

Touchstar system fuels increased efficiency and cost savings at afs

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Refuelling the hundreds of commercial aircraft that pass through Europe's busiest airport is a complex and time-critical operation. It is not difficult to imagine how a couple of errors or a misjudged delivery could lead to a domino effect of ever increasing delays and a headache for those charged with keeping the flights on schedule.

But it is a job that has to be done, without delay and with accurate data collection. Many aircraft taking off from Heathrow Airport will have been refuelled by Aviation Fuel Services (AFS). In the past, the administration of refuelling an aircraft was painstaking and inefficient. The refuelling tanker would drive to the plane, refuel, fill in forms and get a pilot's signature before driving back to the fuel depot to reload and hand the documents to the administration staff, who would have to process the paperwork manually and quickly if they were to keep on top of the day's schedules. In driving rain or at the peak of the holiday season, this was hardly the best way to go about a highly critical operation.

It became necessary to have several tankers on standby to provide backup during busy periods. The solution to their problems came courtesy of TouchStar. Every stage of the refuelling process was touched when we provided AFS with our AvStar system and each tanker was allocated a TouchPC Eagle. First, there is the refuelling itself. The driver need not write down any delivery figures, as the cradled Eagle in the cabin captures all the delivery data direct from the tanker's EMH-500 fuel meter.

What is more, the whole process is completed by following a list of actions so that nothing is omitted, vastly improving safety. Once the delivery is made,

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the Eagle updates its delivery record and is ready to be signed off by the pilot. This can be done simply by signing on the touchscreen which provides an authoritative proof of delivery. It is at the next stage where the AvStar system comes into its own. The driver instead of driving back to the depot pushes the screen and the delivery ticket is sent digitally over the GPRS network.

The central control centre can then allocate a new job to the tanker in the same way. The advantage here is clear. Instead of travelling all the way back to the depot, the tanker can go straight to the next thirsty jet and refuel in a fraction of the time. And the advantages are not restricted to the refuelling process. The whole accounting and administration trail is made quicker and more accurate by the distribution of digital data. AFS reported huge reductions in paperwork as soon as the system went live.

Thanks to AvStar, refuelling Heathrow's aircraft has become an efficient, safe and accurate process. Perhaps John Luiting, AFS's Operations Director, puts it best: " For every minute a plane sits on the tarmac, money is wasted. The TouchPC system has helped get planes into the air a lot quicker."