



**NASAO
CENTER**

for Aviation Research
and Education



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Policy Harmonization Across the States

AAM MULTISTATE COLLABORATIVE

MEMBERS OF THE COLLABORATIVE



ABOUT THE NASAO CENTER

The National Association of State Aviation Officials (NASAO) established its Center for Aviation Research and Education (C.A.R.E) in 1986, a nonprofit organization (501(c)(3)) that seeks to enhance state roles in the future of the national air transportation system. Through its relationship with NASAO and the states, this organization is uniquely situated to collect, analyze, and disseminate state-focused information on the aviation industry and the National Airspace System. The Center also provides educational opportunities aimed at youth and educators, fostering enthusiasm for the diverse careers found within the industry.



An early meeting of the multistate collaborative, hosted in July, 2024 in Oregon. (Photo by Kenji Sugahara)

ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE

The NASAO AAM Multi-state Collaborative is an initiative of state government agencies or instrumentalities focused on the role of states in the development and integration of Advanced Air Mobility into the US National Airspace System. The Collaborative serves as a forum for states to discuss state-level policies and infrastructure needed to support AAM operations, with expert contributions from a variety of private sector stakeholders across this growing sector of the aviation industry.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy harmonization between states and relevant federal and standards entities is vital for cohesive governance and successful integration of Advanced Air Mobility (AAM).

- **Why it matters:** As AAM technologies accelerate, inconsistent policies across jurisdictions could hinder safety, mobility, and economic opportunity. With aircraft operating across state lines in shared airspace, a coordinated approach is vital.
- **What's missing today:** The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) oversees airspace and aircraft certification, but gaps remain in areas under state and local control—such as land use, facility licensing, and multimodal integration. Without alignment, states risk duplicative efforts, public confusion, and regulatory conflict.
- **What states can do:** By coming together to establish shared priorities, model policies, and implementation strategies, states can streamline governance, support safe deployment, build public trust and ensure national interoperability. This paper outlines where consensus exists and how states can lead, collaborate, and contribute meaningfully to the national AAM landscape.

Defining Policy Harmonization

Policy harmonization refers to the alignment of state, local, and federal frameworks to support shared regional mobility needs, including AAM. It involves standardizing regulations, fostering intergovernmental collaboration, and aligning legislation through model laws and synchronized updates. As aircraft operate in shared airspace and across state lines, harmonization ensures consistent policies that promote mobility, interstate commerce, and equitable airspace access. It also enables scalable operations and provides operators with consistent expectations across jurisdictions. Early collaboration is critical to support interoperability, land use compatibility, and minimum service levels for intermodal systems.

This paper identifies key areas where states can lead—including infrastructure licensing, operational standards, and regulatory alignment—with input from local, tribal, and industry stakeholders. The Collaborative is well-positioned to share best practices, define staffing and governance models, standardize terminology, and support community engagement—moving states toward a cohesive AAM future.

Stakeholder Landscape

States serve as a critical connector between federal and local stakeholders, uniquely positioned to convene municipalities, utilities, airports, and municipal planning organizations (MPOs). A broad mix of actors influences aviation policy alignment, and active engagement across these groups is essential. By fostering collaboration, this group can balance federal, state, industry, and public interests—advancing policies that support all stakeholders and enable industry growth. Key stakeholders include:

- **Local Stakeholders:** Municipalities, urban planners, and communities for safety, zoning, permitting, and integration.
- **State Stakeholders:** Departments of Transportation (DOTs), MPOs, Airport Commissions, legislatures, utility commissions, and planning agencies to align transportation and economic goals.
- **Tribal Stakeholders:** Sovereign tribal nations and inter-tribal organizations to ensure cultural, environmental, and access considerations.
- **Federal Stakeholders:** FAA, United States DOT, Transportation Security Administration (TSA), Department of Energy (DOE), Department of Commerce (DOC) for regulation, safety, funding, and international standards.
- **Industry Stakeholders:** Manufacturers, operators, public interest groups, and standards bodies to ensure innovation is safe, sustainable, and community aligned.

Key Policy Areas Under State Purview

States are critical to enabling AAM by aligning infrastructure, regulations, and workforce strategies with local priorities. Through clear regulatory language, guidance to municipalities, and coordination with federal partners, states can ensure AAM delivers both community benefits and statewide value. While each state must work within its legal and constitutional framework, the Collaborative has identified two primary areas within state purview:

1. Land Use, Safety, and Regulatory Standards

States can provide zoning and siting guidance, establish licensing protocols, and promote safety standards that build public trust. While local authorities control land use, state-level consistency supports safe and predictable integration.

2. System Planning and Operational Policies

Integrating AAM into transportation and aviation plans ensures that infrastructure, funding, and service levels support multimodal connectivity. Coordination with the FAA and streamlined operator policies—such as registration and permitting—will help establish a cohesive regulatory environment.

Land Use, Safety, and Regulatory Standards

Land use compatibility near airports and heliports has long been a concern—heightened by increasing urbanization and housing demand. Residential developments near airports often expose communities to noise, emissions, and operational impacts. These same concerns now apply to siting new vertical lift infrastructure, including vertiports, drone ports, and short take-off and landing (STOL) facilities. While some FAA and state policies address airport land use compatibility, vertiport-specific guidance is still emerging.

In most states, land use permitting falls to local governments, with varying support from state agencies. State environmental and natural resource departments enforce environmental regulations, while local planning agencies oversee zoning, permitting, and community development. Regional commissions may also help coordinate cross-jurisdictional planning. However, many local entities lack familiarity with aviation infrastructure, making state-level education, guidance, and technical support essential. States can look to existing models—such as California’s land use compatibility guidelines—for inspiration.

Lessons Learned from Past Infrastructure Deployment:

- Interstate construction disproportionately harmed disadvantaged communities.
- Post-construction litigation related to noise has imposed costly burdens on airports.
- Multimodal and intermodal planning has often been insufficient, reducing the utility of new infrastructure.
- Equity and access considerations have been inconsistently applied.
- Environmental and air quality impacts have sometimes lacked clear state and federal guidance.

Key Considerations for Siting New Facilities (Vertiport, Drone Port, STOL):

- Adherence to FAA engineering briefs, advisory circulars, and applicable technical standards.
- Application of existing airport and heliport land use compatibility frameworks.
- Evaluation of surrounding land use sensitivities (residential, commercial, industrial).
 - Use of risk-based zoning and safety buffers.
 - Consideration of approach/departure corridors and noise impacts.
- Support for “complete trip” planning, including first- and last-mile access.
- Equity in site selection and mitigation of potential community burdens.
- Strong intermodal and multimodal connectivity to enhance value and access.
- Adequate utility infrastructure, including power availability.
- Drone ports require similar evaluation, though with smaller footprints and unique operational profiles.

Finally, consistent operator and facility licensing—modeled on traditional aviation approaches—can simplify compliance and reduce complexity for operators working across states. State DOTs should explore uniform licensing standards for vertiports and drone ports to support safe and scalable integration.

State Transportation System Planning and Aviation System Planning

Planning Integration and Interoperability

Aviation planning must align with state transportation goals to ensure interoperability. States should harmonize terminology, metrics, and infrastructure strategies to create seamless AAM integration. Regional collaboration will strengthen infrastructure placement, policy alignment, and resource sharing.

State Considerations Include:

- Harmonize aviation system plans and airport master plans.
- Coordinate airport improvements with FAA standards.
- Standardize private landing site requirements.
- Adopt model service levels and licensing policies.

- Explore sustainable funding mechanisms such as user fees, infrastructure financing, and public-private partnerships (P3s).

Registration and Licensing

Some states already register and license aircraft and operators. Expanding these frameworks for AAM can improve safety, oversight, and cross-border consistency.

Airport Integration

State collaboration with the FAA is essential to integrate vertiports at existing airports. This includes:

- Aligning with federal infrastructure requirements.
- Leveraging funding opportunities and exploring sustainable funding models.
- Supporting seamless operational transitions for AAM.

ACTION ITEMS

States should act now—alongside federal, local, tribal, and industry partners—to coordinate policy frameworks, close regulatory gaps, and build infrastructure-ready environments.

Through this collaboration, states can:

- Establish shared principles and model legislation.
- Align planning efforts and infrastructure priorities.
- Create consistent licensing, registration, and planning protocols.
- Promote equity, safety, and intermodal integration.
- Engage communities and industry early and often.



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