

Beat traffic by air: Israel flies drone taxi over Jerusalem

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The Israel National Drone Initiative aims to build air taxis in a bid to ease persistent traffic woes.

An air taxi flew over Jerusalem on Wednesday as part of an Israeli experiment to develop a network of drones to offer transport services

and ease traffic congestion.

The [aircraft](#), manufactured by a Chinese company, took off from the premises of Hadassah hospital in the city for a few minutes with its two passenger seats empty.

The electric-powered autonomous aircraft with white cockpit and propellers is capable of flying for more than 35 kilometers (over 20 miles), according to organizers of the showcase.

"What you see here is an air taxi that in the future will be able to carry people from place to place," said Daniella Partem, senior director at Israel Innovation Authority.

Since 2019, Israel has been engaged in a high-profile program known as Israel National Drone Initiative which aims to build air taxis to carry passengers and cargo in a bid to ease persistent traffic woes.

Israel has conducted more than 20,000 [test flights](#) of drones of different sizes, but Wednesday's experiment was the first in front of the media.

The [drone](#) program, which envisages an investment of 60 million Israeli shekels (\$16 million), is backed by several public and private companies.

Several operators would be able to fly from the same place at the same time, Partem told reporters.

"So, if you want to fly a medical usage drone and food deliveries at the same time, you will be able to do that."

According to her, "that will also help to create an economically viable market."

Partem noted the rate of accidents recorded since the start of the tests was less than one per 2,000 flights.

"The first challenge for me is safety," said Libby Bahat from Israel Civil Aviation Authority.

"Safety of the people on the ground, and in the future... the people on the aircraft," he said, adding that [safety](#) parameters had to take into account roads, buildings and railways.

Once fully developed, the network would be useful in particular for transporting medicines, organizers said, and some test flights had carried out blood samples.

Bahat said the cost of such flights was difficult to estimate. It would remain relatively expensive for drones to deliver a "\$5 plate of sushi".

Other countries have also performed test flights of air taxis, with France carrying out similar experiments ahead of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.

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