Virginia Flight Information Exchange Key to Future of UAS and Advanced Air Mobility

Richmond, Virginia — The Unmanned Aerial Systems industry has been clear that the #1 factor holding back growth is a lack of clarity. Through FAA programs like Data Exchange and UAS Service Suppliers (USSes), the federal government is meeting its commitments to support the industry with regulations addressing operations in controlled airspace. Now, Virginia is helping to provide clarity at the state and local levels.

The Virginia Department of Aviation (DOAV), together with its partners at the Unmanned Systems Center at the Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation (VIPC), the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), and Virginia-based small business ATA LLC, is pleased to report the continued success of the Virginia Flight Information Exchange (VA-FIX).

"We do not believe that industry is looking for states to implement new regulations; what they are seeking is for states to facilitate consistent information and to make it easy for the industry to know what the 'ground rules' are," said Greg Campbell, director of the DOAV. "This is why the industry is enthusiastically supportive of VA-FIX and other measures the Commonwealth is taking to spur the advancement of Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) and the growth of the drone industry while ensuring the skies remain both safe and open."

In Virginia, state and local agencies are laying out advisories around incident responses, HAZMAT, search & rescue, critical and sensitive infrastructure, public safety facilities, obstructions, and ground hazards to help pilots avoid risky areas and breaking the law. The VA-FIX shared governance model, including the FIX User Group, brings together diverse stakeholders from across the Commonwealth to work out issues of information sharing and ground space configurations.

Dr. Amber L. Wilson, DOAV's manager of aviation technology, said, "The result is the clarification of many gray areas in UAS without having to change the law or regulations; enhancing the FAA UTM concept; and providing clearer, higher-quality information to the UAS industry."

The proof is in the data. Virginia's willingness to try this has driven strong results. With just over a year in production, the VA-FIX capability has more than 100 government users representing 41 state and local government agencies that have published more than 2,500 permanent and temporary advisories.

-more-

Tracy Tynan, director of the Virginia Unmanned Systems Center at the VIPC, said, "We are proud to be working with UAS industry leaders from across the Commonwealth and the nation. By collaborating with companies like DroneUp, ATA, Google Wing, Verizon Skyward, and Virginia Institute for Space and Autonomy (VISA), as well as federal partners including FAA, DHS, and NASA, we are impacting the future of this industry. All of these relationships are a reflection of the willingness of Virginia to embrace the development of the unmanned systems industry and the jobs it has and will produce. By working together, we reflect the maturity, clarity, and readiness for industry growth that is needed for the future."

There continues to be a role for the integration of advanced technology and other technical capabilities by enhancing and leveraging VA-FIX as an authoritative source of state and local data and a hub for information sharing. The partners envision an integrated "Data Fabric" that creates a next-generation public infrastructure that will enable participants in UTM to take advantage of a set of common, free, authoritative, government data with the Commonwealth of Virginia operating as the "honest broker." This could include vehicle manufacturers who wish to integrate these data feeds into safety systems; USS/UTM providers who will integrate the data into value-added products for pilots, operators, and air traffic management; and UAS and AAM pilots who will use the data to improve the safety and efficiency of unmanned operations.

-end-

The Department of Aviation's mission is to:
- Develop an advanced aviation system that is safe, secure, and fosters economic development;
- Build an appreciation by the public for the importance of aviation and to inspire the next generation of aviation professionals; and
- Provide safe and highly efficient flight services for the Commonwealth's leadership and state agencies.

_____
_____