NORTHERN PLAINS UAS TEST SITE

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North Dakota's Statewide UAS BVLOS Network Beginning Key Site Implementation

GRAND FORKS, N.D. – The Northern Plains UAS Test Site (NPUASTS) has begun the initial stages of implementing infrastructure for North Dakota's statewide Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) network. The key site location chosen for this initial deployment of the BVLOS network is in the surrounding areas of Watford City and Williston, ND, due to the proximity of many potential use cases and existing state and local government infrastructure that can be leveraged for this deployment.

"We're excited to begin the first stage of building this network in western North Dakota. It is ideally located in the heart of North Dakota's oil and gas industry and covers a population center that will directly benefit from the network," said Nicholas Flom, executive director of NPUASTS. "This means that even the very first stage of the network will be commercially viable."

L3Harris Technologies and Thales USA, two leading aviation companies, have been selected to build out this baseline key site infrastructure. This infrastructure will enable BVLOS flights in McKenzie and Williams counties – with additional locations rolling out after the key site has been validated.

"As a leader in air traffic management, surveillance, and mission critical communication technologies, L3Harris is excited to work with North Dakota to build an aviation-grade solution that integrates UAS into the national airspace system," said George Kirov, vice president and general manager, Commercial UAS Solutions at L3Harris. "The technologies we pioneered for beyond-visual-line-of-sight operations will expand the role of UAS for North Dakota and will help improve air safety, increase efficiency, reduce the cost of commercial data acquisition, and support the growth of drone commerce."

"The state of North Dakota's Statewide BVLOS Network is truly the first of its kind," said Todd Donovan, vice president of air traffic management at Thales USA. "This robust network, that safely and securely integrates UAS into the national airspace, will serve as an enviable model and be the catalyst for broader commercial UAS operations for years to come as it relies on a complete solution that addresses the FAA's safety risk management process."

Key site implementation is beginning immediately and will include extensive verification and validation system testing in coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Ensuring the safety and reliability of the network is essential as it will guide future improvements as the network is built out.

“System testing of the network is absolutely necessary for safety, and it will also allow us to perform use-case development flights to set the standard requirements for any aircraft seeking to fly on the network,” said Jim Cieplak, program manager of the statewide network. “Constantly checking for efficacy also means being prudent with the state’s investment. We are making sure the very best iteration of this technology is what we implement."

About the Northern Plains UAS Test Site

The Northern Plains UAS Test Site (NPUASTS) is one of seven Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) test sites in the nation. Its mission is to collaborate with FAA and industry partners to develop systems, rules, and procedures to safely integrate unmanned aircraft into the National Airspace System without negatively impacting existing general or commercial aviation.

About L3Harris Technologies

L3Harris Technologies is an agile global aerospace and defense technology innovator, delivering end-to-end solutions that meet customers’ mission-critical needs. The company provides advanced defense and commercial technologies across air, land, sea, space and cyber domains. L3Harris has approximately $18 billion in annual revenue and 48,000 employees, with customers in more than 100 countries.

About Thales USA

Thales is a global technology leader shaping the world of tomorrow today. The Group provides solutions, services and products to customers in the aeronautics, space, transport, digital identity and security, and defense markets. With 83,000 employees in 68 countries, Thales generated sales of $21.3 billion in 2019 (on a pro forma basis including Gemalto over 12 months). In the United States, Thales has conducted significant research and development, manufacturing, and service capabilities for more than 100 years. Today, Thales is present in 22 states, operating 46 different facilities and employing nearly 5,000 people. Working closely with U.S. customers and local partners, Thales is able to meet the most complex requirements for every operating environment. Thales investments and technologies focus on digital innovations – connectivity, Big Data, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity – to support businesses, organizations and governments in their decisive moments.