

# March blip in e-AWB usage elicits mixed response

**T**HE progress of electronic air waybills (e-AWB) slowed unexpectedly in March, sparking a mixed response from the software industry as to whether the development is a major concern.

The latest figures from IATA show that in March e-AWB penetration slipped slightly to 37.1% compared with 37.5% in February.

At the current rate, it could take a decade or more before electronic documentation becomes anything like the norm for international airfreight shipments.

However, logistics software firm Descartes Systems Group director of logistics execution solutions Jim Alemany did not think that the decline was too much to worry about.

Alemany was speaking to *Air Cargo News* as he returned from two IATA conferences on e-AWB usage, in Montreal and Toronto in Canada, and said that the number of attendees had almost doubled compared with the last time the events were held.

He also pointed out that the second round of airports adopting IATA's e-AWB 360 programme had only started in March.

The 360 programme requires that the

majority of operating airlines and ground handling agents at an airport offer e-AWB as the preferred means to all destinations and that they adopt a single process service and a standard operating procedure (SOP).

In total, nine airports are now part of the programme, with a further 12 set to join by the end of the year.

"Since the roll out [of the 360 programme] in March the numbers have jumped quite significantly," Alemany said.

"The interest is there and I think it's the right interest. The smaller and medium-sized forwarders with one or two offices are harder to convince, but the alignment is getting there.

"The initiative is about aligning everyone locally. There is an SOP that everyone is aware of, so the forwarders know what happens when they send an e-AWB because trust is a hard thing.

"They think if I don't send the paper, I can't be guaranteed the shipment can get on the plane. You will see a lot of kick-on now the infrastructure is in place in terms of the 360 programme."

He added that there was still a lot of work to be done to convince forwarders that by using an e-AWB efficiencies could be gained.

There was also the fact that beyond the e-AWB, compliance authorities were increasingly demanding electronic documentation which would help encourage forwarders to work more electronically.

Certain airlines were also helping by charging forwarders to convert paper documents into e-AWB.

In contrast, Nicholas Xenocostas, the new vice-president global sales and marketing at Champ Cargosystems, thinks that more needs to be done to encourage the use of e-AWB.

"Maybe we're at that point in time when we need to stop and ask why things are not working," said Xenocostas.

"Our systems are ready; it's not a technical issue. It's a question of getting the industry to collaborate, of motivation.

"Perhaps we do need to proactively make things happen. There are a lot of good initiatives, but maybe it is time to take stock of why we don't have the level of penetration

we would like. We need to bring key stakeholders to the industry, including the technology providers."

Champ would be more than happy to lend its experience in this respect, Xenocostas added.

It is also important to ensure that all players in the air cargo chain are involved. Early attempts to foster electronic airfreight often omitted whole groups of key players, such as the handlers, he pointed out.

The other approach to pushing up e-AWB use would be to force it through by means of some legislation, but this could be "a sledgehammer to crack a nut", Xenocostas admitted.

Margins in the industry may be an inhibiting issue, but the prize of further automation is very great, said Xenocostas: "If you can make processes more efficient, people will be able to ship more quickly and for less cost – and that could encourage people to use airfreight more." ■



## Heathrow sets out concessions to help bid for third runway

Heathrow Airport Ltd (HAL) has laid out new environmental measures that it hopes will allow the UK government to give the go-ahead for a third runway at the nation's busiest gateway.

One key commitment from the airport operator is to increase the current night-time curfew of five hours to six and a half hours (to extend between 2300 and 0530).

Other promises include the creation of a legally enforceable 'noise envelope' around the third runway and an independent aviation 'noise authority' with statutory powers.

It will also create an ultra-low emissions zone for airport vehicles by 2025 and offer more than £1bn on community compensation for local people.

HAL will also officially rule out the creation of a fourth runway at the gateway.

HAL's package followed quickly after a UK Parliamentary transport committee backed the expansion of Heathrow Airport and warned that any further delays in making a decision could result in lost economic growth.

The committee supported expansion at

Heathrow, following on from the Airports Commission's backing of the plan last July.

The chair of the committee, Louise Ellman MP, said: "Real progress cannot begin until the location is declared. Work on environmental issues can run in parallel with other pre-construction work.

"The growth of large hubs in the Middle and Far East and North America threatens our position as a hub of international aviation. The UK's connectivity with the world's emerging markets is a major concern.

"The months ticking by constitute time

wasted for the UK's economic prosperity."

Gatwick Airport, whose rival proposal is for a second runway, rebutted suggestions that Heathrow represents the only serious option for airport capacity expansion in the south east of England.

Chief executive Stewart Wingate said that Gatwick's expansion will provide the same degree of growth and the same benefits for UK plc without "the noise impact of Heathrow, without breaking air quality limits, at half the cost and with no public subsidy". ■



## Italy's Parma to become new Etihad transit cargo hub

ETIHAD Airways has signed a deal to create a new transit hub at Parma Giuseppe Verdi Airport to receive cargo for forwarding to Milan Malpensa.

The new hub, due to open in July, will feed traffic to and from flights operated by Etihad Airways with its equity partner, Alitalia, which currently offers bellyhold capacity on 38 weekly flights between Italy and the UAE.

These include six weekly freighter services

from Milan, including a twice weekly service to Bogotá and the four times a week service to Abu Dhabi, which offer a combined capacity of 800 tonnes per week.

Parma airport itself currently handles only a handful of flights, including passenger services to Catania on Sicily and the offshore island of Lampedusa operated by MistralAir, the airline arm of the Italian postal group. It is however in the centre of one of the largest

exporting regions in Italy for high value goods, midway between Bologna and Milan.

Etihad Cargo's vice president, David Kerr, said: "We have already strengthened our freighter capacity out of Milan in the last few weeks, having placed a new Boeing 777 freighter on the Milan-Bogotá sector, so the opportunity to use Parma gives us a further chance to strengthen our cargo services from Europe." ■

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