

SCOTLAND FIRST DRONE PORT & NHS TAYSIDE BEGIN DRONE DELIVERY TRIALS

News / Manufacturer



A new on-demand drone collection and delivery service is being trialled in Angus by Scotland's first drone port, Mercury Drone Ports and NHS Tayside. The new Beyond Visual Line of Sight trials will transport medical equipment, samples and medicine via an unmanned aircraft to and from multiple healthcare facilities between Angus and Dundee. This environmentally friendly drone delivery service will allow vital samples to be collected from local medical practices for analysis at the pathology laboratory at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee quicker and more reliably than current transport alternatives.

Establishing Angus as a centre of excellence for the development of drone technologies in Scotland, Mercury Drone Ports is providing a trials airspace area to support drone companies and end users conduct onshore and offshore drone flight trials.

Receiving funding from the UK Government's £26.5 million Angus Fund, as part of the Tay Cities Region Deal, Mercury Drone Ports is a public-private partnership between Angus Council and DTLX, supported by a number of local and national businesses.

Angus Council leader, Councilor Beth Whiteside, said: "By working with NHS Tayside with the introduction of an on-demand, eco-friendly, drone transportation service we hope to play our part in transforming the health system in Angus. The hope is to demonstrate the benefits this form of transportation can bring, for example, potentially reducing testing times and speeding up diagnoses for patients.

"We are delighted to be able to lead the way through using innovative technologies to increase connectivity with our rural facilities, whilst reducing our carbon footprint as we begin to tackle the climate emergency with a green infrastructure first approach."

Chris Hind, Diagnostics Laboratories Interim Quality Manager at NHS Tayside, said, "NHS Tayside is delighted to be part of this drone delivery trial. This project will benefit our understanding of future opportunities to develop and improve our supply chain and help resilience in response to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This trial will be used to test a fast and frequent drone transport service for a range of pathology samples.

"NHS Tayside plans to extend phlebotomy testing hours at some regional medical practices. We are very interested in testing additional logistical support to transport patient samples, which would permit samples to be taken at later times than currently possible for delivery to the main testing lab at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee.

"We believe a drone delivery service will help to improve diagnostic sample transport times across Angus and other rural areas, helping NHS Tayside to provide an equitable level of healthcare, regardless of a patient's geographical location.

"This also has the potential to be a more efficient, cost effective and lower carbon means of increasing capacity whilst improving provision in the region."

The drone flights will be operated by Skyports Drone Services, a UK based company which has conducted multiple drone delivery projects across Scotland, including the country's first medical drone delivery trials in 2019.

Skyports Flight Operations Manager, Alistair Skitmore, said: "Our work with Mercury Drone Ports in Angus represents an exciting step towards realising permanent drone operations across Scotland. The Skyports Drone Services team is excited to get back to work operating trial flights across the region to demonstrate the role that eVTOL drones can play in facilitating a more sustainable, efficient, and connected future. During our eight weeks of flight trials we'll be demonstrating a range of drone use cases, including the delivery of medical equipment for NHS Tayside and survey operations for Angus Council. Our objective with these flights is to highlight the vast benefits and use cases for drone operations to regulators, government, and local communities."

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Malcolm Offord, said: "It's fantastic to see the drone trials starting, taking us a step closer to using this quick and eco-friendly way of connecting rural patients to essential health services like medicine and sample deliveries.

“The UK Government is spending more than £2 billion levelling up communities across Scotland, and investing £26.5million in projects in Angus. The start of today's trials show just how important that investment is, with the Mercury Drone Port pioneering technology while reducing carbon emissions and bringing in new jobs and investment.”

Mercury Drone Ports will be based within the ZeroFour Hub, a partnership between Angus Council and Crown Estate Scotland, which currently has planning permission in principle for a mixed-use business park. The new hub along with the drone port, forms part of Angus Council's long-term plans to drive sustainable development, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve energy efficiency and create renewable solutions for transportation and energy across Angus and the wider Tay Cities region.

30 SEPTEMBER 2022

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