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Vertical Flight Society Announces 2021-2022 Student Design Competition

University students are challenged with designing electric air taxis that accommodate passengers with reduced mobility; \$12,500 in cash and prizes

FAIRFAX, Virginia, USA — The Vertical Flight Society today announces that the request for proposal (RFP) for its 39th Annual Student Design Competition (SDC) has been published. The 2021-2022 competition challenges students to design an electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft that accommodates passengers with a broad spectrum of mobility difficulties or other disabilities for urban air mobility (UAM) missions.

The competition, entitled, “eVTOL Air Taxi for Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM),” is sponsored this year by Bell, and is open to students at universities worldwide. This year’s RFP and past years winning entries are posted on the VFS website at www.vtol.org/sdc. A total of \$12,500 in cash prizes are available to the winning undergraduate and graduate teams.

“Some \$10B has been invested in eVTOL developments over the past six years, with nearly half of that coming just this year,” said Mike Hirschberg, VFS Executive Director. “eVTOL air taxis can provide safe, quiet, affordable, clean solutions for metropolitan transportation needs, so they must be usable by the widest possible segment of the population.”

Albert G. Brand, Bell’s Senior Technical Fellow for Flight Technology and the company’s lead for this year’s competition, noted: “As an emerging industry, it is not too early to anticipate the greater needs of our society where it comes to eVTOL transportation. We need to recognize the needs of travelers with reduced mobility and factor that in our designs.”

In developing this RFP, VFS partnered with UK charitable organization Aerobility, which offers disabled people the opportunity to fly an airplane. “Aerobility is pleased to partner with VFS on this student design competition,” said Mike Miller-Smith, CEO of Aerobility. “The opportunity to encourage tomorrow’s designers to consider accessibility at the birth of a new transport mode is very exciting. One can only imagine how different air travel today would be for people with disabilities if this had been done at the birth of commercial aviation. We’re delighted to do our bit in helping Urban Air Mobility get it right, from the outset.”

The Vertical Flight Society encourages universities from around the world to form teams and take part in this exciting and challenging competition, which is conducted to attract the best and brightest engineering students to the vertical flight industry.

Two members of the first-place winning undergraduate and graduate teams are invited to the 79th Annual Forum & Technology Display — planned for May 13-15, 2023 in West Palm Beach, Florida USA — to present the details of their designs.

The Annual Student Design Competition sponsorship rotates between Airbus, The Boeing Company, Bell, Leonardo Helicopters, Sikorsky Aircraft and the US Army Research Lab.

The Vertical Flight Society is the world's premier vertical flight technical society. Since it was founded as the American Helicopter Society in 1943, the Society has been a major force in the advancement of vertical flight. VFS is the global resource for information on vertical flight technology. For more than 75 years, it has provided global leadership for scientific, technical, educational and legislative initiatives that advance the state of the art of vertical flight.

The Vertical Flight Society

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