

As air taxi services make progress in US, no timeline set for liftoff over LA traffic

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When the idea of electric air taxis emerged, Los Angeles was vying to be one of the first cities that would utilize the technology to help people avoid its infamous bumper-to-bumper traffic. Some city transportation

officials expected the flying vehicles to be operational by the 2028 Olympics.

But as [air taxi](#) companies have taken further steps toward a launch in other cities, such as Chicago, L.A.'s ambitions to open skyways all over the city have chilled.

Urban Movement Labs, a nonprofit started under former Mayor Eric Garcetti to focus on transit technology, created a primer in 2022 for how cities could incorporate air mobility, including taxi services. But after a merger with Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator, board member Francis Pollara said it's no longer prioritizing the technology.

"We were heavily involved in supporting Archer and the coalition of other air taxi services," Pollara said about UML's involvement. "That work will not be continued as part of the merger."

The Los Angeles Department of Transportation, City Planning office and the mayor's office were part of the initial Advanced Air Mobility partnership with UML to think about how the technology could integrate into the city. But none of the agencies answered questions about when Angelenos could expect to see air taxi services here.

"As with any new technology, the city is working with industry and our departments, and our priority is keeping Angelenos safe," press secretary Clara Karger said.

The pitch of the air taxi boosters is the notion of gliding speedily over L.A.'s traffic-choked streets: a 60- to 90-minute car ride could take about 10 to 20 minutes in a drone-like vehicle from one so-called vertiport to another.

In order to launch in Los Angeles, an air craft taxi service needs

clearance from multiple jurisdictions including the Federal Aviation Administration, which largely oversees airspace, operations and aircrafts, and local and state agencies that set their own rules when it comes to regulations and infrastructure, including permits and design plans for take-off and landing zones. While the FAA has continued to greenlight progress for air taxi operations, less movement has been made at the local and state level.

Clint Harper, a community advocate in the advanced air mobility industry, said that licensing requirements in California are "robust" compared to other states and any air taxi service "may be subject to more stringent state oversight" before operations begin.

The FAA cleared Santa Clara-based electric air taxi company Archer earlier this month to operate its aircraft commercially ahead of an official public launch possibly in Newark or Chicago, which the company said could be as early as 2025.

"This milestone reflects our team's unwavering dedication to safety and operational excellence as we stand up one of the world's first electric air taxi services for communities across the U.S. with a safe, sustainable and low noise transportation solution," Founder and CEO of Archer Adam Goldstein said.

The piloted four-passenger aircraft would make rapid trips with minimal down time to charge. Archer said that it's confirmed two planned routes with United Airlines at Chicago O'Hare International Airport to a destination in Chicago, which has yet to be determined, and Newark Liberty International Airport to Manhattan once its service, Midnight, is in use. The company has also identified five vertiport locations for service in the Bay Area, which it also hopes to launch by 2025. But that goal is dependent on a variety of factors, including local and state rules and infrastructure capability.

The company also recently signed an agreement with a private aviation terminal company to electrify more than 200 take-off and landing sites across the country. It hopes to launch Archer in Los Angeles "as soon as possible" and is working with "infrastructure partners," but did not provide a timeline.

The FAA previously cleared Santa Cruz-based company Joby Aviation for testing operations. The company, which also hopes to launch in 2025 and has created a pilot training course, has agreed to team up with private jet and aircraft company Clay Lacy Aviation to develop an electric air taxi charger, which the FAA previously identified as a requirement for air taxi service plans, at John Wayne Airport in Orange County. The company said it doesn't have a timeline for an Orange County launch but has been discussing plans with authorities and partners in the region, including at John Wayne.

The FAA also recently authorized the [company](#) to develop in-house software that would include a consumer-friendly rider app. It does not currently have a timeline for a Los Angeles launch, but said it recently submitted a proposal to LAX "with a plan to support initial air taxi operations with minimal impact to existing airport infrastructure and operations."

The city's Department of Transportation said it's working with mobility groups to plan for new transportation technology and previously cautioned that it could take years to evaluate and address challenges related to new air technology services. Transit experts have said that equity, accessibility, emissions and noise also remain key concerns to address.

"Nobody likes the idea of rich people flying over their heads, imparting their noise and their emissions on them while they're stuck with traffic," said Harper, who helped write the UML primer.

Harper said there are opportunities, such as emergency-use operations, for the technology to serve the broader public. But the process will take time.

In Paris, Verocopter will test its air taxi service during the Olympics, Transportation Minister Patrice Vergriete recently told Le Parisien. The testing, which will not be for public use, is sure to be closely studied.

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