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CHINA PILOTS AUTONOMOUS, ELECTRIC AIR TAXIS



MOBILITY & TRANSPORT

Guangzhou is partnering with aerial vehicle experts EHang to develop what could be the world's first city-wide, air-taxi network.

Spotted: Autonomous aerial vehicle (AAV) experts EHang is piloting a drone taxi system in Guangzhou, China. The air shuttle system uses low-altitude, smart aircraft to transport people and goods across a variety of routes. The rotor-propelled AAVs are fully powered by electricity.

EHang has tested thousands of self-driving flights, and the aerial vehicle fleet operates with a fail-safe, full-redundancy system. Should any part of a vehicle fail, the aircraft will find the nearest safe place to land. If power is reduced in some way, the second power system takes over to safely complete the flight.

The company is working closely with the city to develop and build the infrastructure needed for full urban air mobility. A command and control centre provides oversight and emergency support. In cases of extreme weather, the command centre will prohibit flights.

The small size and agility of drones make them ideal for accessing hard-to-reach, and sometimes dangerous, locations. Springwise has spotted drones that [spray construction biomaterials](#) to reduce the need for scaffolding or heavy machinery.

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Takeaway:

For cities, networks of AAVs could reduce traffic congestion and air pollution. Other benefits may include the implementation of emergency rescues and remote delivery of essential medications. But widespread adoption is still a long way off, for reasons that include cost and trust issues. At least in the United States, passengers are less willing to fly on-board a solely automated aircraft compared to an aircraft that is flown, at least in part, by a professional pilot, according to a study conducted by NASA.