**Current state of aviation in the region**

Powered by the region's two commercial airports, North Texas' aviation infrastructure is serving more travelers than ever. DFW Airport processed a staggering 88 million passengers in 2024, according to its website. As the third-busiest airport in the world by passenger traffic, DFW remains a critical hub for both domestic and international travel.

Meanwhile, Dallas Love Field is holding its ground as a popular low-cost carrier base. For calendar year 2024, the airport served approximately 16.3 million passengers, according to its website.

Our region comprises more than 700 aerospace companies employing over 100,000 people. Major employers include Lockheed Martin and Bell Flight, which account for over 15,000 jobs in the area.

**The impact of air cargo**

Shipping cargo by air is essential for the economic growth in a region without access to a water port, as it provides shippers with the ability to reach inland markets more quickly and efficiently. DFW Airport, Alliance Airport and Love Field benefit the region's economy by providing scheduled air cargo operations.

Several of the region's general aviation airports aid businesses by allowing shippers to provide critical just-in-time cargo shipments to their customers. While the major cargo airports provide most of the region's air cargo service, the smaller general aviation airports make the seamless flow of goods to and from the region possible.

International air freight in North Texas serves as a major gateway for air cargo to Asia, with 48% of international air cargo flying on trans-Pacific routes to and from Dallas-Fort Worth. DFW's central U.S. location makes it both an attractive e-commerce hub and the hub of transit freight between Latin America and Asia. This growth is expected to continue in the future, with Boeing predicting air cargo operations between North America and Asia will grow 4.4% per year by 2041.

**Drones and the future of advanced air mobility**

Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS), more commonly known as drones, have emerged with developing technology for a variety of civilian and commercial uses. In North Texas, interest in drone technology has continued to grow, supported by regional planning efforts and educational outreach.

As interest increases, drone safety is a crucial focus of NCTCOG and the region. The North Texas UAS Safety and Integration Task Force leads efforts to educate operators, reduce

reckless flying and align practice with state and federal requirements. Additionally, programs like the "Know Before You Fly Your Drone" workshop are available online as a free resource for anyone interested in learning more about drone flying, best practices and rules and regulations.

In May, NCTCOG, in partnership with the City of Arlington, completed a drone and autonomous vehicle food delivery pilot, delivering over 300 grocery boxes to Arlington residents. Funded by a U.S. Department of Energy grant, the two-year program used electric air and ground robots, aiming to reduce emissions and improve grocery access across the city. The results of this pilot will help shape future drone and autonomous delivery systems across the region, paving the way for smarter, energy efficient transportation solutions.

The recent announcement of the Texas A&M University System's Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies (CAAT) marks a significant milestone in the region's evolution in aviation innovation. Located in Fort Worth, the CAAT will serve as a leading center for the research and safe integration of emerging aviation technologies, including drones, air taxis and other advanced unmanned systems.