UBER HIRES NASA AIRCRAFT ENGINEER TO HELP DEVELOP FLYING CARS AT UBER ELEVATE

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Uber is making moves to expand the scope of its flying car experiment – the company just hired NASA engineer Mark Moore, who worked at the federal agency as an advanced aircraft engineer and basically kickstarted the current interest in vertical take-off and landing craft for short-haul urban flight with a 2010 paper on the feasibility of the helicopter-like vehicles. Moore will act as Director of Engineering at Uber Elevate, which is what the ride-hailing company calls its exploration of airborne on-demand drives.

Hiring Moore on came after the NASA veteran consulted on Uber's recent white paper on VTOL craft, according to Bloomberg. The engineer was impressed by Uber's work on the subject, and saw a chance to make the vision he'd originally articulated years ago into something real, in a reasonable time scale. Moore said that key to his decision to join Uber was that the company seemed to have a practical business case for making a flying commuter transit service real – and nothing would ever get done without market motivation behind the vision.

Uber has articulated its vision for "on-demand aviation" as networks of small vehicles that can take off and land vertically, are powered by electric sources, and have ranges of between 50 and 100

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miles on a single charge. The ultimate goal is to have these operate autonomously, summoned via an app on a passenger's phone, but in the near-term Moore tells Bloomberg that we'll probably see a bunch of competing designs hit the field that operate well but with human pilots for now.

VTOL are a pursuit of other companies, too, including two startup funded by Google's Larry Page, and commercial aviation giant Airbus, which is exploring similar territory to Uber with its own Vahana project. The appeal of the service is not only the ability to ease congestion and bypass ground traffic, but also to eventually achieve cost efficiencies that could make VTOL taxis more profitable over the long-term.

Uber's Elevate is far from offering us actual on-demand airborne taxis service, but Uber is serious about pursuing the tech, and will look to host a summit of those interested in the field to help coordinate efforts to achieve practical VTOL transit sometime early this year.

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