

At Paris-Charles De Gaulle Airport, Air France-KLM is using EPC Gen 2 tags to track large containers for shipping passenger luggage.

By Jonathan Collins

Aug. 18, 2006—Just as Air France-KLM starts an early project to examine the potential for baggage tagging within its operations, the company is undertaking another RFID project, testing RFID-tagged unit load devices (ULDs)—large containers that are filled with baggage and cargo and loaded onto planes.

Building on an initial technology test that proved successful, Air France will start a ULD RFID tracking pilot next week that is set to run to the end of the year. The carrier will apply RFID labels made by French RFID specialist [IER](#) and embedded with passive UHF EPC Gen 2 inlays from [Avery Dennison](#) to as many as 100 of its fleet of more than 6,000 ULDs in use at Paris-Charles De Gaulle Airport. If the project proves successful, Air France-KLM says it will tag the entire fleet.

The company hopes the technology will improve not only its ability to track its ULDs around the airport, but also its management of the loading and unloading processes.

"Although there is an asset-protection aspect to using RFID, tracking is the main focus, as it is important for us to know the time taken to load, unload and sort ULDs," says Franck Lucas, track-and-trace and RFID project manager at Air France-KLM. "If we can understand better how they are used, we can improve those processes."

Currently, the carrier's ground staff use handheld scanners to read bar-code labels attached to the sides of the ULDs. Adding RFID to the ULDs, says Air France, will enable the company to improve its tracking of the containers.

"Even though we would pay more for RFID tags [than for bar code labels], we can use RFID to add more read points and get more reliable data," says Lucas.

Air France has already fitted the door of one short connection sorter building with an RFID interrogator to automatically read tagged ULDs being unloaded. Air France says it will equip additional tracking points during the pilot. The RFID-tagged ULDs will also be part of the pool that will be used to transport luggage being RFID-tagged for the company's ongoing baggage-tagging project (see [Air France-KLM Embarks on RFID Luggage-Tag Trial](#)).