it was also keen to cut carbon emissions, which contribute to climate change. Aircraft and lorries powered by waste fuels could use up to 90 per cent less carbon than with fossil fuels.

Trials of sustainable jet fuel made from waste materials have been performed in Europe and North America. About 70 groups have expressed interest in bidding for the DfT funding to develop similar proposals in the UK, involving the use of landfill rubbish.

The DfT said the new fuels were “chemically very similar to conventional fuels” and could be used in existing aircraft without engine modifications.

Jesse Norman, of the DfT, said: “We are committed to cutting carbon emissions and promoting new environmentally-friendly fuels that will help us meet that goal.

“We are making funding available to innovative businesses which will lead the way in developing alternative fuels that are efficient, sustainable and clean.

“We want every new car and van in the UK to be zero emission by 2040, but we know lorries and aeroplanes will rely on more traditional fuels for years to come so we must promote environmentally-friendly alternatives.”

It is hoped the government funding will help develop five new low-carbon fuel plants by 2021.

The money is available to projects producing low-carbon waste-based fuels to be used in planes and lorries that cannot use electric power because they are too heavy.

John Strickland, an independent aviation consultant, said: “Airlines are always looking to improve their environmental credentials and improve fuel efficiency.

“This move will be welcomed but widespread adoption would still be some way off in the future.”

Separately, a vehicle emissions test will be introduced in the European Union from Friday. It is designed to stamp out cheating after VW fitted software to its diesel models to manipulate results by detecting when the vehicles were on a rolling road.

A government testing programme found last year that modern diesel cars emit six times more nitrogen oxide in the real world than in the lab.

Paul Maynard, transport minister, said: “This government has led the way in Europe pushing for on-road emissions tests, alongside a tough new laboratory test, to clean up air in our towns and cities.

“This will ensure all vehicles meet rigorous standards when driven on our roads and we are going further, tightening requirements again in 2020.”

6 comments

DC Aug 28, 2017

The government have a perverse way of showing their electorate's concern about air quality by cancelling rail electrification schemes which have already been planned at considerable expense. Out of sight and out of mind?

Gary Stapleton Aug 28, 2017

I find it incredible that for decades cars have been tested in laboratory / roller road conditions. It is obvious to anyone, with an ounce of common sense, that real world driving is far more demanding on vehicles and therefore results in greater emissions and increased fuel consumption. You don't test an aircraft in a hangar, you test it by flying across the full spectrum / envelope of the possible / likely flight conditions that aircraft will

encounter during its projected life. For decades, successive UK governments, and the EU, have abrogated their responsibilities to their publics though running inadequate car testing regimes with low pass criteria, thereby allowing the Car Industry to hoodwink populations over a car's true performance and its real level of toxic emissions.

Brexit24 Aug 28, 2017

The future of short-haul aviation is electric, not burning things.

Michael Fisher Aug 28, 2017

"Aircraft and lorries powered by waste fuels could use up to 90 per cent less carbon than with fossil fuels."

So what are they burning if not organic carbon compounds from the waste?!!

More explanation needed, I think!

The Toy maker Aug 28, 2017

The article does not mention anywhere what this fuel is likely to cost us. It sounds like another windfarm scandal of billions of taxpayers money hidden in fuel bills spent on stuff that is within 5-10 years obsolete.

The new wind farms are so much better that the older ones are almost scrap.

Mister Happy Aug 28, 2017

@The Toy maker The great majority of the cost of a wind farm is the capital cost. Running costs are pretty low. And the cost of wind technology has come down only slightly in the last 15 years.

I struggle to understand your comment, in the light of those facts.

My understanding was that for some years wind has been a mature technology. It is actually becoming a more and more expensive option in the UK as the ideal sites were used years ago, and now we have to use much more expensive ones, requiring long distant connections for example.