

AirBaltic

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Credits: airBaltic

[airBaltic](#) is a Latvian-based airline that embraces the best of both worlds- traditional network airlines and ultra-low-cost carriers. In this case, geography is essential. Using Riga, the capital of Latvia, as their main hub, they connect the three Baltic countries with a total of 100 destinations through a Hub & Spoke model. In 2020, airBaltic celebrated its 25th anniversary with a fleet consisting of a single aircraft type, the emerging Airbus A220, the first airliner of its class featuring EGNOS & LPV capabilities as standard.

airBaltic is known worldwide for its innovation and punctuality. For several years, the airline has been recognised by OAG as the most punctual carrier in the world. Its fleet is one of the most modern and environmentally friendly in Europe and includes a full business class service and affordable economy class tickets. The A220 is very efficient for the type of routes flown and customers enjoy a wider seat width at 18.5 inches.

When airBaltic first ordered the A220s in 2012, it was called the Bombardier C-Series, a clean-sheet design competing with offerings from market leaders Airbus A320 and Boeing B737. But airBaltic saw the potential of the longer-range A220-300 variant and became its global launch customer. EGNOS & LPV capabilities were part of the decision-making process because airBaltic had already planned LPV for the Dash-8 Q400.

airBaltic's initial agreement with Bombardier was for ten aircraft, but even before entry into service, the order had increased to 30 aircraft. The A220 quickly demonstrated an excellent operational and customer experience, saving fuel and exceeding the company's expectations. They received such positive feedback from their pilots, their technical staff, and their passengers, for instance, about the spacious and quiet cabin with superior interiors that, in 2018, airBaltic presented a new business strategy based on a unique fleet around the A220. As a result, they signed a new agreement with Airbus for another 20 planes, now rebranded as A220, plus 30 options.

EGNOS Bulletin asked airBaltic how it managed to get the A220s in the air so soon after purchasing them and turning around its fleet so quickly. airBaltic responded: "We had a very well-defined strategy. We decided to go for an all A220s fleet because it makes things easier for pilots, mechanics, crew training and, in addition to having important operational advantages, the customer response was amazing. The A220 was the most efficient and convenient plane for us to achieve the planned growth to double their passengers from 2019 to 2025. Having a single fleet makes it easier to introduce new fuel-saving initiatives too."

EGNOS is instrumental in fulfilling airBaltic's strategy, as it needs SBAS and LPV approaches to meet its responsibility of being a "HUB", as the shorter routes are under a one-hour flight time to transport the passengers between the Baltic countries efficiently. It needs to increase availability, and EGNOS and LPV reduce the chances of not getting to the destination, "come rain or shine". airBaltic's Chief Operating Officer –COO-, is also a Captain and knows it well: he flew the first A220 from Montreal to Riga.

On the first implementation of EGNOS LPV in airBaltic, COO Pauls Cālītis: "As an innovative company, airBaltic is always striving to increase its efficiency and benefit from the most modern technology available. We are proud to have successfully implemented this modernisation programme with the cooperation of the EU and the EU Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA) co-financing and having paved the way for other European airlines to follow in our footsteps."

During the early days of COVID, an airBaltic A220-300 made a 6-hour and 35-minute flight from Ürümqi Diwopu International Airport in China to Riga, carrying one million face masks and respirators. This was one of the longest flights for airBaltic and, since then, several cargo flights have been airBaltic's contribution as part of the effort to combat the COVID pandemic to this very day. In fact, this pandemic has shown the resilience of the A220, being one of the least-impacted aircraft both for operators, who kept more of them in service during the worst of times and are flying most of them now, and for the manufacturer, who, unparalleled, did not cut production but even increased it. airBaltic has a strict commitment to reducing its environmental impact, and the A220 is an essential part of that strategy. The A220 was chosen in the first place also based on the reduction of emissions. According to an internal comparison with previously operated fleets, the A220 offers a 19% reduction in fuel & CO2 per seat compared to the Q400 and a 24% reduction per seat compared to the B737CL aircraft on similar routes with the same load factor. The company also benefits from the A220's EGNOS/LPV capabilities by training flight crews to use them to save more fuel and reduce CO2 as much as possible.

In fact, it is working to improve digitalisation with initiatives such as digital passenger lists instead of paper ones. In 2020, sustainable aviation fuel accounted for 0.6% of the total amount used by the company. Constantly looking for new improvements is a steady job, because all things, even the smallest, add up and contribute to the final goal. EGNOS is a good example, as it contributes new possibilities for saving fuel and CO2. Today, 55% of airBaltic's destinations have LPV procedures in place, so the opportunities are only improving.