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South Korea tests flying taxis in Seoul in glimpse of future



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A leading manufacturer of unmanned aerial vehicles also unveiled its plans for a 'verti-hub' terminal for airborne taxis

By Julian Ryall

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South Korea has got its campaign to lead the world in flying taxis off the ground, with a drone swooping over the centre of Seoul.

A leading manufacturer of unmanned aerial vehicles also unveiled its plans for a “verti-hub” terminal for airborne taxis.

A number of other cities around the world have announced plans for ["urban air mobility" schemes](#) in the coming years, primarily for delivery services, but the South Korean government is throwing its weight behind a number of domestic technology companies that have the potential to play a leading role in a market that Morgan Stanley estimates will be worth £1.13 million by 2040.

Six prototype drone taxis were displayed in Seoul, according to the South Korean transport ministry, including vehicles by Korean firms Hyundai Motor and Hanwha Systems Co., a defence contractor, which was showing off its two-seat Butterfly drone.

Hanwha also released an artist's concept of the world's first air taxi terminal, which it plans to build at Gimpo International Airport, in western Seoul.



A member of media sits inside the drone taxi at an event in Seoul | CREDIT: Bloomberg

The event on Wednesday included a demonstration over the Han River by an EH216 vehicle, made by Chinese firm Ehang.

The eVTOL - electric Vertical Takeoff and Landing Vehicle - is capable of reaching speeds of 80 mph and can carry two passengers with a maximum weight of 485 lbs, but was loaded with sacks of rice for the demonstration flight.

Raphael Rashid
@koryodynasty

Seoul City today demonstrated a 2-seater human-crewed drone taxi, the "first time" a drone taxi flies in the skies of S. Korea.

The EH216, developed by China's Ehang, flew 1.8km near the Han River at 50m above sea level for about 7 mins.

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The South Korean government is drawing up legislation for urban air mobility and expects [the first drone taxis](#) to be airborne by 2025. Drones are expected to be available for the emergency services in Seoul by 2023.

As well as developing potentially lucrative technologies for export, [air taxis](#) will help reduce congestion on Seoul’s notoriously busy streets.

“The introduction of this new transportation system will dramatically reduce travel times”, said Son Myung-soo, deputy transport minister, suggesting that it will take less than 20 minutes to travel from central Seoul to Incheon International Airport, the main hub for the capital region nearly 30 miles to the west of the city centre. By car, that same journey typically takes one hour.

Mr Son added that drone taxis will create 160,000 domestic jobs, adding that the environment-friendly system will prove popular in cities that presently experience problems with congestion.

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