Power at Truck Stops? Braun Express says Bring It!



Stephen Normandin, Director of Strategic Initiatives at Braun's Express.

ith a distribution network in New England and the Northeast, and a terminal in Dalton, Ga., to consolidate shipments from local carpet mills, long-haul drivers for Braun's Express find Virginia to be a logical and convenient place to spend their 10-hour breaks.

What would make Virginia even more convenient for Braun drivers, says Stephen Normandin, the company's director of strategic initiatives, is the availability of Truck Stop Electrification (TSE) to cut down on truck idling.

Braun's Express is a privately owned freight trucking company providing LTL service in a territory stretching from Virginia to Maine. Founded in the 1930s, Braun's now operates 120 power units and 300 trailers, with four terminals in the Northeast and one in Georgia.

One of the company's specializations is complete supply-chain management for carpeting and flooring products. Braun's picks up products from carpet mills, consolidates them at its Dalton, Ga., facility and sends them north for delivery.

This schedule makes Virginia a natural resting point, where it often gets hot in the summer, necessitating air conditioning. Normandin says all of the company's long-haul power units are equipped with battery-powered APUs for running heaters and air conditioning. Normandin says Braun's chose battery APUs over diesel-powered units because of the reduced maintenance and restrictions on diesel APUs due to anti-idling and emissions rules. He also believes improvements in battery technology will make battery-powered HVAC systems a mainstream product.

"I think it's the future," he says.
"But what we'd like to see is the
battery-powered system working
in concert with AC-power at truck

stops. Then you have the best of both worlds...an onboard system that can work solo on battery power, or one that can be tied into the grid. Once on shore power, AC-power runs the entire unit, plus recharges our batteries. So, it's good for the batteries' health, plus our guys get full HVAC comfort and all the conveniences of AC power to run their laptops, microwaves and TVs.

"That's why I'm interested in the broad deployment of shore power technology," he continues. "All of our long-haul power units are equipped with shore power connections, and they're plugged in when they're at our terminals. But so far the technology isn't available in Virginia where we spend a lot of truck-stop time.

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them to use the system for the full 10 hours and not rely on battery power, or have to idle if the batteries wear down. We'd love it if we could offer them that option in Virginia, Georgia, and Massachusetts – everywhere they take their break."

When not idling, Normandin says

they save as much as \$45 a night. "From tracking fuel-consumption data, we know we save a huge amount of fuel. Complementing the APUs with shore power would get these systems working to their full potential."

Drivers are aware of the potential gains from having an alternative

to idling because they have a direct stake in cutting fuel consumption. "We post rankings of all of our drivers by miles per gallon," Normandin says. "One driver told me, 'I want to be at the top of that list, but sometimes my APU doesn't last and then I have to override the system and it's dropping me down on my ranking.'

"We want to save the money but we want to keep the drivers happy," Normandin says. "Having shore power available on the road will help us accomplish both of those goals."

Such words are music to the ears of Alan Bates, vice president of marketing for Shorepower Technologies, a company that is deploying power pedestals at truck stops around the country. By making shore power available and easy to use, and building awareness of the technology with drivers, fleet operators and truck stops, the company is accelerating the arrival of the day when a shore power connection is as standard a part of a truck driver's day as a dieselfuel pump.

"It's a vision that is very clear and do-able," says Bates, whose company is in the midst of installing TSE at 50 truck stops throughout the country as part of a government grant. "AC-power is used in all modes of transportation for engine-off idle reduction – from RV's to boats and yachts to aircraft. When they arrive at their layovers, they plug in and turn off and enjoy the benefits of electricity. One day we'll ask, why did it take the trucking industry so long?"



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