Flying Taxis

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Description

Vertical takeoff and landing technology development is accelerating and reaching an inflection point where proof of concept designs are beginning to become viable. Increasingly plausible designs opens the door to autonomous travel services for short distances.

Examples

Uber is taking a leadership role in designing a platform and specifications for crafts that will be part of their platform of flying autonomous taxis. Uber's guidelines dictate that vertical takeoff and landing crafts be able to travel at up to 200 miles per hour, at an altitude of 1,000 to 2,000 feet, and have a range of 60 miles. Commercial pilots will initially pilot the crafts during a transition window of 10-20 years before becoming fully autonomous. Uber's service is envisioned to serve concerts, festivals, and green spaces.

But Uber isn't the only company to watch. Airbus is working on flying taxis and aerial networks. Google's Larry Page has, for years, been investing in three startups: Cora, Kitty Hawk and Opener.

What's next

Prototype models in the next five years will prove that the hardware is technically possible. Once the equipment is available, the next limitation to overcome will be the pace of development in rules and regulation around aerial travel. The existing partnering with NASA will facilitate the development of regulation, but significant efforts will be needed to develop the landing and takeoff infrastructure.

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