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Harmonized Int'l Framework May Boost Advanced Aircraft

By **Jennifer Trock and R. Latane Montague** (July 10, 2025, 5:59 PM EDT)


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On June 17, at the Paris Air Show, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy announced a first-of-its-kind collaboration between the Federal Aviation Administration, Australia's Civil Aviation Safety Authority, Transport Canada's Civil Aviation Directorate, New Zealand's Civil Aviation Authority and the U.K.'s Civil Aviation Authority.

Duffy also announced that the collaborative effort, known as the National Aviation Authorities Network, has produced a road map for advanced air mobility, or AAM, aircraft type certification, and added that "all kinds of futuristic advanced air mobility vehicles will redefine how we transport goods and people."

Electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft, hydrogen-based propulsion systems and other AAM technologies stand to revolutionize urban mobility and offer new transportation solutions. However, differences in the certification process for these advancing technologies make the current traditional aircraft type certification framework insufficient.

The NAA Network's road map acknowledges these differences, and provides a framework to harmonize current standards and streamline validation of AAM aircraft to meet multiple countries' certification criteria.

What the Road Map Does

The road map establishes six key principles, and associated guidelines to reach them. The NAA Network will update the road map with increasing detail as it identifies and minimizes AAM certification progresses and differences.

1. Safety and Innovation

The first principle focuses on balancing safety standards with technological advancement, and promoting innovation within a safety-first framework. This aligns the road map with the International Civil Aviation Organization, which recognizes that greater safety assurances are needed as products and operations become more complex.

The NAA Network will draw on the current U.S. regulatory framework and type certification criteria, including the use of Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 21.17(b), to identify additional

requirements for type certification of special class aircraft.

Under this approach, safety standards will be applied through robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance, which will allow innovation without sacrificing safety.

2. The Harmonized Type Certification

The second principle is aimed at harmonization of airworthiness standards and means of compliance for AAM type certificated aircraft. The objective is to develop a three-phase approach: implementing performance-based requirements, seeking convergence on requirements where differences exist, and applying mutually accepted means of compliance.

First, the NAA Network will use current performance-based certification criteria from member authorities for certificating specific AAM designs and technologies. Second, the NAA Network will exchange knowledge and compliance information, which will allow convergence where different approaches exist between authorities.

Lastly, the network authorities will seek to maximize the use of industry consensus standards, which should lead to streamlined validation of AAM within the network.

3. Collaboration and Alignment

The third principle focuses on fostering collaboration within the NAA Network. This includes parallel alignment with the U.K.'s CAA and coordination with other key authorities that have active domestic AAM certification projects.

Collaboration will increase the exchange of means of compliance information between network authorities, increasing acceptance of published industry consensus standards and reducing differences between airworthiness criteria.

Appropriate sharing and learning across the NAA Network will ensure inclusion of additional considerations, reducing the burden on future type certification. Ultimately, this collaboration and alignment will reduce the validation burdens associated with introducing AAM aircraft into operational service.

4. Leveraging Opportunities

The fourth principle focuses on leveraging opportunities for multiauthority validation, which is particularly important for AAM original equipment manufacturers seeking validation from multiple network authorities.

While multiauthority validation will continue to be governed by respective bilateral agreements, with each authority retaining its regulatory independence on airworthiness requirements, this approach should allow for collaboration toward the common goal of validating aircraft.

This would allow for benefits to be realized in the near term while bilateral agreements are simultaneously reviewed and updated to reflect a more formal process of validation and acceptance.

This model will also set a global precedent for AAM certification, allowing for exchange and

transferability of airworthiness criteria and means of compliance between member authorities of the NAA Network.

5. An Incremental Approach

The fifth principle builds on the now-familiar "crawl, walk, run" approach put forth by the FAA in prior implementation plans to take advantage of existing opportunities, processes and standards.

This principle focuses on increasing levels of autonomy, by starting with piloted AAM certification systems before moving to remotely piloted AAM systems and, eventually, to fully autonomous AAM.

6. Inclusive Bilateral Agreements

The sixth principle focuses on establishing a comprehensive process for creating new and updated bilateral agreements to formally streamline validation of AAM aircraft. This will be accomplished by reviewing existing NAA Network bilateral agreements, and working toward updating them where necessary to ensure the six principles of this road map are realized.

This approach to building on current existing bilateral agreements reflects the commitment to harmonization, and sets the stage for continued prioritization of safety and innovation in AAM and other emerging technologies.

Looking Forward

NAA Network member authorities will continue to work constructively to understand and align airworthiness requirements for AAM aircraft type certification.

While timelines are not certain, given the early phase of AAM aircraft certification and operations, the road map reflects awareness of time constraints and the shared urgency of moving forward — e.g., updating regulations, bilateral agreements, etc. The NAA Network intends to implement this approach incrementally, starting this month.

AAM aircraft are evolving rapidly, driven by technological advancements, environmental considerations and the need for enhanced safety and security. The NAA Network's road map underscores the importance of a robust regulatory framework that adapts to this evolution, while safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders.

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