

Hydrogen and Sustainable Aviation

Until recently, fossil-based liquid fuel has been the primary energy source and carrier for powering flight. Aviation is transitioning to renewable energy sources to reduce life cycle CO₂ emissions. Hydrogen is an energy carrier that when produced with renewable energy sources can greatly improve production of drop-in sustainable aviation fuels and has the potential to evolve into a low carbon impact fuel for use with propulsion, flight and infrastructure technologies of the future.

Boeing's hydrogen demonstration projects

Boeing has conducted six demonstration projects and has extensive experience using hydrogen as a fuel for launch vehicle and space applications. We continue to study and test the potential of this energy source.

2008:

Boeing's Fuel Cell Demonstrator, a two-seat Dimona, flew three flights in Spain—representing the first piloted airplane in history to use power generated solely by hydrogen fuel cells.

2012:

Our ecoDemonstrator program tested similar regenerative fuel cell technology for onboard auxiliary power applications on a Next-Generation 737-800.

2012:

Boeing's Phantom Eye high-altitude and long-endurance uncrewed aircraft flew several flights in California powered by liquid hydrogen.



2015:

A second project in Spain completed over 100 hydrogen flights on an uncrewed flight demonstrator.

2020:

Insitu completed the first flight of their ScanEagle3 unmanned aerial vehicle powered by an all-electric, hydrogen fueled, proton exchange membrane (PEM) fuel cell.

2021:

A new type of composite cryogenic fuel tank was designed and manufactured by Boeing, signifying this lightweight storage technology is mature, ready and safe for use in aerospace vehicles.

Challenges and opportunities

- **Producing green hydrogen for sustainable aviation fuels** requires abundant renewable energy to ensure emissions reductions from flying are not negated during the production portion of the fuel's life cycle.
- **The larger fuel volume** required to store liquid hydrogen means these aircraft will have shorter range capability than SAF for any given size of airplane.
- **All-new distribution, storage and fueling infrastructure** for airports around the world must be established for use of hydrogen-fueled airplanes.



What's Next?

Given the urgent need for emissions reductions, our near-term emphasis is on implementation of drop-in sustainable aviation fuels (SAF). Our current and future investments in green hydrogen for aviation will enable the next generation of low-impact, drop-in SAF production as well as future flight and propulsion concepts for zero carbon emissions.

Hydrogen and Sustainable Aviation

Green hydrogen for propulsion requires new design studies, safe certification approaches, scaling, and platform developments coupled with new system-wide ground and network infrastructure. For these reasons, it will play a role in longer-term aviation products. In the nearer-term, application of drop-in sustainable aviation fuels and maturation of electrification technologies will be critical for reducing total life cycle emissions.

Renewable energy solutions evolution

Now and tomorrow

2030

2040 and beyond



Urban

1–8 passengers
Range up to 100 nm

Battery and Fuel Cell

Low-carbon, electric-powered urban air mobility vehicles such as those powered by batteries or hydrogen fuel cells offer potential to reduce emissions and accelerate battery technology development.

Battery performance currently limits passenger and range capability.

Battery and Fuel Cell

Small electrified regional and sub-regional aircraft could be flying in this decade as battery capability improves.

Life cycle CO₂ reduction will depend on renewable energy to charge batteries or create hydrogen.

Hydrogen Fuel Cell

Fuel-cell powered air vehicles could start to penetrate the market in the regional segment.

Abundant renewable energy and a widespread hydrogen economy will be required.



Sub-regional

9–19 passengers
Range up to 500 nm

Sustainable Aviation Fuels

Outside of operational efficiencies, drop-in SAF is the only available solution to reduce emissions from today's airliners and those that will be built in the coming decades.

Currently, drop-in SAF is less than 1% of aviation fuel and high in cost. Innovation, supportive policies and public-private partnerships are crucial to help catalyze commercial-scale production and use.

Hydrogen for SAF

Hydrogen is required to produce almost all SAF—and must be produced and scaled sustainably to improve life cycle emissions reductions.

Over 96% of hydrogen produced today comes from fossil fuels—mostly natural gas.

Hydrogen Combustion

Aircraft powered by turbine engines using liquid hydrogen fuel are potentially feasible for regional, short-haul and long-haul aircraft and larger, such as in Boeing's core markets.

Liquid hydrogen requires over four times the volume of today's jet fuel for the same given energy and must be cooled to -253°C.



Regional

20–80 passengers
Range up to 1,000 nm



Short and Long haul

Over 80 passengers
Range over 1,000 nm