

Return of the airship - this time for cargo



It has the vertical takeoff and landing capability of helicopters, the range and cargo capacity of airplanes and fuel consumption benefits of lighter-than-air vehicles.

The Aeroscraft is being developed by planemaker Aeros and will serve military, commercial and humanitarian efforts. It will revolutionise cargo logistics, especially for over-sized payloads, and can carry 66 tonnes.

The Aeroscraft vehicle compresses helium into large storage tanks to become heavier

than air. The helium is released back into the vehicles' envelope to become lighter-than-air.

This innovative control of static heaviness (COSH) system means an Aeroscraft can provide precise cargo deployment from hover, free from the need for existing infrastructure or ground personnel. The aircraft was developed to provide new ways of moving heavy and oversized cargo from point-of-origin to point-of-need. Its makers point out that the Aeroscraft is not a blimp.
 - CNA Staff

Behemoth airline created

American Airlines emerged from bankruptcy protection and US Airways culminated its long pursuit of a merger partner as the two completed their deal last week to create the world's biggest airline.

It's the latest in a series of mergers that will leave four airlines controlling more than 80 percent of the US market - American, United, Delta and Southwest Airlines.

American's old parent, AMR Corp, is gone, replaced by the new American Airlines Group.

Whether the deal leads to higher ticket prices, the issue at the heart of legal challenges from the government and consumer groups, remains to be seen.

Fury as CEO pay doubled

EasyJet founder Stelios Haji-Ioannou has denounced the airline's directors as "City insiders enriching themselves without taking any risk" after chief executive Carolyn McCall (below) almost doubled her pay to US\$10.45 million in 2013.



Around \$6.86 million of her overall pay was in shares that will be released to her in March 2014. She was also paid \$1.88 million cash and shares bonus.

A easyJet spokesman said McCall's rewards reflected a surging share price and performance over the past three years. Annual profit rose 51 percent to \$780.28 million over the 12 months to September 30.

Haji-Ioannou, the largest shareholder in the airline, has been a long-standing critic of the

board since relinquishing control of the carrier.

He said: "Although the share price has gone up roughly three times since this management took over, their take home pay has multiplied 20 to 30 times."

"A nice job if you can get the other directors to vote for it. Yet another case of City insiders enriching themselves without taking any risk."

Boeing's 777x wish list

In search of a new home for its latest long-range aircraft, the 777x, Boeing is looking for land, transportation access, a huge factory - and above all plenty of tax breaks.

It sent out this request to at least a dozen states across the country. It lays out two scenarios: one in which a 777x jet would be assembled entirely within a 4.2-million sq ft factory, and another that would require two buildings, one for the plane's new carbon wing and a facility where the fuselage and the finished product would be assembled.

Boeing wants a site adjacent to an airport with a 9,000-ft runway to launch the planes, as well as easy access to a major highway and rail lines for parts deliveries.

Boeing wants the land at no cost, or very low cost, and the state to pick up the tab for the new facilities, along with infrastructure improvements and new training programmes to churn out high-skilled mechanics required to build the jets.

And finally Boeing wants the "entire applicable tax structure including corporate income tax, franchise tax, property tax, sales/use tax, business licence/gross receipts tax and excise taxes to be significantly reduced".

A tall order? No. The 777x project would bring tens of thousands of jobs and billions in economic activity to the state that gets the assembly line.

Several states have already been dangling

enticing carrots to lure Boeing. So far, Washington is leading. It has approved sweeteners valued at US\$8.7 billion over 16 years.



Drones versus droids

Following the revelation that Amazon is developing autonomous flying delivery drones (above), Google said that it is developing humanoid robots that could one day carry groceries to your door.

Google executive Andy Rubin has overseen the firm's acquisition of seven small companies whose combined technology could be used to create a robot with animal-like characteristics.

The companies acquired include a start-up that has developed digital eyes and robot arms for use in loading trucks; a company that produces caster wheels that can swivel in any direction; and a Japanese firm, whose robots generate as much power as a human and have mastered stable biped walking to cope with uneven ground.

Internet retailer Amazon says its drone delivery system can get packages to customers in half an hour or less. In a video it showed mages of a Prime Air test flight, where a shopper buys an Amazon item, which is then placed into a shipping container and picked up at the end of a conveyor belt by a drone. The drone then takes off and soars over a field before depositing the

package outside the online shopper's doorstep.

But Prime Air needs to await clearance from the Federal Aviation Administration, so it could be years before its drones become available for commercial use.

Fed helps trains chug along

The US rail industry boasts that it spends billions of dollars improving its infrastructure "so taxpayers don't have to".

But its ads don't tell everything. The nation's freight rail network has been the quiet recipient of more than US\$600 million in federal investment during the Obama administration.

The public money has built new overpasses to separate trains from one another, as well as from cars and trucks. The investments have replaced ageing bridges, laid new track and upgraded signal systems. They've paid to enlarge tunnels and raise bridges so shipping containers may be double-stacked. They've built new facilities where cargo containers can be transferred from trucks to trains, or vice versa.

Supporters say these investments will help take trucks off crowded highways, reduce pollution and improve the flow of goods.

But others wonder whether an industry that boasts about how little it depends on taxpayers really needs the extra help.

First paperless flight

Swiss logistics giant Panalpina launched the first paperless flight recently during a US-Europe round trip. The flight was from Huntsville airport in Alabama, US, to Luxembourg.

Panalpina uses its own controlled modern 747-8 freighter planes, to operate several paperless port-to-port services with final destination in Europe, Hong Kong and the US.

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