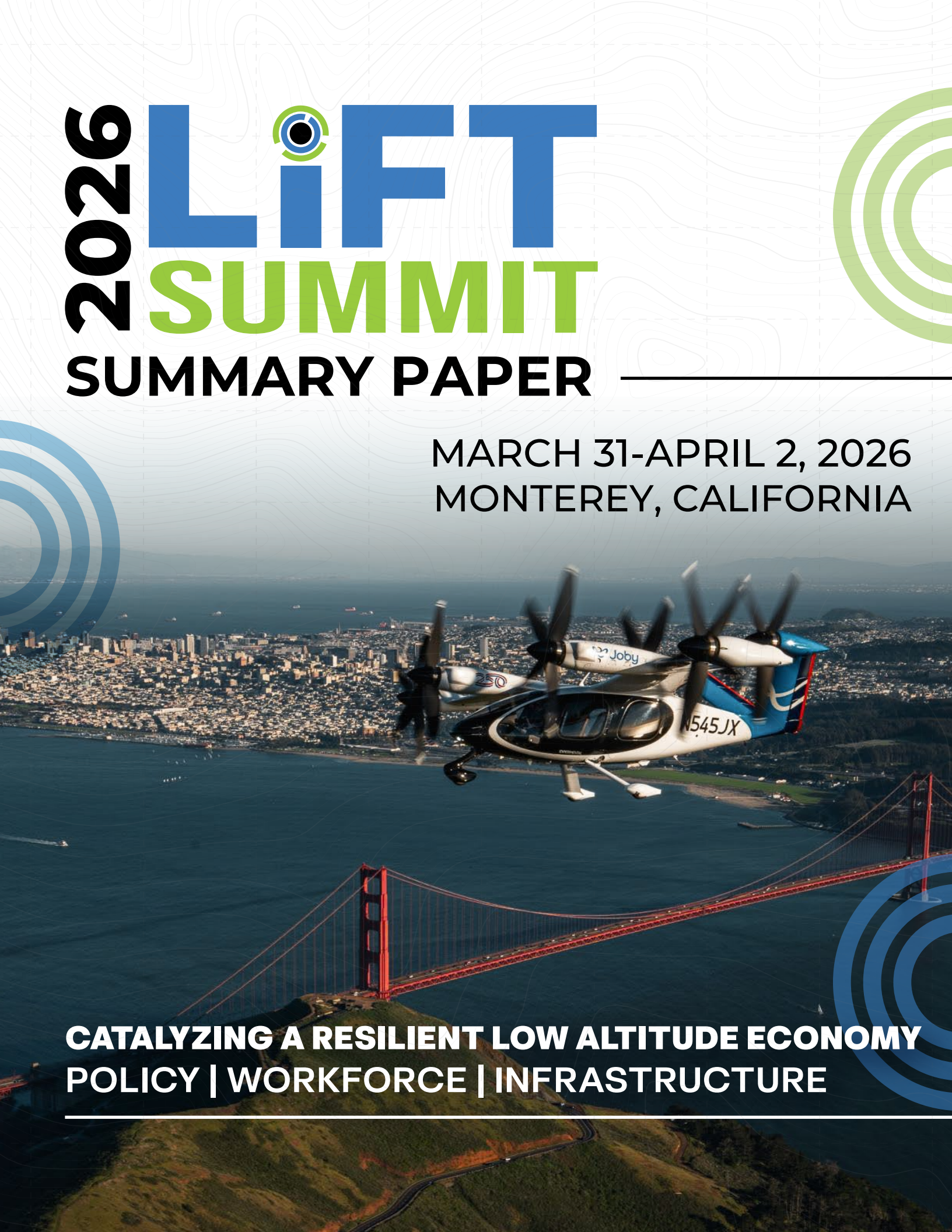


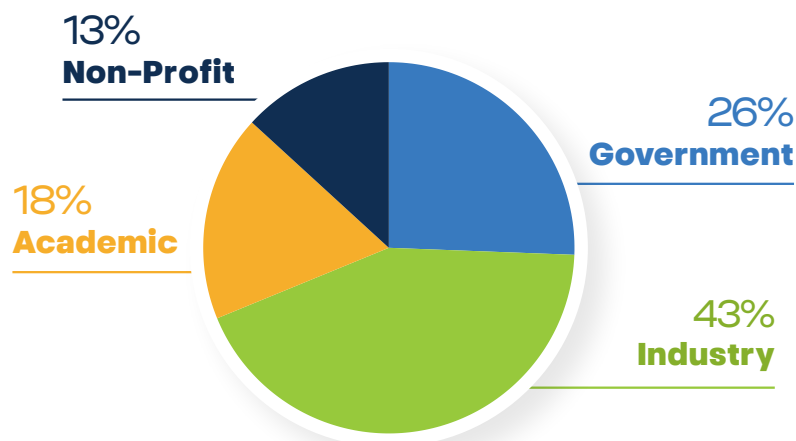
2026 **LiFT** **SUMMIT** **SUMMARY PAPER**

MARCH 31-APRIL 2, 2026
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

**CATALYZING A RESILIENT LOW ALTITUDE ECONOMY
POLICY | WORKFORCE | INFRASTRUCTURE**

2026 LIFT Summit at a Glance

257
Attendees



3
Days

17
Panels & Keynotes

22
Sponsors

10
Fully-Funded Scholarships

Core Themes:



Policy

Federal, state, and local agencies are advancing regulations, airspace modernization, national strategy, and community engagement to shape how AAM is implemented.



Workforce

Educators, employers, and workforce partners are developing talent pipelines, from K-12 and community colleges to apprenticeships, to meet the industry's growing workforce needs.



Infrastructure

Planning and investment are underway for vertiports, electrical grid capacity, weather data, and digital airspace systems needed to support AAM operations.

Presented by **DART**

DART is a nonprofit advancing the **low-altitude economy** by catalyzing cross-sector collaboration for quality jobs and community vitality.

Introduction

The LIFT Summit is California's flagship event for Advanced Air Mobility (AAM). Hosted in Monterey, California across three days, the summit brings leaders together at the national epicenter of AAM research, testing, and manufacturing to discuss the industry's most pressing topics.

We welcomed over 250 attendees and 22 sponsors in 2026, drawing an audience of national policy leaders, global industry voices, and regional stakeholders from communities across the country who came to understand how to translate AAM's promise into local economic and workforce opportunity. Attendees were not only able to engage directly with AAM thought leaders, but also saw industry progress first-hand through site tours of Joby Aviation's manufacturing site in Marina and AirSpace Integration, a coastal test range 45 minutes north of Monterey.

The summit exists to bring regional lessons to a national audience, and vice versa.

Monterey offers a vantage point on AAM few other places can claim, sitting at the intersection of leading Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and DART's workforce development and regional advocacy programs. By convening here, the summit allows local stakeholders to engage directly with national perspectives on sector strategies and transportation planning, while ensuring that the lessons learned in California's testbeds and training pipelines reach the leaders setting direction for the industry at large.

What follows is a synthesis of the summit's core discussion threads, keynote and moderator contributions, and the strategic themes that emerged across three days of programming. The body of this paper is organized around the three leading agenda topics: Policy, Workforce, and Infrastructure. Each is examined in turn through the lens of what AAM requires to scale responsibly, equitably, and in ways that strengthen the regions hosting it.

"We're at an inflection point—moving from 'if' advanced air mobility will happen to 'how, when, and how fast we make it happen.'"

— Josh Metz, Executive Director of DART

2026 Sponsors



LIFT SUMMIT

Fireside Chat: Advancing the AAM National Strategy

Peter Irvine • USDOT Deputy Director, Office of Aviation Analysis

Yolanka Wulff • Executive Director, Community Air Mobility Initiative

Peter Irvine opened the summit with a reflection on the National Strategy's origins, noting that the Monterey Bay Region, its OEMs, and DART's programs were central to inspiring the legislation and the interagency effort behind it. The strategy, developed over two years through 50+ agency engagements and work groups spanning 20+ federal bodies, is built around seven pillars (six topical, one overarching) and 40 concrete recommendations, with workforce development and infrastructure adaptation as two of its most consequential threads.

Key Projections & Figures

- **The eIPP** (eight selected projects, including California as part of a multistate collaborative) will serve as the primary implementation vehicle for the strategy, with detailed operational plans, published goals, and interagency accountability mechanisms to follow.
- **Existing airport infrastructure** will be the first-priority integration environment, with federal investment focused on enabling rather than dictating where AAM operations take root.
- **AAM-specific workforce job codes** at the Bureau of Labor Statistics are a near-term federal deliverable, creating the scaffolding for grants, curricula, and training programs to organize around AAM occupations.
- **Spectrum management and weather detection** were flagged as critically unsettled technical and policy areas that must be resolved at both the federal and industry level before AAM can scale.
- **Replicable templates for AAM infrastructure and operations** are expected to be published based on eIPP findings, effectively creating "second-mover advantages" that allow additional states and localities to follow an established path.

"The question isn't just building new systems
— it's how we adapt what we already have to
unlock advanced air mobility at scale."

— **Peter Irvine, USDOT**

American Air Leadership: National Strategy, Drone Dominance & the Path to Scaled AAM

Kenji Sugahara • NASAO and ODOT

Arjuna Fields • FAA

Michael Sanders • Texas A&M CAAT

Lydon Sleeper • Joby Aviation

Moderated by NASAO's Kenji Sugahara, this panel assessed the current state of AAM National Strategy implementation through federal, industry, and academic lenses, examining the regulatory pipeline, the eIPP's transition from planning to operations, and the urgent security and supply chain challenges that must be resolved before AAM can scale responsibly. The World Cup emerged as an unexpected throughline, framing near-term airspace integration and counter-UAS coordination as a national stress test with a hard deadline.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Part 108 and Part 146 rulemaking** is in its final months following a comment round on conspicuity and right-of-way; pre-implementation work is already underway, with daily commercial drone operations in existing UTM architectures reaching approximately 4,000 per day across eight-plus states.
- **The 2026 FIFA World Cup** — drawing an estimated 3 million attendees across multiple host cities — represents the most complex near-term airspace security challenge the U.S. has faced, with panelists flagging that many host cities remain underresourced. A notice of proposed rulemaking for critical infrastructure protection is expected within the year.
- **Domestic command-and-control link quality** remains the decisive variable in replacing Chinese drone platforms; while motors, batteries, and ESCs are increasingly competitive, the gap relative to DJI's OcuSync was identified as the single most consequential technical barrier, with targeted federal investment the recommended remedy.

"Last year we were at about 1,000 to 2,000 [commercial drone] operations a day within those architectures that now span, I think, over eight states and start at North Texas, and now we're upwards of 4,000 per day, within that architecture. That shows not only the numbers, but also the scalability across the different states where operators and service providers are setting the stage."

- Arjuna Fields, FAA

State-Led Vision: Enabling Advanced Air Mobility Through eIPP Leadership

Sergio Cecutta • SMG Consulting

Ted Angel • National AAM Center of Excellence (NAAMCE)

Kenji Sugahara • NASAO and ODOT

Tarek Tabshouri • Caltrans Division of Aeronautics

Alice Griffith • Crown Innovations

State-Led Vision: Enabling Advanced Air Mobility Through eIPP Leadership State aviation leaders compared eIPP implementation strategies across awarded and non-awarded states, agreeing that community acceptance follows demonstrated use value rather than preceding it.

Key Projections & Figures

- **The eIPP's 90-day operations requirement** will prompt a staged ramp-up rather than immediate full-scale activity; panelists cautioned against expecting simultaneous operations across all awarded states, given the limited number of certified airframes currently available from OEMs including Joby, Beta, and Archer.
- **Community acceptance** is expected to develop alongside demonstrated use value rather than precede it, particularly for emergency response, wildfire management, and rural medical transport. Aircraft noise profile was identified as the single most addressable barrier, as illustrated by anti-helicopter advocates in New York City reversing their opposition after a Joby demonstration flight.
- **Non-awarded states retain meaningful pathways** to support AAM development, and panelists emphasized that the relationships, coalitions, and use case documentation built during eIPP application processes remain long-term assets to integrate AAM operations, regardless of award status.

"We lost the battle, but I think we're winning the war — what we really managed to do in [the eIPP process] was pull all these different partners, airports, technology companies, and counties across the board into what we call the American Air Advantage."

— **Tarek Tabshouri, Caltrans Division of Aeronautics**

Part 108 & The Path to Scale: Unlocking Growth for Mature AAM Startups

Dean Donovan • Diamond Stream Partners

Andrew Clare • Elroy Air

Anna Dietrich • AUVSI

Brent Klavon • ANRA

Dallas Brooks • Wing

Moderated by Dean Donovan of Diamond Stream Partners, this panel examined how the proposed Part 108 and Part 146 rulemaking package will unlock beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) commercial drone operations at scale. Panelists drew on live operational experience from Wing, Elroy Air, and ANRA to ground the regulatory discussion in what is already working and what must still be resolved before national expansion is viable.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Part 108 shifts accountability** from individual remote pilots to certified operating organizations, mirroring the Part 135/121 air carrier model. Panelists expect this change to produce a meaningful safety improvement, as organizational controls and training requirements have historically outperformed individual pilot accountability across aviation categories.
- **Part 146 will formally define and certify Automated Data Service Providers (ADSPs)**, establishing the legal and technical foundation for the UTM, weather, surveillance, and conformance monitoring services that BVLOS operations depend on.
- **Wing has completed more than 750,000 commercial deliveries** across six cities with no safety incidents. Panelists projected that mixed-traffic corridors above 400 feet, integrating cargo drones and eventually eVTOLs, will be routine within five years of the rule being finalized.
- **City-by-city political engagement** was identified as a rate-limiting factor alongside regulation. Wing's expansion strategy prioritizes cooperative local governments and avoids areas with dense general aviation activity.
- **Electronic conspicuity including ADS-B** was flagged as one of the highest-impact, lowest-cost safety interventions available, with data suggesting it has reduced aviation accidents by more than 50% and fatalities by nearly 90% among participating aircraft.

"Regulatory clarity is not a technicality. It's a market signal."

— **Dean Donovan, Diamond Stream Partners**

The Future of Advanced Air Mobility: A NASA Vision

Parimal "PK" Kopardekar • Director of Aerospace Operations and Safety, NASA

Dr. Kopardekar framed AAM as a decades-long systems challenge and urged regions to build 20-to-30-year transportation outlooks rather than treat it as a near-term federal product.

Key Projections & Figures

- **The UTM architecture NASA developed** beginning in 2013 has been adopted globally as the foundational construct for BVLOS drone operations; NASA's current focus is extending that architecture to handle cooperative, mixed-traffic airspace at scale — integrating cargo drones, eVTOLs, and conventional aircraft without overloading air traffic controllers.
- **Every region pursuing AAM should develop a 20-to-30-year outlook** that works backward from desired transportation outcomes to identify the supply chain, workforce curriculum, charging infrastructure, and vertiport siting it will need — treating AAM as a local systems problem, not a federal one.

"One type of operation [alone] is not going to scale. Infrastructure and the supporting environment needed to enable it will be difficult to capitalize and maintain."

— **Parimal Kopardekar, NASA**

California's Transportation Vision for Advanced Air Mobility

Toks Omishakin • Secretary of California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA)

Secretary Omishakin tied AAM to CalSTA's safety, equity, climate, and economic priorities and confirmed SB 800's three-year AAM work plan is nearing finalization.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Senate Bill 800**, passed in 2023, directed Caltrans to develop a three-year AAM work plan covering regulatory modernization, infrastructure readiness, accessibility, and community engagement; that report was recently published for public comment and is expected to be finalized and submitted to the legislature imminently.
- **Realizing AAM's equity and climate benefits** will require close coordination between utilities, airports, and local communities — particularly to deploy charging infrastructure and ensure service reaches residents without surface-based transportation access.

"If we're planning for what we already have today, then we're behind the curve."

— **Anthony Foxx**, former U.S. Secretary of Transportation, as cited by Secretary Omishakin

Fireside Chat: Innovative Transportation Technology Integration

Emily Warren • Deputy Secretary for Innovative Mobility Solutions, California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA)

Jessie Denver • Lead Advisor for Zero Emission Vehicle Markets, Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz)

Drawing on their shared history working through the rollout of ride-hailing, micromobility, and autonomous vehicles in San Francisco, Warren and Denver reflected on what the AAM sector can learn from past technology introductions. The conversation centered on regulatory flexibility, public benefit narratives, infrastructure investment, and the additional accountability bar that comes when industry asks for changes to the built environment rather than simply a license to operate.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Fitting new technologies into existing regulatory frameworks** has historically required structural innovation from regulators, not just adaptation by industry. The Public Utility Commission's (PUC) introduction of platform-based licensing for Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) and the safety case framework being adopted from aerospace for autonomous vehicles are two models that may inform how AAM earns its operating authority.
- **The public benefit case must be built proactively.** Novel disruptions, whether scooters on sidewalks or aircraft overhead, attract disproportionate attention. Without a clear story about community value, political resistance can become a market barrier.
- **AAM's ask of government** is fundamentally larger than ride-hailing or Autonomous Vehicles (AVs): those technologies used existing roads and asked only for regulatory permission. AAM requires infrastructure changes, which means a higher standard of demonstrated public benefit to justify public investment.
- **Equity is a genuine question mark.** Rural emergency, healthcare, and freight use cases present a compelling public benefit argument; urban air taxi models at high price points do not — and the latter will face less political support for infrastructure subsidy.
- **Electrification aligns AAM with state climate goals,** but grid infrastructure is a serious bottleneck. California's CPUC proceedings have begun to streamline energization timelines, and P3 financing models — analogous to what scaled the solar industry — are expected to be necessary for vertiport and charging buildout.

"When you're asking for infrastructure change, that's a bigger ask.
It requires a stronger case for public benefit."

— **Emily Warren, CalSTA**

Responsible Deployment: Community Engagement and Local Partnership

Adam Cohen • UC Berkeley Transportation Sustainability Research Center

Tim Haile • Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA)

Emilien Marchand • Wisk

Darlene Yaplee • Aviation-Impacted Communities Alliance (AICA)

Karen Coronel • Joby Aviation

Responsible Deployment: Community Engagement and Local Partnership Panelists argued that local governments hold real regulatory leverage over AAM through land use and permitting, and that genuine community engagement must go beyond one-way information sharing.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Local governments hold meaningful regulatory power** that airports do not: cities can set noise limits, restrict hours of operation, cap flight volumes, and condition or decline to renew operating permits through their land use and conditional use processes.
- **Current planning and environmental review processes** — including some NEPA categorical exclusions — require no community notification or engagement for AAM procedures. Panelists identified this gap as a serious risk and called for proactive outreach well in advance of formal approvals, not as a compliance exercise but as a foundation for durable operations.
- **Panelists distinguished between three levels of community engagement** — information sharing (one-way), input (two-way adaptation), and decision-making authority (e.g., CEQA/NEPA review of a vertiport) — and cautioned that the industry frequently signals the second while practicing only the first.
- **Physical demonstrations were identified as the most effective tool for shifting public perception.** Joby's New York demonstration for anti-helicopter advocacy groups — where attendees had to be told the aircraft was overhead because they could not hear it — was cited as a turning point that reversed opposition and illustrated how direct experience outperforms any amount of data or messaging.
- **Equity concerns must be addressed across multiple dimensions:** pricing trajectories, overflights above underserved communities, workforce pathways into the industry, and accessibility design for passengers with disabilities. Panelists pointed to mobility-as-a-service models and public-private partnerships — particularly for rural medical and emergency use cases — as the most viable near-term mechanisms for broadening access.

"Technology without trust doesn't scale. Community acceptance is not a checkbox. It is the foundation of durable deployment."

— **Adam Cohen, UC Berkeley**

Building the Talent Runway: DART-network Aviation Workforce Development in Action

Andrea Pesce • DART

Julie Edwards • Pajaro Valley Unified School District

Omar Perez-Sandoval • Joby Aviation

Michael Matkin • CITRIS Center for Drone Education & Research, UC Santa Cruz

Peter Church • DART

DART and partners showcased a K-12-to-employment pipeline anchored by Joby's apprenticeship program, which has graduated over 100 apprentices with a 90%-plus retention rate.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Joby technicians train on an RV-12**, the same aircraft high school students at Watsonville High are now building, creating a direct handoff between K-12 programming and Joby's aviation maintenance technician (AMT) apprenticeship pipeline.
- **Joby's Advanced Manufacturing Apprenticeship Program (AMAP)**, launched in partnership with DART and the Irvine Foundation in 2022, has achieved over a 90% retention rate and graduated more than 100 apprentices, who now represent approximately one-fifth of Joby's Marina manufacturing workforce.
- **The CITRIS Initiative for Drone Education and Research (CIDER)** has expanded beyond University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) to train instructors at high schools and community colleges across Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, and Monterey counties, with CA Jobs First partnership funding now enabling statewide replication.
- **Federal restrictions on Chinese-manufactured drone equipment** are creating near-term procurement gaps for federally funded programs; DART and UCSC are working with AeroSystems West to prototype a domestic, open-source training platform at approximately \$3,000 per unit, available in kit, pre-programmed, and fully assembled configurations.
- **The Part 107 remote pilot certification**, while not a standalone job credential, functions as a low-barrier entry point into aviation exposure, and panelists identified the \$175 exam fee as a persistent equity barrier warranting dedicated funding solutions.

"We started talking about it in March, and now the kids are building airplanes [In August]. That turned around only because of how much we trust each other."

— Julie Edwards, Pajaro Valley Unified School District

Meeting the Moment: In-Demand Skills for the Low-Altitude Economy

Natalie Perez-Regaldo • Foundation for California Community Colleges

Matt Williams • California Air Resources Board

Pam Gutman • Bay Area Community Colleges

Lance Hastings • California Manufacturers and Technology Association

Kelda Mae Tabaranza • Pyka

Panelists identified high-voltage systems and electric propulsion as the key curriculum gaps community colleges must close, citing CARB's SHIFT grants as a workforce-linked funding model already in motion.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Community college aviation programs** remain largely built around traditional Airframe & Powerplant curricula; panelists identified high-voltage battery systems, electric motors, and powered-lift-specific maintenance as the skill gaps most urgently requiring OEM-partnered curriculum development.
- **Pyka's Pelican 2 agricultural spray drone**, funded in part through a CARB SHIFT grant, is already employing College of Alameda students in manufacturing, with workforce training built directly into the grant scope.
- **CARB's SHIFT program has committed nearly \$650 million** across 40-plus projects, with workforce development components now standard in all solicitations; no new funding is currently available, but panelists encouraged interested organizations to begin building project teams and identifying eligible grantees now in anticipation of future solicitations.
- **Exposure drives enrollment:** panelists pointed to the 500% Navy recruitment increase following the release of the film Top Gun and to Tesla dramatically raising interest in automotive technician careers as evidence that getting students and faculty in front of new aircraft is among the highest-leverage investments in pipeline development.
- **Equity is a design requirement, not an add-on:** 99.6% of SHIFT funding to date has benefited disinvested communities, and future solicitations will continue to prioritize projects with measurable benefits to these groups, including pathways for farmworkers and other populations not traditionally present in aviation careers.

"When I brought a Tesla to a high school skills challenge day, the students went crazy. Suddenly being an automotive technician was a cool thing to do. It was a high-tech job, the laptop is in the toolbox. That's what seeing a Joby or a Pyka can do for aviation."

— **Matt Williams, California Air Resources Board**

Funding the Future: Financing Airport Infrastructure through Federal, State & Public-Private Partnerships

Toni Gomez • City of Mountain View

Brandon Cardwell • City of Livermore

Trelynd Bradley • CA Governor's Office of Business & Economic Development (GO-Biz)

Kevin Cox • Vertiports by Atlantic

Mark McClardy • Former FAA Airports Division Director, Western Pacific Region

Panelists walked through California's financing tools for vertiport development, stressing that early and sustained FAA engagement, not funding availability, is what separates successful projects from stalled ones.

Key Projections & Figures

- **California's infrastructure financing toolkit** — including IBank's state revolving loan fund, exempt facilities bonds, and tax increment financing districts — is applicable to vertiport development today; the primary gap is not tool availability but awareness and deal structuring, with panelists encouraging airport managers to connect with GO-Biz regional specialists and visit iBank.ca.gov to identify relevant programs.
- **Private operators will prioritize markets that demonstrate community support, regulatory clarity, and operator demand** before committing capital; airports and cities that have completed aviation master plan updates, established zoning protections, and documented AAM in general plans will be earlier beneficiaries of infrastructure investment than those that have not.
- **Early and ongoing FAA engagement is the single most consistent differentiator** between airport infrastructure proposals that succeed and those that stall; panelists recommended that airport managers treat FAA's Office of Airports as a planning partner from the outset, not an approving body consulted at the end.
- **Municipal financing tools are better suited to funding the ancillary infrastructure** — electrical upgrades, access improvements — that will serve any tenant at an airport, rather than the vertiport structure itself; framing bond capacity around durable public infrastructure rather than nascent aviation technology reduces council risk and broadens project viability.
- **Underutilized GA airports** with former defense use histories may qualify for EPA Brownfields pre-development funding and Economic Development Administration grants, providing a federally supported on-ramp to AAM-readiness planning that does not require AIP eligibility or a committed private partner.

"We will never build anything without an operator or demonstrated demand. But the most important step is to raise your hand and say you're interested. Then it becomes our job to put the pieces of the puzzle together."

— **Kevin Cox, Vertiports by Atlantic**

Leading the Charge: Challenges and Solutions for Powering Vertiports

Paul Stith • Critical Loop

Andy Krebs • Joby Aviation

Nate Ward • Beta Technologies

Anthony Harrison • PG&E

John Kasuda • Siemens

OEMs and utility representatives tied vertiport power needs directly to turnaround time and highlighted PG&E's new pending loads framework as a way to shrink years-long energization delays.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Power demand scales directly with turnaround time:** a 2.5-hour charge cycle requires modest infrastructure most airports can accommodate today, while a 15-to-20-minute turn requires roughly ten times the power, and a five-to-six-minute turn pushes sites into medium-voltage infrastructure most have never needed. Airports should define their concept of operations before sizing electrical upgrades.
- **PG&E's new pending loads framework**, adopted in December 2025, allows the utility to incorporate speculative or early-stage AAM projects into its distribution planning cycles years before a formal service application is filed, directly addressing the three-to-five-year energization delay that has constrained EV infrastructure broadly. Panelists urged airports to engage PG&E now, even if buildout is years away.
- **On-site battery storage can compress interconnection timelines by up to 18 months through PG&E's FlexConnect program**, which allows sites to come online faster by managing load flexibility during peak grid hours. Panelists cited Critical Loop's work at San Diego Airport, saving tens of thousands of dollars monthly through time-of-use rate arbitrage, as evidence that storage pays for itself across multiple value streams beyond charging alone.
- **A statewide EPIC-funded R&D program** covering all three California investor-owned utilities was expected to open AAM infrastructure projects as eligible applicants within approximately six weeks of the summit, representing the first dedicated public R&D funding stream for vertiport energization in California.
- **Airports may lack the metering and energy management infrastructure** to know how much power their tenants are using today, making rate recovery for electric aviation practically impossible without that foundation. Panelists recommended that airports prioritize sub-metering investment as a prerequisite for any viable charging revenue model.

"Power equals time. You have to figure out where you are in the spectrum — and then that will tell you the electrical infrastructure you need."

— John Kasuda, Siemens

Airspace Management Modernization for Public Good

Raja Sengupta • UC Berkeley

Arjuna Fields • FAA

Tom Prevot • Joby Aviation

David Schleicher • ATAC

Min Xue • NASA

Don Berchoff • TruWeather Solutions

Panelists agreed the national airspace system is already open for AAM operations today, with low-altitude weather data and modernized acquisition processes identified as the biggest near-term gaps.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Low-altitude weather data** is functionally absent today, with current models accurate only about 80% of the time and off by as much as 50% when they miss. A new FAA weather standard enabling lower-cost sensors and a public-private funding model — in which states contribute capital expenditure, operators pay per-aircraft fees, and private investment follows once the business case is proven — is the proposed path to closing this gap, with TruWeather pursuing certification as the first weather Automated Data Service Provider (ADSP) under Part 146.
- **Joby's recent flight from Marina to Oakland International Airport**, conducted within current airspace rules with FAA coordination, demonstrated that early commercial operations do not require a fully modernized NAS. Panelists agreed that real-world operations are the only reliable source of lessons that will inform what actually needs to change.
- **The FAA's shift toward challenge-based acquisition** — illustrated by a 2024 safety data analytics competition that drew 68 entrants, opened agency data stores to industry, and resulted in three contract awards — signals a meaningful change in how the agency brings in new capabilities, particularly AI and machine learning tools for safety monitoring.
- **Local and state governments** are not regulatory actors in the airspace, but they are essential to operational success on the ground. Community acceptance, zoning decisions, and permit processes are best addressed through early, transparent engagement rather than resolved through legal or regulatory conflict.
- **International airspace modernization is advancing in parallel**, with ICAO's remotely piloted aircraft working group and AAM study group serving as the primary venues for aligning standards. Panelists noted that the FAA's dual role as both regulator and air navigation service provider — a structure uncommon in other countries — creates integration challenges that bilateral partnerships with Japan, South Korea, Brazil, and others are helping to navigate.

"The NAS is actually open for business. We flew to Oakland Airport — if we get a type certificate, that would be a commercial flight."

— **Tom Prevot, Joby Aviation**

Climate-Smart Mobility Across the Atlantic: California & The Netherlands in Action

Sam Assefa • Director, Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI)

Dr. Peter Van Deventer • Coast-to-Coast Program, Province of North Holland

Sam Assefa and Peter Van Deventer, champions of a formal subnational bilateral partnership between California and the Province of North Holland, reflected on three years of exchange visits, joint working groups, and NGO partnerships. They made the case that international peer collaboration is one of the most underutilized tools/available to states pursuing climate and mobility innovation.

Key Projections & Figures

- **The California-Netherlands collaboration** has already resulted in seven NGO partnership agreements and multiple ongoing working groups; panelists projected these relationships as the foundation for co-piloting demonstration projects and policy frameworks that neither jurisdiction could develop as quickly in isolation.
- **California's CEQA modernization** and permitting reform are proceeding with urgency; Assefa indicated that the legislature has tasked his office with developing a plan to position the state for AAM transformation, including identifying regulatory structures that are slowing innovation rather than protecting public safety.

"The climate doesn't know any borders or boundaries. Innovation thrives not when you're doing it behind closed doors with your peers, but when you have a creative vision across disciplines, cultures, and nations."

— **Sam Assefa, Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation**

Digital Infrastructure for the Low-Altitude NAS

Michelle Duquette • Future Flight Global

Ryan Pleskach • ResilienX

Patrick Gould • Skyway Technologies

Nicholas Flom • Thales

Ray Adams • Trajectory Corporation

Moderated by Future Flight Global's Michelle Duquette, this panel brought together operators, system integrators, and former air traffic controllers to examine the digital infrastructure needed to scale low altitude operations. Drawing on real world deployments across vertiports, UAS test sites, and military BVLOS programs, panelists explored the governance, data, and investment priorities required for operational success.

Key Projections & Figures

- **North Dakota's Vantis program** established a replicable blueprint — organizational as well as technical — for receiving raw federal radar data from a government agency, with more than 150 security requirements met across software and organizational dimensions. Panelists cited this as a meaningful proof point for what state-level programs can achieve.
- **Moving from a human-centric airspace system** toward one that supports remote and autonomous operations requires pushing data and decision support to the edge of the network, replacing functions currently performed by controllers and pilots with automation that can act on trustworthy, real-time information.
- **Governance structures must be established before ecosystems scale:** without clear policies governing how distributed UTM services share authority, handle deconfliction, and define service-level agreements, the federated architecture underlying low-altitude operations has no reliable foundation.
- **Operators entering this space** should prioritize holistic digital investment over piecemeal hardware acquisition: buying sensors or radar without the software, integration layer, and governance framework to support it will not unlock airspace access or BVLOS approvals.

"The world runs on software. An iPhone only works because there's a ton of cloud infrastructure supporting it on the back end. Moving this industry forward is really no different."

— **Ryan Pleskach, ResilienX**

Storming the Market: Weather Risk, Mitigation, and National Strategy

Matt Nelson • Salinas Municipal Airport

Michelle Duquette • Future Flight Global

Clint Harper • Future Flight Global

Don Berchoff • TruWeather Solutions

Ray Adams • Trajectory Corporation

Panelists identified the low-altitude weather data gap as a core constraint on AAM economics, with a new FAA weather standard expected to make aviation-grade sensing dramatically more affordable.

Key Projections & Figures

- **A new FAA weather standard under Part 146** will allow lower-cost, IoT-enabled, and camera-based sensors to qualify as approved weather sources for AAM operations, breaking the previous market structure in which only a handful of certified vendors could supply aviation-grade observations at costs between \$300,000 and \$1 million per station. Panelists estimated that a viable minimum viable product weather stack for a vertiport, including a vertical wind lidar, can now be assembled for approximately \$180,000.
- **Road Weather Information System (RWIS) stations and other existing public sensor networks** cannot currently be used for aeronautical decision-making under Parts 91 or 135, but the new standard creates a pathway to qualify them, which panelists identified as a near-term, low-cost opportunity to extend weather coverage before new infrastructure is built.
- **Vertiport siting is a weather decision:** urban canyon effects, marine layer behavior, and microclimatic variation between adjacent city blocks make airport-based AWOS readings an unreliable proxy for urban conditions. Panelists recommended commissioning computational wind modeling during site selection rather than after, since location choice is one of the most effective tools for building weather resiliency into operations from the start.
- **TruWeather is pursuing certification as the first weather Automated Data Service Provider (ADSP)** under the forthcoming Part 146 framework, which panelists described as the mechanism through which third-party weather data will gain regulatory standing for BVLOS and eVTOL operations.

"Today you pay a weather tax in your airline ticket — you just don't know it. About 30% of manned aviation that's canceled or delayed due to weather could have flown. If we don't get better data, we'll cap this industry."

— **Don Berchoff, TruWeather Solutions**

Airport Integration: Lessons from the Field

Erin Sheelen • Kimley-Horn

Naashom Marx • Woolpert

Jeff Crechriou • Hollister Municipal Airport (CVH)

Anwar Elgonemy • San Francisco International Airport (SFO)

Ryan Sheelen • San Jose Mineta International Airport (SJC)

Airport managers across GA, regional, and hub facilities shared how OEM siting preferences, electrical capacity limits, and early community transparency are shaping real-world AAM integration.

Key Projections & Figures

- **Vertiport siting has proven more complex than anticipated:** OEMs frequently prefer commercial-side proximity to terminals over General Aviation (GA)-side Fixed-Base Operator (FBO) locations, and early assumptions about parking structures as natural vertiport sites produced sharply mixed operator feedback. Airports should expect OEM preferences to drive early siting conversations rather than pre-built airport assumptions.
- **Electrical infrastructure** is a long-lead constraint, particularly at large commercial airports where electrification demands from airlines, EV fleets, and facility upgrades are already compressing available capacity. Airports were advised to commission utility master plans now and to treat AAM charging as one of several competing loads rather than a standalone line item.
- **Through-the-fence agreements** are emerging as a practical mechanism for airports with constrained footprints to support OEM flight testing and early operations on adjacent properties, with FAA concurrence required and aviation-use necessity as the governing standard for approval.
- **Business model alignment** between airports and OEMs remains unsettled: airport revenue from AAM is more likely to take the form of increased passenger volume and ground lease income than a direct share of operator revenue, and common-use vertiport infrastructure — rather than exclusive operator arrangements — is the model most airports will need to pursue.
- **Community acceptance** is built through direct experience rather than data campaigns. Physical demonstrations, aircraft on terminal floors, and simulator access were cited as the highest-return investments in public trust, alongside consistent transparency through bodies like airport commissions and community roundtables.

"Transparency is key. We are public servants. Anytime we venture into something new that impacts the community, we have to be driven by hard data — and that data has to be public."

— **Anwar Elgonemy, SFO**

Monterey and Beyond

The LIFT Summit exists because the conversations that shape this industry need a consistent home, a place where federal officials, state agencies, OEM engineers, community advocates, and workforce developers can work through shared problems from different vantage points. That is what Monterey offers, and what DART has built here over six years of annual convenings.

The Monterey Bay Region sits at the center of the nation's most active AAM ecosystem. R&D, manufacturing, and flight testing are being conducted by Joby, Archer, and Wisk, representing over \$10 billion in market capitalization and private investment, with several emerging companies also conducting flight testing at locations such as AirSpace Integration. These companies have created thousands of jobs in Monterey Bay, a transformational achievement for a region primarily supporting agriculture and hospitality. DART's workforce programs, spanning K-12, community college, and direct-to-employment pathways, have been developed over the last decade out of the conviction that if the right partnerships and pathways are forged, AAM can be a source of community flourishing in Monterey and beyond.

The LIFT Summit exists because the OEMs are already here, and because six years of regional coordination have turned proximity into partnership with the local community. That foundation has translated into concrete outcomes, including continued philanthropic support for workforce programs that other states are now examining as models, and \$7.45 million in state funding awarded to the Monterey Bay Tech Hub for the California Advanced Air Mobility Corridors Initiative.

The 2026 summit convened as the industry moved from planning into early operations. Part 108 and Part 146 rulemaking are in their final months. The eIPP is transitioning from awarded plans to flight activity. Joby has now demonstrated point-to-point eVTOL flight both in New York City and from Marina to Oakland International Airport. Across three days of sessions, the recurring theme was not whether AAM would develop, but whether the supporting conditions, including workforce pipelines, electrical infrastructure, community trust, and regulatory clarity, would keep pace.

Several clear starting points emerged to address these challenges. Community college aviation programs need OEM curriculum partnerships to close the gap between traditional Airframe and Powerplant training and the high-voltage, electric propulsion systems entering service. Airports need electrical master plans that account for AAM charging alongside existing electrification demands, and they need to start those conversations with utilities now. Vertiport developers are not going to commit capital without demonstrated operator demand, but the preparation work, including zoning, master plan updates, and utility engagement, can and should happen before a developer is at the table.

By the time the 2027 LIFT Summit convenes, a number of this year's projections will have become operational realities. The first eIPP flight operations are expected to have taken place. Part 108 and Part 146 will likely be finalized or near finalization. The first Weather Automated Data Service Providers under Part 146 may be certified. What was discussed as a near-term possibility this year will require honest assessment next year. What worked? What didn't? What can the rest of the country learn from the states and regions that moved first? There will be no shortage of material to work with when the industry reconvenes in Monterey for LIFT 2027.

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