

Airport Carbon Accreditation – Empowering Airports to Reduce Their Emissions

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In the context of new scientific evidence on the urgency to address the Climate Emergency and rising societal and political expectations -specifically in relation to the climate footprint of aviation - the airport industry has a key role to play. While airport related emissions are estimated to represent only 2% to 5% of the global aviation emissions, airport operators are a critical interface between various aviation and non-aviation stakeholders. By actively reducing their emissions, they can act as a role model and also facilitate or even drive effective emissions management by these stakeholders. This is a challenging exercise, requiring a lot of creativity and commitment from the airport operator. Encouraging it is the purpose of *Airport Carbon Accreditation* – a voluntary carbon management programme launched by ACI EUROPE back in 2009.

Airport Carbon Accreditation assesses and recognises the efforts of airports to manage and reduce their carbon emissions according to four ascending levels of certification – ‘Mapping’, ‘Reduction’, ‘Optimisation’ and ‘Neutrality’. Throughout these levels, airports have to comply with increasing obligations, in particular by including emissions from third party stakeholders operating at the airport in their carbon management, notably airlines, ground handlers or retailers. The ultimate certification level - carbon neutrality - requires that the airport offsets those remaining CO₂ emissions under its direct control that cannot be further reduced. It is a key feature of the programme that airport operators have to first reduce their own emissions as much as possible, before being allowed to compensate the rest.

This year, the programme is celebrating its 10th anniversary. From an exploratory initiative that began with 17 of the environmentally most advanced airports in Europe in the first year (2009-2010), it has become a global industry standard for airports all over the world, with 274 accredited airports worldwide as of June 2019. These airports are located in 71 countries across all continents and welcome close to 44% of global air passenger traffic - almost every second passenger in the world is travelling through a *Carbon Accredited* airport today. They are small and large, commercial hubs and general aviation airports, situated in the biggest countries of the world and in the small island States. They are at different stages in the carbon management journey. *Airport Carbon Accreditation* provides a general framework and beacons, but the exact path is charted by each airport individually, as is the pace of its progress.

Airport Carbon Accreditation has come so far thanks to three main reasons.

First, its methodological robustness and relevance for airports came as a big advantage. *Airport Carbon Accreditation* is based on international, cross-industry standards for emissions management – translated into airport language. There are actually many airports for which *Airport Carbon Accreditation* was the starting point for developing and continuously improving their carbon management.

Second, by showing year on year quantified results in terms of emissions reductions, the programme is proving its effectiveness. In the last programme year (May 2017-May 2018), accredited airports worldwide have

demonstrated a reduction of 347,026 tonnes of CO₂, or minus 5.3 % compared to the baseline. Such reductions are typically achieved through the use of low carbon fuel or electricity for ground support equipment, renewal of vehicle fleets, efficiency improvements in lighting and heating/air conditioning systems in terminal buildings and the procurement or direct generation of electricity from renewable sources. Furthermore, 672,000 of CO₂ have been offset.

Last but not least, while *Airport Carbon Accreditation* has been designed specifically for airports and by airports, the day-to-day administration of the programme, including the decisions on certifications, is performed by an independent third party: the environmental consultancy WSP which has been supporting the programme since its inception. Furthermore, airport applications must be independently verified on a regular basis, before being submitted to the administrator; they are thus subject to a double quality control.

It is therefore not surprising that *Airport Carbon Accreditation* has won praise from the most authoritative institutions in the area of aviation and climate change, such as ICAO, the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC), the European Commission and the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

While the 10th anniversary of *Airport Carbon Accreditation* certainly offers many reasons to celebrate the programme's success, it is also the right time to reflect on what it can do more or better. Since the publication of the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C and with the imminent entry into force of the Paris Agreement, an increasing number of airports are looking to step up the ambition of their climate action, including with regard to their business partners and stakeholders. *Airport Carbon Accreditation* needs to ensure it provides the relevant guidance and recognition for this.

At the same time, the programme will have to continue engaging airports from various regions and at different stages in their carbon management journey. It is about recognising that depending on the region they are located in, airports all over the world are not equally empowered to take action against their emissions. For instance, access to sustainable alternative fuels or electricity generated from renewable sources is not equally developed in all countries. *Airport Carbon Accreditation* has to remain a tool that also accommodates the needs of these airports – similar to ICAO's principle of "No Country Left Behind". Ultimately, this is what represents the force of a truly collective industry effort.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Climate Change Mitigation: Sustainable Aviation Fuels

