

Hillwood wants to turn AllianceTexas into 'mobility innovation zone' for drones, autonomous vehicles

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When Uber announced it would develop and test an urban air taxi service in Dallas, the Perot family's Hillwood was among the first companies to sign on as one of the ride-hailing company's business partners.

Now the real estate developer wants to turn its giant master-planned development north of Fort Worth into a [test bed](#) for futuristic transportation.

The Dallas-based company said that it will collaborate with companies, regulators, entrepreneurs and academics at AllianceTexas to deploy and commercialize new kinds of mobility, from drones to autonomous cars. Hillwood is working with consulting firm Deloitte to develop a business model for the "mobility innovation zone."

AllianceTexas covers about 26,000 acres—larger than the island of Manhattan. It is already home to many transportation and supply chain-related hubs. It's anchored by Fort Worth Alliance Airport, an industrial facility that opened 30 years ago. It includes over 162 miles of major arterial roads, and state and federal highways. The Federal Aviation Administration's southwest regional headquarters is based there.

More than 500 global and regional companies have a presence at AllianceTexas, from Fidelity Investments to J.C. Penney. BNSF

Railway, which transports new cars and other large cargo across the country, has an intermodal facility there. It's home to a Facebook data center and a new regional hub for Amazon Air, which is under construction. FedEx and UPS have large sort hubs there, too.

The large development includes neighborhoods of thousands of [single-family homes](#) and apartments, along with shopping centers, restaurants and hospitals.

Hillwood president Mike Berry said the idea for the mobility innovation zone was born out of conversations with some of the developer's big industrial customers and Uber. He said AllianceTexas is an ideal place for testing because of its massive size and mix of commercial and [residential development](#).

The effort will initially focus on two areas, Berry said: moving freight with autonomous trucks and testing drones and vertical takeoff and landing aircraft, such as Uber's urban air taxis, in a controlled airspace.

In the future, though, Berry imagines a wider range of experimentation. For example, he said, Amazon, UPS or FedEx could test robots that deliver packages to nearby houses and apartments.

Hillwood is working with Uber to build skyports—stations where urban air taxis can take off and land in North Texas. The Dallas area's first skyport is under construction at Frisco Station. The mixed-use development by Hillwood is near The Star, the Dallas Cowboys' practice facility and headquarters.

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