

Google asks for airspace access for internet balloons

September 30 2016



Google's X Lab hopes to establish a network of helium balloons floating in the stratosphere that will emit a powerful 4G signal to rural and difficult-to-access areas

Google, which is hoping to beam the internet to remote areas of the world via balloon, went before the UN's aviation agency to ask member states to let it ply their airspace.

The company's X Lab, which was created to pursue big-vision projects,

said it hopes to establish a network of [helium balloons](#) floating in the stratosphere that will emit a powerful 4G signal to rural and difficult-to-access areas.

The new initiative—launched in 2013 and dubbed "Project Loon"—saw its first balloon take off from South America in February only to crash at a tea plantation in Sri Lanka, where it was discovered by villagers.

Alphabet, the parent company of Google, had partnered with Sri Lanka to bring the internet to remote areas there. The country's Information and Communication Technology Agency, which coordinated the tests with Google, described the landing as controlled and scheduled.

Loon has "significantly improved the balloon design, manufacture and launch procedure," X Lab told the UN's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Wednesday, according to a document seen by AFP.

"The balloons are now robust, remaining aloft well beyond the targeted 100 days, and are launched through a custom developed auto-launcher, allowing rapid multiple launches," X Lab told the organization's executive committee.

After compiling publicly available wind data with its own flight data, Project Loon was able to model the stratosphere's air flow, allowing its balloons to "change altitude to 'catch' the winds moving at the speed and direction necessary to a given service area," the document said.

Alphabet requested the assistance of ICAO member states as they met for its 39th triennial assembly, asking them in particular to "establish bilateral or multilateral letters of agreement with adjacent states and Project Loon to allow Loon balloons to safely transit flight information region boundaries."

"Safety and coordination with the international civil aviation community is very important to Project Loon," a X Lab spokeswoman told AFP.

Loon is currently working to finalize a safety plan and set up its operations center.

In July, leading social network Facebook launched a similar attempt to bring internet access to remote areas via solar drones.

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Citation: Google asks for airspace access for internet balloons (2016, September 30) retrieved 1 June 2023 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-09-google-airspace-access-internet-balloons.html>

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