EVTOL THE FUTURE CONNECTOR FOR THE BAHAMAS

News / Business aviation

Think drones. Now think of drones carrying passengers and the abbreviation eVTOL for Electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing, begins to make sense. It is all about moving persons fast from point to point without hurdles. These “green” flying machines will deliver on-demand flights at a more affordable price, and trips from island to island will be quick and easy, and it will bring joy of flight to islanders and visitors.

These eVTOL aircraft are characterized by the use of multiple electric-powered rotors or fans for lift and propulsion. Advances in materials, computerized flight controls, batteries and electric motors have improved models and designs for deployment to take off and land vertically in a relatively small area and avoiding the need of a runway. They are not meant to replace airplanes, but they rather mainly focus on short distance transportation. Aerial vehicles and flying cars are no longer science-fiction.

It is a rapidly growing segment in air transportation. More than a dozen airframe manufacturers are developing the concept. When major international players like Airbus and Boeing get involved, it tells one that they foresee future potential. Various models of these air taxis are in a progressed development stage, and some are already close to having the certifications of the authorities. Metropolitan urban areas are the focus markets.

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To bring persons to where they want to be while avoiding traffic congestion hurdles. ‘Urban Air Mobility’ is the common name for the development. When it is applied in the Caribbean, it should have a more appropriate name ‘Island Air Mobility’.

Island Air Mobility will be a game changer for a smart archipelago nation. In the future one may hear about the many passenger drones moving people around the hundreds of islands, islets and cays of the Bahamas and in government circles it may be called Bahama Island Air Mobility or BIAM for short. The new flying vehicles may be customized by region to adjust to differing circumstances. The Bahamas has an opportunity to claim leadership for a specialized form of development.

Sustainability must be a priority for the interisland transportation of the future. IAM will provide a fast, safe, eco-friendly, affordable mobility option to connect the islands like never before. It will help the development of smaller islands. As air island mobility evolution progresses, new investment will bring more jobs and economic growth opportunities and increase community accessibility. Today’s fast connections by aircraft and rotorcraft are still associated with high cost and cause considerable noise and high fossil fuel consumption. IAM will change that.

Island Air Mobility development will require the readiness of authorities to accept modern technologies, their legislative readiness, their capacity to support the planning, modeling, and implementation of IAM services into a sustainable development plan process. Initially existing infrastructure like helipads may be used, however an extensive network of vertiports on the islands with battery loading equipment needs to be created to serve as hubs for eVTOL aircraft departures and arrivals. For these low altitude flying vehicles, air corridors could be created. Aviation safety and security of operations must be considered. Community engagement may be encouraged. It is all a doable and exciting task that needs to begin now.

Urban Air Mobility is definitely coming to metropolitan areas worldwide as a solution for traffic congestion. Island Air Mobility will be coming to the Bahamas as a solution to bridge the inter-island hurdles. It is going to be the third dimension of Bahamian inter-island traffic from point A to B, more sustainably and quickly. Look skyward.

by Cdr. Bud Slabbaert

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11 APRIL 2022

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