

BUSINESS

Failure to launch: Don't expect to take flying taxis to the World Cup after Arlington's plan delayed

by James Hartley | KERA News
December 1, 2025 10:20 am



Donate



Arlington intended to partner with Overair, an eVTOL startup, to supply the company's Butterfly aircraft for air taxi operations in the city. City leaders say Overair hasn't communicated with them, so finding another manufacturer will create another obstacle to launching flying taxis. (Courtesy image | Overair)

Arlington won't have flying taxis in time for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, as city leaders had hoped last year.

Arlington Mayor Jim Ross first announced the city was partnering with a startup with the hopes of making Arlington the first American city with advanced air mobility during his state of the city address in October

2024.

“Theoretically, when it’s all done and we expect it to be done **for the World Cup in 2026**, you can be flying these air taxis right into the Entertainment District,” Ross said during the address.

But a year later, Ross and other experts say that won’t happen.

This is due to a combination of factors, but the biggest obstacle is Federal Aviation Administration regulations that haven’t been completed.

Still, Ross told KERA News in a recent interview, Arlington hasn’t given up on being among the first in the country to have flying taxis.

Those taxis would be eVTOL aircraft – electronic vertical take-off and landing. The vehicle would be powered by an electric motor instead of a combustion engine and would take off and land the same way as a helicopter.

Not ready for the World Cup

While the air taxis won’t be ready to **move people in time for the World Cup**, Ross said it’s not unreasonable to expect at least one of them to be in the skies over the Arlington Entertainment District in what the mayor referred to as a World’s Fair type demo.

Ernest Huffman agrees.

The aviation planning and education program coordinator for the North Central Texas Council of Governments, Huffman’s job includes researching new forms of air travel often called advanced air mobility.

The millions of visitors expected in North Texas for the World Cup wouldn’t be able to hop on an eVTOL and fly to the games, but Huffman said it could still benefit the region.



The Arlington Entertainment District includes the National Medal of Honor Museum, Texas Live!, Choctaw Stadium and Globe Life Field. (Yfat Yossifor | KERA)

“We’ve been trying to do an advanced air mobility demonstration type day for the World Cup games,” Huffman told KERA News. “This just gets us more momentum and more leverage to do so. And we can use that demo event for our kickoff for our EIPP piloting program.”

Even that’s not certain, though, Huffman said. The FAA has pushed back the launch of eVTOL programs in the past and he wouldn’t be surprised if it happened again.

NCTCOG and Arlington are making preparations, though, so they can be ready if an aircraft has the necessary approval to conduct the demonstration.

Uncertain timeline

Alicia Winkelblech, Arlington’s director of transportation, said it could be 2027 when the first manufacturers of air taxis get FAA certification to move people.

But that’s not the only thing for planners to think about for this project. For Arlington, a part of the journey will be finding a new manufacturer.

Overair, the original partner, had a memorandum of understanding with Arlington, saying that the company intended to produce its aircraft in the city and would be the provider for Arlington's air taxi fleet. When everything was in place with regulations and planning, the city and company intended to enter into a contract to provide the aircraft.



Arlington hoped to have the Butterfly, an eVTOL aircraft designed by Overair, in its skies by the 2026 FIFA World Cup – but the city has been left to search for another manufacturer. (Courtesy photo | Overair)

But Overair was bought by competitor Archer Aviation in August, according to a news release from Archer Aviation. The company acquired Overair's patents and key employees, and Winkelblech said the city hasn't heard from anyone with Overair since.

The Overair website says it is under construction and will be “available soon.” Another company would be brought in to operate the eVTOLs, Winkelblech said.

While all of that is in progress, Winkelblech said the city is still researching ways to **integrate air taxis** into the city's transit ecosystem.

Huffman's timeline isn't quite as optimistic, but isn't terribly far off.

Huffman said the earliest, most realistic scenario for commercially operated air taxis is likely 2028, when Los Angeles will be home to the summer Olympics.

“If I were to guess, I would say around 2028, around Olympics time, you’ll probably see some commercial operations,” Huffman said. “You’ll see some real small operations, probably in Florida, a New York operation.”

He said there could even be an operation in North Texas by then, but it would likely be one single route.

Jinzhu Yu, a civil engineering **professor who studies advanced air mobility** like eVTOL taxis, doesn’t have as much faith in the FAA’s ability to wrap up certification by then.

He’s not comfortable giving any timeline at all, but said there’s a good chance the first flying taxis won’t be operated in the US at all.

The first city might not be American

Yu said the front runner might be the United Arab Emirates, “because of their economy, their position, they’re probably taking bigger steps.”

The potential air taxi clientele of the UAE could be one advantage, he said. When thinking about the success of new technology, especially something with the costs and safety questions that come with a new form of air travel, early adopters will likely be bigger earners.

Tourists are also more likely to spend that kind of money, Yu said. The UAE gets enough wealthy tourists to make operations viable not only from a safety standpoint but also an economic one.

Yu said China is also a contender to be the first country, but that the country could also position itself to be second – learning from the successes and mistakes of the first country and giving Chinese air taxis a better chance at success.

Of course, safety will be the biggest factor.

Yu said manufacturers, operators and regulating agencies alike will place major importance on making the aircraft safe. In addition to concerns about human life, he said anyone involved in ushering in an era of advanced air mobility also realizes that a single crash or other safety incident could push back adoption of the technology by decades.

It's those safety measures he said could result in a longer wait for the rollout of the first air taxis than others expect.

Still looking toward takeoff

However long it takes, Ross said he wants Arlington to be one of the first cities to host eVTOL operations.

“We have always been a city that sort of leads the way when it comes to innovation,” Ross said.

He pointed to the city's subsidized rideshare as an example. Arlington On-Demand, also known as Via, acts as the city's primary form of public transportation. It works like an Uber or Lyft, with riders calling the vehicle, except that riders could be in the vehicle with other customers and are dropped off within two blocks of a destination instead of at the front door.

On-demand public transit has spread across DFW, with cities like Grand Prairie running its own operations and both DART and Trinity Metro having similar options.

Ross said eVTOL is the clear next innovation for Arlington to embrace. He wants the city to have at least two stops: one at Arlington Municipal Airport and another in the entertainment district.

Much of the infrastructure needed isn't expected to be as expensive as with normal transportation. Flying taxis would need a place to park and charge, known as a vertiport, and a place to land at destinations, a vertipad.

The city would put its vertiport at the airport, acting as a place to store and charge as well as pick up and drop off passengers. The vertipad would go in the entertainment district, a simple place to land and board or disembark customers that wouldn't look very different from a helipad used by helicopters.



Arlington Municipal Airport is five miles south of Arlington in Tarrant County. (Emily Nava | KERA News)

Yu, whose research done in partnership with NCTCOG put a focus on the locations for this infrastructure, said the first vertiport will likely be at DFW Airport and the first vertipads at city centers.

Arlington could still have a vertipad at the entertainment district and a vertiport at the Arlington airport, but it may be difficult to maintain both economically, Yu said.

Flying taxis will have a high economic bar to entry – likely in the neighborhood of \$5 per passenger mile, similar to an Uber Black, the company's priciest offering that puts riders in luxury vehicles,

He said they'll also mostly be the typical early adopters of new technology. They'll be people who seek out new tech because it excites them, have the money to spend on higher early costs and be willing to take risks with an innovation that involves going up into the sky.

Yu isn't saying for certain that Arlington wouldn't be able to make it work economically, but that city leaders should expect to face some challenges associated with low demand. A vertipad in the city center may be a better option in many places, but with the number of visitors to the entertainment district he said it could be a viable location, he said.

Huffman said no matter the timeline, North Texas is poised to play a significant role.

Texas A&M's campus in Fort Worth was recently selected as home of the **Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies**.

Huffman said the center will conduct research related to flying taxis and other innovations in air travel, ensuring North Texas is on the radar for eVTOL. The designation was granted by Congress and comes with \$35 million annually to help with research.

“Hopefully they’ll establish some vertiports around the Metroplex where they’ll be researching the different use cases, the different aircraft types, charging infrastructure, things of that nature,” Huffman said.

For Ross, flying taxis are a part of Arlington’s future, no matter how long it takes to get all the necessary regulations and approvals sorted.

The aircraft will start off piloted but, after a few years, are expected to transition into autonomous flight.

“When that technology meets the demand and we’re able to move people along efficiently without crowding up the roadways,” Ross said, “that would be really cool.”