

US Department of Transportation Announces Virginia Wins Bid to Participate in Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration Pilot Program

May 9, 2018 - The United States Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration have announced Virginia's selection as a participant in the Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration Pilot Program. The Program helps tackle the most significant challenges to integrating drones into the national airspace to reduce risks to public safety and security.

Virginia's successful bid for a spot in the pilot is the latest evidence of the state's dominance in a growing field.

It's also good news for the commonwealth's residents, who will have a strong voice in the conversations unfolding around drones and their benefits.

Through the program, the Virginia team will seek expedited flight permissions from the Federal Aviation Administration to perform some of the most complex flight testing ever attempted in the U.S.

"I have been happy to work closely with Virginia Tech and the Mid-Atlantic Aviation Partnership for several years now in promoting the safe use and development of drones in Virginia," said Sen. Mark Warner, who supported the state's application.

"Today's award is recognition that this team has assembled some of the strongest expertise in the nation and has put forward a proposal that will prove critical to shared efforts to safely integrate drones into our communities and airspace. I congratulate the team for winning this slot, and thank Secretary Chao (U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao) and the FAA for giving us the opportunity to continue Virginia's leadership in this field," Warner said.

Over the next three years, the team will explore applications of drone technology that stand to offer Virginians significant benefits, including package delivery, emergency management, and infrastructure inspection.

The pilot will also focus on gathering feedback from the communities where testing takes place about their experiences with the program, so that technology and regulations can continue to serve the needs of the public as they evolve.

Virginia's successful bid was led by the state's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Investment Authority and the Center for Innovative Technology. The Virginia Autonomous Systems Center of Excellence, the Virginia Department of Aviation, the Virginia Commercial Spaceflight Authority, the Virginia Department of State Police, the Virginia Department of Transportation, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, and Virginia Tech round out the list of state organizations involved.

The state's proposal was bolstered by support from a bipartisan coalition, including Sen. Warner and Reps. Bob Goodlatte, Morgan Griffith, and Barbara Comstock.

"The use of drones has the potential to revolutionize a number of fields. The work done through the collaborative partnerships of the UAS Integration Pilot Program will help provide important data on how to most safely and effectively utilize this technology," said Goodlatte. "Virginia is leading the way in innovation, and I was happy to join Congressman Griffith and Congresswoman Comstock in supporting Virginia's bid. I look forward to seeing the work that the great minds at Virginia Tech and across the commonwealth will do as part of this program."

The day-to-day operations of the program in Virginia will be managed by the [Virginia Tech Mid-Atlantic Aviation Partnership](#) (MAAP), which has accumulated significant expertise running one of only seven federal test sites for unmanned aircraft systems. The organization has built a reputation for facilitating groundbreaking testing while upholding the most rigorous standards of safety.

“The days aren’t far off when millions of drones will be flying in the airspace,” said Mark Blanks, MAAP’s director. “When you’re looking at an expansion of that scale, it’s critical to make sure it’s being handled carefully and safely. We’re grateful to the DOT and the FAA for creating this program, which recognizes the benefits drones have to offer and seeks to identify ways to balance the needs of operators and the public. It’s a perfect fit with the safety-case work we’re known for, and Virginia’s team is a great one to take it on.”

Corporate partners joining Virginia include Project Wing, Intel, AT&T, Airbus Aerial, State Farm, Dominion Energy, Sinclair Broadcast Group, and HAZON Solutions.

“Unmanned aircraft systems hold great potential for commercial use, and Virginia is charting the path forward,” said Rep. Morgan Griffith. “The commonwealth’s inclusion in the Integration Pilot Program will help bring the benefits of drone technology closer to everyday application.”

[Project Wing](#) is a part of Alphabet’s moonshot factory, [X](#). The group worked with MAAP in 2016 for their [first autonomous drone delivery test with members of the public in the U.S.](#) and returned in June 2017 to take part in [testing convened by NASA and the FAA to test unmanned air traffic management systems](#). MAAP has also worked with Dominion and HAZON on a number of [infrastructure-inspection projects](#) and with Sinclair Broadcast Group on a unique [aerial-journalism training program](#).

Six Virginia counties — Buckingham, Cumberland, Loudoun, Montgomery, Prince Edward, and Wise — participated in the proposal and are poised to become future hubs of innovation for drone technology.

“This is an important day for all of Virginia,” said Ed Albrigo, the chief executive officer of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Investment Authority and the Center for Innovative Technology. “This work will be foundational to a rapidly growing innovation ecosystem in unmanned systems throughout Virginia, benefiting communities across the commonwealth and the nation overall.”

About the Center for Innovative Technology, www.cit.org

Since 1985, CIT, a nonprofit corporation, has been Virginia’s primary driver of innovation and entrepreneurship. CIT accelerates the next generation of technology and technology companies through commercialization, capital formation, market development and revenue generation services. To facilitate national innovation leadership and accelerate the rate of technology adoption, CIT creates partnerships between innovative technology start-up companies and advanced technology consumers. CIT’s CAGE Code is 1UP71. To learn more, please visit www.cit.org. Follow CIT on Twitter [@CITorg](#) and add the Center for Innovative Technology on [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

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