



Delta Is Going Carbon Neutral In 10 Years— Should Other Airlines Follow?

by **Laura Ash** · February 16, 2020 · 5 comments · 4 minute read

Delta Air Lines' carbon footprint is one of the biggest in the world, according to its figures from 2018. However, earlier this week the airline committed US\$1 billion towards the environment. It plans to heavily invest in a strategy that will see it becoming carbon-neutral by 2030. Its big promise has been met largely with praise. So should other airlines follow?



Will other airlines be inspired by Delta's carbon-neutral promise? Photo: Getty Images

Becoming a world first

Delta Air Lines has set its hopes on becoming the world's first carbon-neutral airline with the help of a 10-figure cash injection that will see it slash carbon emissions across its entire business. The Atlanta-based airline, one of the major carriers in the US, will take the first step on this monumental climate-salvaging journey in just one month's time.

Delta's promises of "clean air travel technologies, accelerating the reduction of carbon emissions and waste, and establishing new projects to mitigate the balance of emissions" are certainly admirable. But not only that. With irreversible climate change being a potential reality within the next 10 years, Delta's commitment is essential. In fact, it seems as though many other airlines should also be doing the same. If our house really is on fire, how much more time is there to waste when the world as we know it could be at stake?



Is Delta paving the way by doing more than just carbon offsetting? Photo: Delta

That said, many airlines are doing their part for the climate. Or so they say. The rise of airlines committing themselves to carbon-offsetting is phenomenal. From [Etihad](#) to JetBlue, to [British Airways](#) and easyJet, many of our airlines want to be doing their bit. Except not all of them are. Rather than doing *their* bit airlines are simply doing *a* bit. Carbon offsetting isn't really a remedy. It's a weak promise in a time of potential global catastrophe. Airlines need to ask themselves: are we doing enough?

Why do Delta's actions matter?

Unlike some other airlines, what Delta is doing is different. It wants to focus not only on developing more sustainable aviation alternatives such as jet fuel and modernization of its fleet, but it also wants to directly impact the environment. Part of its carbon removal strategy is investigating how forestry and soil capture can effectively remove CO₂ from the atmosphere and, effectively, reverse climate change.



Delta's commitment is good for the future of its business. Photo: [Chris via Flickr](#)

That said, why should Delta only operate within its scope? Airlines have access to capital which they can choose to invest how they desire. Ultimately, Delta's decision to invest more heavily in the environment is an important one not only for society but for business. If it can do more than simply offset its carbon emissions, it can develop ways to keep its passengers flying for longer in the future without significant damage to the climate. This certainly seems like a profitable goal. For that reason, Delta is not alone.

More airlines should go carbon neutral

Whilst its financial promise is newsworthy, many other airlines began developing their carbon neutral strategy long before Delta. If all goes to plan, [HiFly will likely be the first airline to become carbon neutral](#). It's looking at a projection date of 2021 and similar to Delta it will also be investing in scientific research into our environment. It's working on ocean renewal and tapping into the regeneration of ocean dead zones.

Even if Delta Air Lines is beaten to the post by HiFly, its intentions are still exemplary. Unlike HiFly, it's one of the largest carbon emitters in the aviation industry. Its ability to cull its carbon footprint will have significant repercussions. That's not to say that smaller airlines should not go carbon neutral, but more that if Delta can, others can too.

Of course, going carbon neutral does not only guarantee that airlines will be able to operate in the future. It also has some short-term benefits too. Passengers are now more conscious of the [impact of the environment](#) when they fly. So far, the traction of the [flight shaming movement](#) has given substantial evidence to show that passengers do care about their environmental impact. For that reason, an airline committed to carbon neutrality looks attractive.

It's also time for airlines to admit that carbon offsetting is not enough. Climate change is a serious issue that needs to be treated as such.



The biofuel used by KLM can use existing fuel infrastructure. Photo: KLM

What happens if airlines don't follow?

On the surface, there are very few arguments against airlines turning to carbon-neutral operations. With so few years left in the carbon budget, it makes sense to make a change and make it now. That said, the financial capacity of an airline could be one hindrance to making the leap into eco-friendly waters.

Delta's \$1 billion is not a modest sum. For some airlines, that amount of money might not be attainable right now. However, it is so important that airlines reevaluate what they can do. Perhaps the decision comes with investing in more green aircraft or steadily making ground operations carbon-neutral. Whilst the climate crisis demands swiftness, something at a slow pace is much better than nothing.

If airlines don't follow Delta's lead, a drastic shakeup of the aviation industry will no doubt be imminent. It is impossible for airlines to continue burying their heads in the sand or doing the bare minimum when so much is at stake.

Do you agree? Let us know your thoughts in the comments.