

# Bell Helicopter unveils plans for air taxis, but when will they be zipping around?

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Imagine flying from Fort Worth to Frisco in just a matter of minutes.

If all goes according to plan, urban air taxis could be zipping across the Dallas-Fort Worth area within the next decade.

At this week's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Bell Helicopter will roll out its air [taxi](#) cabin design. The mockup will include four seats.

"I want it to be four passengers like if you jumped into a car, like if you grabbed a taxi," said Mitch Snyder, president and CEO of Bell Helicopter.

During the Consumer Electronics Show, attendees will be able to take a simulator ride to get a sense of what the experience will be like.

In April, Uber announced it was working with manufacturers including Bell to provide on-demand air transportation. Uber said Dallas-Fort Worth would be a test market, with plans to launch a network by 2020.

Snyder said it will likely take a little longer.

"I would like to have our concept vehicle flying in the early '20s, but I think it's more like the mid-'20s by the time we have a certified aircraft that's flying," Snyder said. "That's kind of our timeline."

## Uber develops vertiports

Hillwood Properties, the developer of AllianceTexas, is also a partner with Uber to develop vertical skyports, called vertiports, with plans to develop two to five ports within the year.

The first vertiports will be located at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport and in Frisco, Hillwood said last year. Other vertiports could eventually be built at Victory Park in Dallas, near AT&T Stadium and Globe Life Park in Arlington, and at the old Tandy heliport on the Trinity River in downtown Fort Worth.

While there is momentum to get an urban air taxi into the air, Snyder said Bell won't skimp on safety.

"We want people to walk up to this and to feel safe getting into it," Snyder said. "It's designed initially to have a pilot, called a mission manager. Eventually, we'll move towards full autonomy."

With the number of drones and other aircraft expected to multiply, Scott Drennan, Bell's director of innovation, said there are numerous air space challenges to overcome.

There's a need for very good "vehicle-to-vehicle communication and a very good ground system" to deal with drones, other autonomous vehicles and even birds, Drennan said.

Ideally, urban air taxis envision a world where passengers can be whisked rapidly across the city.

How much will it cost for a ride? In an October 2016 white paper, Uber put the initial cost for a ride from the marina district in San Francisco to downtown San Jose at \$129 compared to \$111 for a ground-based ride

using UberX. The same report said prices would drop over time.

"We really want this to be a tremendous user experience," Snyder said. "We want them to feel safe when they climb into it. ... It's probably going to be the shortest ride they've ever had because they're going to be so enthralled with interfacing with the vehicle that about the time they're taking off, they're landing."

Long-term plans call for hundreds of vertiports, changing the way people get around.

"Where they really want to go is where you wouldn't own a personal car," Snyder said. "On-demand mobility would move you from place to place. A self-driving car picks you up and drives you to the vertiport."

Or, for true urban dwellers, it could simply mean walking a few blocks to the nearest vertiport.

While it is partnering with Uber, Bell is also looking at whether it should be an operator of urban air taxis itself.

"When you think about urban air taxi and the need to drive the cost down, to drive the operational hours per year up, you start to talk to yourself if being just an equipment provider is enough," Drennan said.

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