

Dubai airport tests self-driving baggage tractors

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Dhaka: Dubai World Central (Al Maktoum International Airport) is pioneering automation with dnata's introduction of 6 electric self-driving baggage tractors, marking a significant advancement in airport ground handling operations.

As part of a USD 1.6 million investment, dnata has deployed EZTow tractors, developed by TractEasy, capable of towing up to four baggage containers at speeds of 15 km/h along pre-defined routes.

The fleet currently operates at Level 3 autonomy—requiring minimal human oversight—and is expected to upgrade to full Level 4 autonomy with fully autonomous capabilities in controlled environments by early 2026.

Ground handling is among the most labor- and time-intensive airport activities. By adopting autonomous electric ground support equipment

(GSE), dnata aims to enhance efficiency and safety while reducing reliance on manual operations.

The rollout at Dubai World Central is a critical step toward broader global deployment across dnata's extensive network.

Robert Powell, VP UAE and Global GSE Strategy at dnata Technical Services, emphasized the importance of this initiative as a model for global adoption.

"We are working closely with airport partners and regulators to refine operating models and establish regulatory frameworks for autonomous airport vehicles," he said.

The introduction of autonomous tractors also addresses workforce concerns, with staff previously operating these vehicles being reassigned to more complex, value-added roles. Automation is expected to reduce human error and enhance safety on the ramp.

Jaffar Dawood, Divisional SVP for UAE Airport Operations at dnata, described the deployment as a milestone for the aviation industry: "Moving autonomous vehicles beyond trial phases into daily operations is a significant achievement."

The project is a collaborative effort between dnata, TractEasy, Dubai Airports, and the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), aiming to pioneer regulatory standards for autonomous ground vehicle operations—an area still largely undefined worldwide.

As global travel recovers, dnata sees automation as key to building smarter, safer, and more resilient airport infrastructure.

Rich Reno, CEO of TractEasy, added, "We are proud to partner with dnata to lead the way in autonomous ground support equipment innovation."

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