



SHE'S HELPING BUILD THE FUTURE OF FLIGHT— AND JUST TOOK IT FOR A SPIN

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BY TRACY IDELL HAMILTON

When Kara Hill lifted off in an electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft (eVTOL) recently, she wasn't just checking something off her bucket list.

For Hill, Port San Antonio's Director of Strategic Projects, the flight in LIFT Aircraft's HEXA — an electric powered, single seat, multi-rotor ultralight aircraft — was a hands-on look at a technology the Port is helping bring to life: advanced air mobility, or AAM.



AAM is an umbrella term for a rapidly evolving spectrum of new electric and hybrid aircraft that take off and land vertically or on very short non-traditional runways. Some are drone-like passenger vehicles while others resemble small planes. Together, these aircraft present new options for moving goods and people faster, more efficiently and potentially more sustainably within cities and beyond.

It's still a new concept for most people, says Hill, who, as part of her job, often speaks with community groups about AAM.

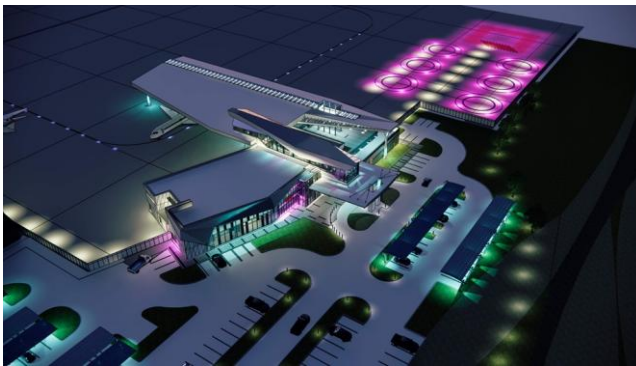
"I get more comments than questions," she said. "Most people tell me, 'I had no idea this was even a thing.'"

AAM is not only real, it's already a fast-growing industry, spanning everything from package-delivering drones that are already being used in some communities to short haul cargo flights and eventually, air taxis that will carry people across short and medium distances.

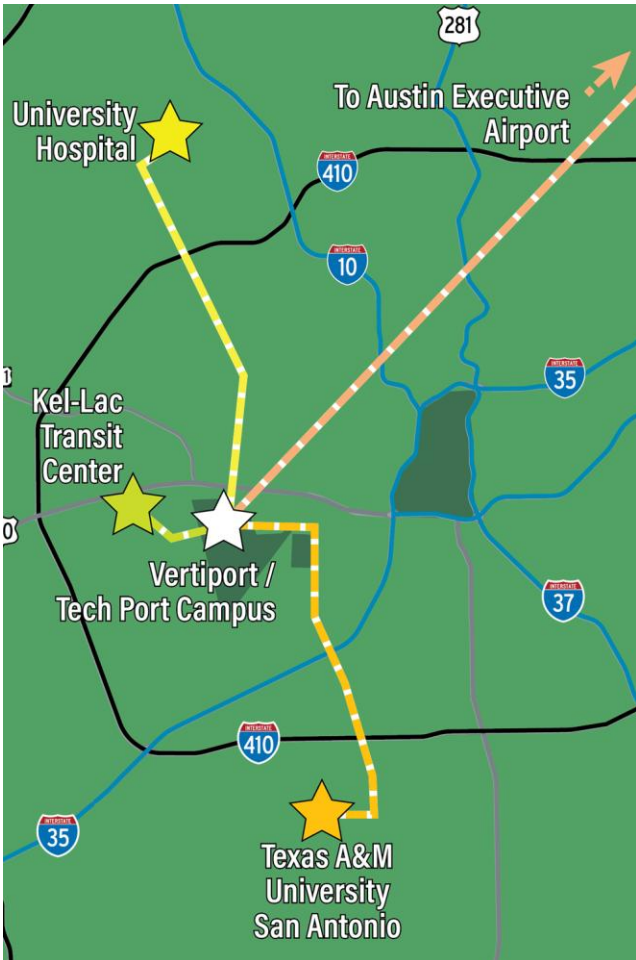
One of Hill's key roles is helping turn these emerging technologies into real projects. That means advancing the Port's efforts to build partnerships with the private- and public-sector stakeholders which are developing new aircraft safety systems and the necessary regulations.

The Port is also working to build one of the nation's first vertiports on the Tech Port campus next to Kelly Field. The vertiport will include specialized landing pads, electric chargers and other infrastructure to support





Rendering of Port San Antonio vertiport. Credit: Port San Antonio.



Port San Antonio has developed several potential eVTOL test routes from its Tech Port campus.

eVTOLs. Earlier this year the Port proposed test routes across the region for various use cases for AAM, such as internal campus logistics, mass transit commuting and support for medical airlift or other emergency operations.

Hill shares this progress to help people understand what's coming and why it matters. So it was natural for her to turn her recent flight into a teaching tool, weaving video of the experience into a presentation at Urban Land Institute San Antonio's IdeaFest, where local transportation, planning, and real estate leaders could get a glimpse of what this new mode of travel might look like.

"Seeing our own team members experience these aircraft helps people understand that this isn't science fiction—it's happening now," said Port San Antonio President and CEO Jim Perschbach. "Demonstrations like this make advanced air mobility real and show how valuable AAM will be in the very near future."

AAM developers consistently tell Hill that Port San Antonio offers something unusually valuable. "The number one piece of feedback we've gotten from industry is that the Port is a uniquely attractive site, because it integrates military and civilian operations and airspace," she says. That mix is rare and important for companies testing new aircraft and the systems that will manage them to ensure efficiency and safety.

The Port's broader ecosystem matters, too. "People really find value in our approach — building a community that brings together cyber, aerospace, workforce development and other partners. They feel it's an advantage to their business and will help them grow," Hill says.

AAM companies are innovating quickly, often backed by significant private investment, but many are still small and scaling. Access to talent, research partners, and real-world testing conditions can make a critical difference in successfully developing, deploying and scaling.

While there is still work ahead for the Port and partners, Hill's flight underscored that the technology is real,



happening now, and getting closer. For Hill and her colleagues, it's another step toward raising San Antonio's profile as a global hub for the next era of air travel."

Video credit: Sam Fernandez / Tapi Studio

Image credits: Philip Williamson / Port San Antonio