

When cars fly? Japan wants airborne vehicles to take off

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Japan's government hopes the private sector will help make flying cars a reality

It might sound like pie in the sky, but Japan's government is banking on a future with flying cars, launching an initiative Wednesday with the private sector to develop futuristic vehicles.

The initiative aims to draw up a roadmap by the end of the year on commercialising flying cars, a concept that so far remains largely theoretical.

Japanese government officials are partnering with companies including Boeing and Airbus, as well as major Japanese firms like All Nippon Airways, Japan Airlines, NEC and the Toyota-backed Cartivator.

"(Flying cars) are expected to solve issues of transportation in remote islands or [mountainous areas](#), or rescue operations and goods transport in disaster," trade ministry official Shinji Tokumasu said.

"We launched the public-private meeting to cultivate a new industry and make it profitable in the world market."

In Japan, a group of engineers working with the Cartivator project are already developing a three-wheeled car that relies on drone technology to take flight.

Toyota and affiliated companies have invested about 42.5 million yen (\$382,000) in the project.

Cartivator is hoping to launch a manned prototype by the end of 2019 so it can be used to light the Olympic flame when Japan's capital Tokyo hosts the Games in 2020.

The manned vehicle, dubbed SkyDrive, will have four sets of propellers and be just 2.9 metres (9.5 foot) long and 1.3 metres wide.

But Japan is not alone in the flying car marketplace.

Companies researching the sector include Uber, the Kitty Hawk project backed by Google founder Larry Page, Lilium Aviation in Germany, Safran in France, and Honeywell in the United States.

Last month, British engine maker Rolls-Royce revealed plans to develop a [hybrid electric vehicle](#), dubbed the "flying taxi," while Kitty Hawk in June offered test flights to people interested in buying its [vehicle](#).

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