FLYING TAXIS BRISBANE 2032—OLYMPIC DREAM OR REALITY?

Date: 22 January 2025

Australia Transport & Logistics Alert

Over the next eight years as elite athletes train with their eyes on winning gold at the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Brisbane, there is another Olympic dream that edges closer to reality—that of flying taxis transporting competitors and spectators around South East Queensland to Olympic venues.

It was hoped that a small fleet of flying taxis would make their Olympic debut at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Unfortunately, flying taxis 'missed the flight' in Paris as there were delays in obtaining the requisite air safety certifications from the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) in time for the Games. Nevertheless, a test flight was carried out on the last day of the 2024 Olympics over Versailles palace, carrying luggage but no people.[1]

Now air taxi manufacturers have turned their hopes towards the Los Angeles Games in 2028.[2] In a positive step forward, in October 2024, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued a final rule for operating air taxis and how pilots will be trained to fly them.[3] If flying taxis are successfully integrated into the airways for the Los Angeles Games, then in a further four years' time, they could play an important role at the Brisbane Games.

Flying taxis could assist in managing congestion, with the *RACQ Red Spot Congestion Survey 2023* raising concerns about how Queensland roads would cope in 2032.[4] Flying taxis could also support Queensland's tourism industry to allow fast access to regions from Brisbane. The recent *Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games Arrangements and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2024* inserted a new requirement on the Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority that the Games deliver legacy benefits for all of Queensland, including regional areas.[5]

The last few months of 2024 have seen flying taxis progress further towards becoming a reality at the Brisbane Olympics:

- In November 2024, it was announced that Archerfield Airport Corporation (AAC) and Wisk Aero had signed a Strategic Alliance Agreement to support electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft (eVTOL) air taxis at Archerfield Airport, Queensland. AAC Executive General Manager Rod Parry said at the time that the airport was uniquely well-placed to service the emerging advanced air mobility (AAM) sector given "*Archerfield's central location only 11 kilometres from Brisbane's CBD and between three 2032 Olympic and Paralympic zones.*" He further noted that "*By the time of Brisbane's Olympic Games, eVTOLs will likely be providing essential emissions-free transport services from vertiports around the region, keeping traffic off our busy roads and ensuring the efficient transfer of personnel to key sites throughout South East Queensland.*"[6]

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- November 2024 also saw AMSL Aero announce that it had completed the first free flight of Vertiia, its passenger-capable, emission-free, long range eVTOL aircraft. The flight was heralded a landmark as it was the first made by an Australian-designed and built eVTOL.[7]
- In December 2024, it was reported that three Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) senior certification engineers had travelled to Santa Cruz, California, to look at how the FAA and Joby Aviation (Joby) are working together to certify the company's eVTOL Advanced Air Mobility aircraft, the JAS4-1. Joby has applied for the aircraft to be certified by CASA for use in Australia. CASA is collaborating with other aviation authorities on standardising type certification of AAM aircraft.[8]
- Also in December 2024, CASA issued its updated 'RPAS and AAM Strategic Regulatory Roadmap' which charts a path for safely integrating remotely piloted aircraft systems and advanced air mobility into Australian airspace and the future regulatory program.[9]

Over the last three years since it was announced that Brisbane would host the 2032 Games, a lot of conjecture has focused on the location of the stadium. Whichever venue is ultimately selected, to deliver an Olympic legacy that will be fit for purpose for years to come, the stadium and indeed any new infrastructure built for the Games like new hotels and transport hubs, will need to incorporate vertiports and other facilities to cater for flying taxis as they become a way of life in the future.

There is a complex web of Australian laws that govern the innovative technologies of AAM, including flying taxis. AAM operations fall within the domain of regulation by CASA to ensure aviation safety under the *Civil Aviation Safety Act 1988* (Cth) and the *Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1988* (Cth).

Beyond CASA requirements, AAM operations and their vertiports are also governed by a broad but fragmented system of different pieces of legislation ranging from town planning to environmental, privacy, safety, property damage, personal injury and radio-communications.

We have extensive experience in assisting clients comply with CASA requirements and advising on the rapidly evolving legal framework that governs AAM operations.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Caroline Petrow-Cohen, 'Aviation startup seeks to bring air taxis to Los Angeles in time for Olympics', *Los Angeles Times* (online, 26 September 2024) https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2024-09-26/startup-seeks-to-bring-air-taxis-to-los-angeles

[2] Jack Daleo, 'Air Taxis Missed Paris Olympics Goal – Could They Soar in LA?', *Flying* (12 August 2024) https://www.flyingmag.com/modern/air-taxis-missed-paris-olympics-goal-could-they-soar-in-la/

[3] The Associated Press, 'Flying air taxis move closer to US takeofff with issuing of FAA rule', *AP* (online, 23 October 2024) https://apnews.com/article/faa-air-taxis-regulation-electric-aviation-85fd3c8b905a003eff64590afb5da339

[4] Rebecca Borg, 'Making things difficult: New survey finds QLD roads aren't match fit for 2032 Olympics', *News.com.au* (2 July 2023) https://www.news.com.au/national/queensland/news/making-things-difficult-new-

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survey-finds-qld-roads-arent-match-fit-for-2032-olympics/news-story/d2c63c828589679cb3772156dcb637be

[5] S.53AE(b) *Brisbane Olympics and Paralympics Games Arrangements Act 2021* (Qld)

[6] 'Archerfield Airport and Wisk Aero Sign Strategic Agreement', Archerfield Airport News (21 November 2024) https://archerfieldairport.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Archerfield-Airport-and-Wisk-Aero-Sign-Strategic-Agreement-1.pdf

[7] 'AMSL Aero Makes Aviation History by Completing Landmark Free Flight of Zero-Emissions Aircraft "Vertiia", AMSL Aero (18 November 2024) https://www.amslaero.com/news/landmark-free-flight

[8] Civil Aviation Safety Authority, 'Collaboration on advanced air mobility' (3 December 2024) https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/collaboration-advanced-air-mobility-umytc/?trackingId=WNO26%2BqGI0SQocvEDS44RA%3D%3D

[9] Civil Aviation Safety Authority, 'Our updated RPAS and AMM Strategic Regulatory Roadmap is now available' (11 December 2024) https://www.linkedin.com/company/civil-aviation-safety-authority-casa-/posts/?feedView=all

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