

Gulliver

Business travel



Be the first to comment

Print

E-mail

Permalink

Reprints & permissions

Previous | Next | Latest Gulliver

All latest updates

Biofuels

Fry, fry away

Sep 23rd 2014, 15:15 by B.R.



LATER today, Finnair is planning to fly an Airbus A330 from Helsinki to New York partly powered by recycled cooking oil. It is an interesting concept. The airline will not disclose the ratio of fossil fuel to cooking oil it has used until the plane touches down, but to be certified jet fuel must contain at least 50% of the traditional, dirty type.

Some of the cooking oil that will be used is waste from restaurants. Before it is pumped into a plane, it has to be filtered to remove any impurities (like stray chicken nuggets, presumably), and then refined. At which point, it becomes chemically almost identical to the fossil variety, and can just be "dropped in" to the mix, according to Finnair. Which also means that aircraft engines do not need to be modified to run on the mixture.

Nonetheless, it could be a while before commercial planes are powered by biofuel (there will be no passengers aboard today's flight). It is still too expensive to collect and refine—it currently costs perhaps twice as much to produce as traditional fuel. For that proposition to change, the cost of carbon would have to rise significantly, either through normal market pricing (one estimate suggests that the oil price would have to reach \$168 a barrel before jet-biofuel could compete) or regulation.

About Gulliver

Our correspondents inform and entertain business travellers with news and views to help them make the most of life on the road

Follow @EconBizTravel 22.6K followers

RSS feed

Advertisement

sas | THE POWER TO KNOW.
Analytics
 Big Data and Hadoop for those who don't speak geek.
[Read the paper](#)

Finnair reckons that switching to a more sustainable fuel source would reduce net CO2 emissions by 50-80%. But more widespread use of biofuels would not be without controversy. Farmland used to grow fuel crops, some think, means less food production or more deforestation, though the calculations are far from straightforward. Indeed, the first ever biofuel flight by a commercial aircraft was by Virgin Atlantic in 2008. It added 20% coconut and nut oil to one of the engines of a 747 flown between London and Amsterdam, something that would be more likely to raise environmental eyebrows today. Which is why recycled cooking oil is so appealing. Finnair hopes to set up a "biofuel hub" at Helsinki Airport, using fuel "that neither compete[s] with food production nor damage[s] biodiversity".

The other thing that might alter the proposition, of course, would be if customers were prepared to pay more for a flight powered by old chip fat. Experience suggests this is pretty unlikely. Indeed, all the signs are that we are becoming ever more seduced by low fares. Perhaps a less ambitious goal would be to convince people that eating twice as many chips, and thus flooding the market with recyclable oil, meant doing one's bit for sustainability. The campaign starts here.

<< Previous
Next >>

Airline food: Bring a picnic

Like 1
 Tweet 1
 reddit
 Share 7
 +1 0

Be the first to comment

Doing business in

Audio

<

00:00
10:19

>

Doing business
in Singapore

Doing business
in Hong Kong

Recent Activity

Why does liberal Iceland want to ban online pornography?

1,057 people recommend this.

Pricing sunshine

955 people recommend this.

Tantrums and tiaras

3 people recommend this.

Difference Engine: Digital disillusion

423 people recommend this.

A heavy load

829 people recommend this.

Facebook social plugin

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| <div style="background-color: #e67e22; color: white; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold; text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">The Economist</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="margin-bottom: 5px;">Contact us <li style="margin-bottom: 5px;">Help <li style="margin-bottom: 5px;">My account <li style="margin-bottom: 5px;">Subscribe <li style="margin-bottom: 5px;">Print edition <li style="margin-bottom: 5px;">Digital editions <li style="margin-bottom: 5px;">Events <li style="margin-bottom: 5px;">Jobs.Economist.com <li style="margin-bottom: 5px;">Timekeeper saved articles | <p>Sections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> United States Britain Europe China Asia Americas Middle East & Africa Business & finance Economics Markets & data Science & technology Culture Multimedia library <p>Debate and discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Economist debates What the world thinks Letters to the editor The Economist Quiz | <p>Blogs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Americas view Analects Babbage Banyan Baobab Blighty Buttonwood's notebook Charlemagne Democracy in America Eastern approaches Erasmus Feast and famine Free exchange Game theory Graphic detail Gulliver Newsbook Pomegranate Prospero The Economist explains | <p>Research and insights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topics Economics A-Z Special reports Style guide The World in 2014 Which MBA? The Economist GMAT Tutor Reprints and permissions <p>The Economist Group »</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Economist Intelligence Unit The Economist Intelligence Unit Store The Economist Corporate Network Ideas People Media Intelligent Life Roll Call CQ EuroFinance The Economist Store <p style="font-weight: bold; color: white; margin-top: 10px;">View complete site index »</p> |
|---|--|---|--|