

A sustainability-focused industry looks to its exciting future



Ed Bolen believes that despite challenges from the pandemic the business aviation industry has continued to make progress in moving toward a truly sustainable future

Business aviation has always been characterized by a spirit of innovation and resilience, and we've certainly seen both qualities on display throughout the past 18 months as we've continued to adapt to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Despite challenges from the pandemic, however, our industry has continued to make progress in moving toward a truly sustainable future.

Among the most significant advances we've seen of late have been in efforts to promote greater access to sustainable aviation fuels, or SAF. Partly derived from a diverse array of renewable sources, SAF holds the potential right now to reduce lifecycle carbon emissions from the aviation sector by as much as 80 percent, and work continues to improve on that impressive figure even more.

For example, fractional ownership provider NetJets, one of the largest operators of business aircraft, has committed to purchasing 100 million gallons of SAF over the next 10 years. Through this program, NetJets has reduced more than 112,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and cut more than 43 million metric tons of CO₂ through its Blue Skies initiative enabling customers to offset emissions from their flights.

Earlier this year, the NBAA-championed Sustainable Skies Act was introduced in the US Congress that would create a new, 10-year performance-based tax credit for production of SAF, capped at a \$2 per gallon credit on production of SAF demonstrating a 100% emissions reduction.

As we've seen with other tax credit programs for other alternative fuels, such as biodiesel, such a program would markedly incentivize production of SAF, significantly expanding its availability while also helping to reduce costs for the fuel for flight operations. We're further encouraged to see this measure included in upcoming budget legislation on Capitol Hill.

That said, building a sustainable business aviation sector takes far more than the use of SAF. Our industry has also long embraced such sustainable practices as developing highly-efficient airframes and powerplants; utilizing renewable, reusable and recycled products throughout their companies and flight operations; and building environmentally-responsible hangars and terminal facilities.

Indeed, many Fortune 100 companies that use business aircraft have also set aggressive targets to cut their carbon, water and waste footprints in half by 2030. Further, more have committed to offsetting 100% of emissions attributable to their business aviation flights.

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Fixed base operators (FBOs) have also embraced sustainable practices. When the need for a second hangar became apparent, Gary Jet Center (GJC) at Gary/Chicago International Airport (GYG) opted to construct the facility with Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification from the US Green Building Council in mind, through such measures as a refrigerant-free ventilation system, LED lighting and exterior surfaces and hangar flooring that are moulded in colour and require no additional paint or sealant to finish.

These and other sustainable practices are key to further reducing business aviation's already low carbon footprint, which comprise just 0.04% of global man-made carbon emissions. But our industry has embraced the desire to do even better.

Sustainability is key to our industry's future in other ways, as well, as seen through growing interest and investment by industry stakeholders in the emerging advanced air mobility (AAM) industry. AAM aircraft now in development are powered largely by all-electric or hybrid-electric propulsion systems that offer the promise of drastically reduced CO₂ and noise emissions over conventional rotorcraft.

AAM can operate and complete trips in close proximity to where they begin, particularly in dense urban environments, many of which currently lack efficient transportation options. They also hold tremendous potential for business aviation, offering new options for short- to medium-range trips that, in addition to offering greater convenience, are also environmentally sensible and emissions-free.

Business aviation's environmental focus to be showcased at NBAA-BACE

Sustainability will also be front-and-centre throughout NBAA's upcoming Business Aviation Convention & Exhibition, taking place October 12-14 in the brand new, 600,000 sq. ft. West Hall of the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas, NV.

Held in conjunction with the show, the second annual Business Aviation Sustainability Summit will spotlight the benefits of SAF and other methods by which business aviation flight operations may reduce their carbon footprint. NBAA-BACE will also feature a new AAM Zone showcasing hybrid- and electric-powered, vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) vehicles from both new and familiar names across business aviation.

An impressive variety of business aircraft of all sizes and for all missions, from OEMs including Airbus, Daher, Dassault and Textron Aviation, will be showcased at the show's expansive Outdoor Aircraft Display at nearby Henderson Executive Airport (HND).

Also at HND will be the new NBAA Owner/Single-Pilot Operator Pavilion, where single-pilot operators to connect with their peers and engage with useful, relevant content designed specifically for this key part of the industry.

These exciting exhibits and presentations are in addition to the dynamic roster of featured presenters, education sessions and product displays that are hallmarks of NBAA's annual convention. For those unable to travel to Las Vegas, a full program of valuable educational content will be available for streaming by at-home attendees.

More than two dozen education sessions taking place at NBAA-BACE will be recorded and made available on NBAA's online Learning Management System within 24 hours following the in-person presentation, in addition to several on-demand-only sessions.

Additional content, and other events yet to be announced, will also be made available online. NBAA will also expand its online networking platform to allow business aviation professionals attending the show from their home or office to interact with their peers in real-time video and audio.

Whether you attend in-person or digitally, I expect the 2021 edition of NBAA-BACE to be nothing short of a transformational event highlighting our industry's resilience against adversity, its continued path toward innovation and our embrace of a truly exciting, and sustainable, future. ■

Ed Bolen is President and CEO the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA)