

New type of aircraft is under development

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An unusual 120-foot-long, two-seat prototype aircraft is being developed in Ohio in hopes it will usher in a new transportation era.

The aircraft, although not a blimp, may be outfitted with two small engines and filled with 16,500 cubic feet of helium.

"Dynalifter is a hybrid aircraft," Robert Rist, a co-founder of Ohio Airships Inc., told National Geographic News. "The only comparison (with a blimp) is that they both use helium."

Unlike a blimp, the aircraft has wings, with its weight carried by aerodynamic lift on the wings and hull, augmented by helium lift. The prototype is one-eighth the size of the aircraft that Rist and his partner, Brian Martin, that they hope to test-fly this spring: a 990-foot-long Dynalifter, NGN reported.

Rist says such a craft could move materials at a lower cost than airplanes and at higher speeds than ships, delivering cargo to hard-to-reach places and making it especially useful in military and emergency situations.

"Like the cell phone has brought the third world to the communications era, the Dynalifter will allow freight to (avoid) infrastructure costs of road and train track," Rist said.

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