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U.S. DOT selects North Dakota DOT for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration Pilot Program

Program will build on strengths of NDDOT, Northern Plains UAS Test Site and partners to bring new technology, jobs and business to North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. (May 9, 2018) – U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao today announced that the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) has been selected as one of 10 participants in the Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Integration Pilot Program, an initiative aimed at shaping the future of drones in America.

“We are looking forward to helping today’s winners unlock the enormous potential of drone operations, which will create new services and jobs in their local communities,” Secretary Chao said.

The three-year Drone Integration Pilot Program will enable agencies to work on policy that can safely advance UAS operations, including beyond visual line of sight, flights over people and night operations. As the lead applicant and program manager in North Dakota, the NDDOT will work with partners and stakeholders from across the state including the Northern Plains UAS Test Site in Grand Forks and city, state and tribal agencies.

“Today’s announcement further cements North Dakota’s position as a national leader in transportation and UAS advancement,” Gov. Doug Burgum said. “We are deeply grateful to Secretary Chao and the U.S. DOT for choosing North Dakota to participate in this program, which will bring new technology, jobs and business to our state.”

Lt. Gov. Brent Sanford, who chairs the Northern Plains Unmanned Systems Authority, said the NDDOT and the Northern Plains UAS Test Site – one of only six test sites chosen by the FAA to conduct research on how to safely integrate UAS into the national airspace – will use their

strong connections with private and public stakeholders to collaborate on additional avenues of exploration for UAS use.

“North Dakota is unique in that we were able to come together with one voice to help lead the nation in drone integration,” Sanford said. “This collaboration allows us to develop policy that will one day serve as a blueprint for the rest of the country.”

“This innovative technology will enhance our state in many areas,” NDDOT Director Tom Sorel said. “Our transportation system in North Dakota represents a sandbox for UAS ideas and applications. We have just opened the door to a new era of technology that will revolutionize the way we do business, and we welcome all our partners to walk through that door with us.”

“With this Pilot Program, we also will be able create new avenues to enhance safety on our roadways and help first responders keep our citizens safe during emergencies,” Sorel added. “It will allow us to explore new uses for unmanned aircraft, such as monitoring critical infrastructure and working with law enforcement and emergency services to speed up response times during events such as flooding, blizzards and finding missing persons.”

The UAS Integration Pilot Program is an opportunity for state, local and tribal governments to partner with private sector entities, such as UAS operators or manufacturers, to accelerate safe UAS integration.

The Pilot Program is expected to foster a meaningful dialogue on the balance between local and national interests related to UAS integration, and provide actionable information to the U.S. Department of Transportation regarding the expanded and universal integration of UAS into the National Airspace System.

The program will allow local and state governments to:

- Obtain expedited FAA approval for airspace authorizations for specific operations.
- Work closely with private sector partners on advanced commercial drone operations and applications of technology.
- Inform standard operational procedures.
- Demonstrate technical and operational solutions that reduce the need for waivers.
- Incorporate community participation to provoke meaningful dialogue relative to drone operations.

More information related to the UAS Integration Pilot Program can be found at https://www.faa.gov/uas/programs_partnerships/uas_integration_pilot_program/splash/.