



NEXT PHASE OF CAELUS PROJECT LAUNCHES - UK FIRST MEDICAL DELIVERY DRONE NETWORK

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A consortium led by AGS Airports in partnership with NHS Scotland to deliver what will be the UK first medical distribution network using drones has launched its next phase. CAELUS (Care & Equity – Healthcare Logistics UAS Scotland), secured £10.1 million funding from the Future Flight Challenge at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) last month. To celebrate, consortium members, stakeholders and politicians gathered at Glasgow Airport for the official launch and to hear more details of the project timelines and work so far. Scottish Government Public Health Minister Maree Todd provided the key note speech at the event which had a number of exhibitions on show from partners.

CAELUS brings together 16 partners including the University of Strathclyde, NATS, NHS Scotland and Skyports. Together they are working to deliver what will be the first national drone network that can transport essential medicines, bloods and other medical supplies throughout Scotland including to remote communities.

Since securing £1.5 million in January 2020, the CAELUS consortium has designed drone landing stations for NHS sites across Scotland and developed a virtual model (digital twin) of the proposed delivery network which connects hospitals, pathology laboratories, distribution centres and GP surgeries across Scotland.



NHS Scotland has said it will bring its “Once for Scotland” approach to the project, the second phase of which will involve live flight trials and removing remaining barriers to safely using drones at scale within Scotland’s airspace.

Fiona Smith, AGS Airports Group Head of Aerodrome Strategy and CAELUS Project Director, said: “We were delighted when we heard we were receiving the £10.1m funding from UKRI to move onto the next phase of the project.

“The CAELUS project is set to revolutionise the way in which healthcare services are delivered in Scotland. A drones network can ensure critical medical supplies can be delivered more efficiently, it can reduce waiting times for test results and, more importantly, it can provide equity of care between urban and remote rural communities.”

“As well as being able to undertake live flights we can begin to deploy the physical infrastructure needed to support the drones across Scotland. This will involve building prototype landing bases as well as digital and communication infrastructure. We will also work with local communities to ensure they understand why and how the drones will be used.”



Live flight trials will be operated by CAELUS consortium member Skyports. The UK-based drone services provider is an experienced operator of medical and dangerous goods cargo flights. The company was instrumental to early trial flights with NHS Scotland in 2020 and 2021, flying over 14,000km in the region to date.

NHS Grampian's Program Lead for Innovation, Hazel Dempsey, said: " We are incredibly excited to be the lead board for this high-end innovative project.

"Our aim, from an NHS perspective, is to test the use of drone technology in urban, remote, rural and island landscapes. We want to test if using drones to will improve important aspects of our logistics service, for example, to test the transportation of laboratory samples, blood products, chemotherapy, and medicine delivery. Ultimately, we want to explore if drone technology can speed up diagnosis and treatment of medical problems. This has the potential to improve services for those whose care is dependent on rail, ferry or airline timetables and help keep people at home where they can be supported by families and loved ones. This project intends to position the United Kingdom and NHS Scotland as a leader in the third revolution in the aviation industry."

David Lowe, National Clinical Director for Innovation added: "This national, exciting 'next stage' programme of work builds on the success of CAELUS 1 launch which focused on the West of Scotland."

Alex Brown, Director, Skyports Drone Services said: "Over the last four years, we've launched projects throughout Scotland which demonstrate the benefits that drone interventions can provide to individuals and communities – even in the hardest to reach areas. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we flew thousands of kilometers to deliver critical pathology samples for the NHS, helping countless patients receive their diagnoses and treatments faster. The CAELUS project is the next step in these critical trials to demonstrate the feasibility of drone services and pave the way for the launch of permanent drone delivery operations for the NHS."



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