NCDOT Division of Aviation Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Planning Program Overview

Second Round (FY26-27)

Program Background

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) envisions a comprehensive transportation system that embodies safety, sustainability, efficiency, resilience, and accessibility for all residents. With North Carolina's population projected to grow from 10 million to 14 million by 2050,[1] the resulting increase in demand on transportation infrastructure will require innovative and strategic approaches to ensure continued accessibility, efficiency, and resilience across the system. Advanced mobility innovations offer promising solutions to meet these evolving needs.

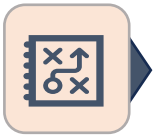
By harnessing the collaborative efforts of NCDOT's Aviation, Integrated Mobility, and Rail divisions, Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) technology emerges as a transformative force to enhance accessibility and connectivity for both people and freight across the state. Comprising a suite of emerging aviation technologies, AAM has the potential to support critical services, complement existing transportation systems, and act as an economic catalyst. As AAM gains momentum, it can attract investment and expand mobility options across the State.

To ensure these benefits are realized, regional planning organizations are encouraged to integrate AAM into long-term planning efforts, laying the groundwork for thoughtful implementation, mitigating potential impacts, and maximizing public value across mobility, public service, and economic development goals. In support of this vision, NCDOT has established the Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Planning Program, a statewide initiative designed to help regional planning organizations explore and prepare for the integration of these technologies into future transportation planning efforts.



Source: N.C. Department of Transportation Advanced Mobility NC (2024)

Benefits of AAM Planning



Strategic Alignment: AAM planning helps communities define their vision and goals, ensuring alignment with broader mobility priorities and readiness for future funding and implementation.



Stakeholder Alignment: AAM planning fosters collaboration among agencies, industry, research institutions, and other partners, building a shared foundation for innovation and investment.



Community Responsiveness: Public engagement ensures AAM solutions reflect local needs and values, building trust and support for new mobility options.



Economic Development Potential: AAM planning helps regions attract investment, grow the workforce, and unlock new opportunities in aviation, logistics, and related sectors.



Implementation Readiness: Early planning helps communities identify infrastructure, regulatory, and funding needs, laying the groundwork for future deployment and integration into multimodal networks.

Program Funding Overview

As part of its ongoing commitment to innovation and regional planning, the NCDOT Division of Aviation is continuing a second round of the Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Planning Program into FY 2026-2027. With up to **$750,000** in consultant-supported planning assistance available, this initiative empowers regional planning organizations (RPOs, MPOs, and COGs) to explore and prepare for the integration of AAM technologies into their transportation planning. To maximize the impact of these resources while fostering local investment and commitment, the Division of Aviation will cover 90% of eligible costs, with applicants required to provide a 10% cash match.

The AAM Planning Program is intended to fund the development of **comprehensive regional AAM plans** or the enhancement of existing multimodal plans that advance statewide AAM goals. Planning documents should address the following:

Planning Element	Description
Community Benefits of AAM	How AAM enhances mobility, safety, public health, economic opportunity, and sustainability. Consider broader impacts on accessibility and quality of life.
Existing Conditions	Assessment of current transportation infrastructure, land use, and mobility patterns. Include key safety, connectivity, and environmental concerns, demographics and policies affecting AAM planning.

Planning Element	Description
Needs Assessment & Use-Case Alignment	Evaluation of unmet mobility needs and alignment of AAM use-cases with regional planning priorities.
High-level Site Analysis	Analysis of land use compatibility and infrastructure needs to support AAM operations, including existing facilities and planning for new sites like landing areas (vertiports) and charging stations, with attention to community integration.
Multi-modal Integration Planning	Identification of opportunities to connect AAM with other transportation modes through intermodal facilities, mobility hubs, and coordinated cargo movement.
Policy and Regulation Alignment	Review of existing policies and regulations to support safe and effective AAM operations, including zoning, vertiport siting criteria, and airspace coordination. Incorporates best practices and planning standards.
Outreach & Public Engagement	Development of a public engagement strategy, including stakeholder interviews, steering committee coordination, and outreach to engage all communities that inform AAM planning.
Recommended System Plan	Development of conceptual AAM system plan, including priority corridors, proposed facilities, and short and long-term implementation opportunities.
Implementation Plan	Outline of action steps, lead partners, funding opportunities, and timelines to support AAM deployment, including short-term priorities, a phased approach, and design guidance resources.

Note: *For additional information about AAM technologies, applications, and benefits, please refer to the Appendix.*

Who the Program is for

The following North Carolina entities are encouraged to apply for AAM planning program funding:

- **Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)**
- **Rural Planning Organization (RPO)**
- **Council of Government (COG)**

Applications may include a consortium of multiple applicants as defined above for regional planning purposes. If neighboring planning organizations wish to file a joint application, please select one primary applicant and use the indicated box on the application to list additional local partners.

How to Apply

To apply, applicants must complete the AAM Planning Program online application form. In the form, please indicate the proposed “not to exceed” project cost, the local match amount, and the source of matching funds. The submission deadline for FY 2026-2027 is Friday **June 26, 2026**.

There is no minimum or maximum funding amount that applicants may request; however, similar projects range from $150,000 to $300,000.

Criteria

Applicants should demonstrate a foundational understanding of advanced air mobility and how it may address existing needs within their region. The online application will ask for the applicant to communicate a clear intent to integrate AAM planning into long-term land use, transportation, and/or multimodal strategies.

The following criteria will be requested in the online application:

Proposal Element	Description
Planning Context Statement	Summarize regional transportation challenges and opportunities that make your area a strong candidate for AAM planning.
Local Commitment & Capacity	Describe your organization's support for the planning process, including staff, coordination, and data sharing.
Regional Coordination	Identify partner organizations and explain how regional collaboration will be facilitated.
Planning Integration Intent	Explain how the AAM plan will be incorporated into existing or future regional planning efforts.

Applicants must also meet the program's requirement to provide a 10% local cash match. Local participation cannot be fulfilled through in-kind services. NCDOT provided state funds to potential applicants cannot be used as a local cash match. However, funds secured from other state agencies, organizations, or businesses may be used.

Note: *Proposals demonstrating a higher match may be viewed more favorably as a sign of stronger commitment and investment in AAM planning.*

Additionally, applications must include a cover letter and a letter of commitment at the time of submission (to be uploaded in the online form). A scope of work will be developed post-award for selected projects; therefore, an initial scope of work is not required as part of the application. **Please submit only the required documents as part of the online application**.

Selection Process

The NCDOT Division of Aviation staff will perform an initial review of all proposals to ensure completeness and general appropriateness. This review includes consultation with other NCDOT staff and professionals experienced in AAM plan development, administration, and implementation.

Proposals will be evaluated based on their overall merit, alignment with program goals and demonstrated readiness to support and integrate AAM planning. Selection of applicants will be based on a competitive review process. However, efforts will also be made to award funding not

only based on the merit of the proposal, but also to achieve statewide geographic distribution.

NCDOT will select eligible proposals and assign a Division of Aviation on-call consultant team to collaborate with applicants in developing customized AAM planning documents. Project funding will be administered through on-call limited-service contracts (LSCs) between NCDOT and the selected consultants.

When to Expect Funding

After award notifications are issued, NCDOT will announce the selected program participants and coordinate with them to select a consultant through its on-call LSC. Each participant will finalize a scope of work with the consultant team and then receive a municipal agreement from the NCDOT Division of Aviation. This agreement outlines responsibilities, terms, and deliverables.

The planning process begins once the agreement is executed and a Notice to Proceed (NTP) is issued to the consultant. **Applicants must provide the required 10% local cash match to NCDOT prior to the Notice to Proceed being issued.**

Note: *Funds must be spent within two years of receipt.*

Division of Aviation Planning Support

The successful implementation and integration of AAM relies on a statewide collaborative approach, bolstered by the comprehensive support of the NCDOT Division of Aviation. Accordingly, the AAM Program includes **technical guidance, and peer exchanges**, and/or **workshops** with NCDOT Division of Aviation to foster knowledge sharing and establish best practices. This multifaceted support ensures a robust foundation for AAM's realization.

Deliverables

Participants/consultants are required to submit quarterly progress reports throughout the duration of the project. Upon project completion, a comprehensive AAM Planning document must be completed. For additional details, participants can refer to the AAM Planning Program Content Standards.

Helpful Resources

NCDOT has developed the *Advanced Mobility NC Plan*, a comprehensive statewide Mobility Plan that incorporates AAM considerations. This strategic plan provides essential insights into AAM technologies and infrastructure, serving as a framework for addressing AAM planning. Additionally, applicants can refer to the following critical resources:

- American Planning Association (APA): *Planning for Advanced Air Mobility* (2024)
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA): *Advanced Air Mobility Implementation Plan* (2023)
- FAA: *Advanced Air Mobility National Strategy* (2025)

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA): *Advanced Air Mobility Community Integration Considerations Playbook* (2023)

Endnotes

[1] Office of State Budget and Management. (2022). NC's population to reach 14.0 million by 2050. https://www.osbm.nc.gov/blog/2022/12/30/ncs-population-reach-140-million-2050

Appendix A: AAM Aircraft & Concepts

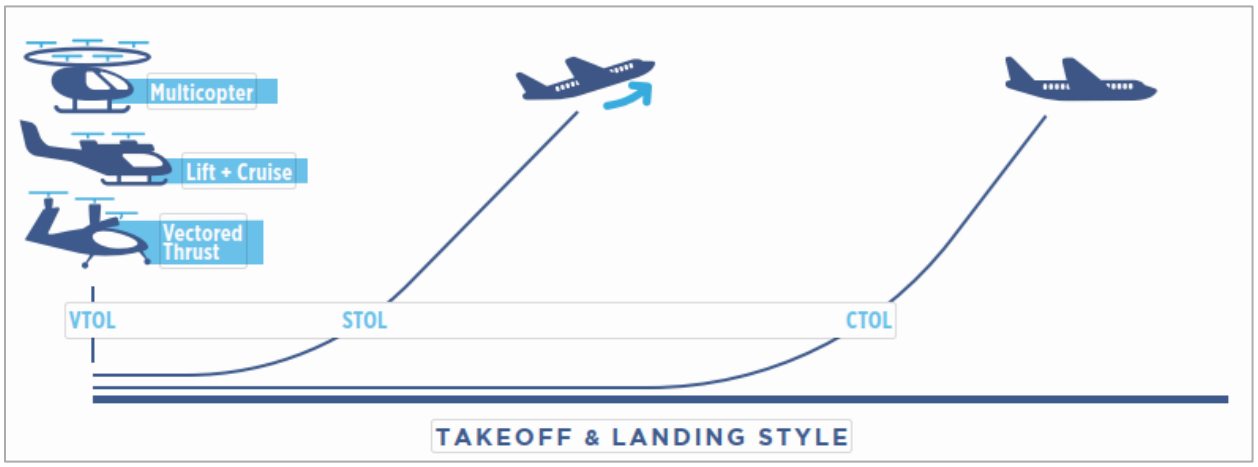
What is AAM?

Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) is a new approach to transporting people and goods, particularly in areas not served or underserved by traditional aviation. It represents a shift in transportation, leveraging emerging technologies such as electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, autonomous systems, and connected infrastructure to enhance mobility. Together, these innovations have the potential to make air travel more accessible, efficient, and sustainable as part of a broader, integrated transportation system.

Types of AAM aircraft

Small Uncrewed Aircraft Systems **(sUAS/Drones)**	Electric Vertical Take off & Landing **(eVTOL)**	Electric Short take off & Landing **(eSTOL)**	Electric Conventional Take off & Landing **(eCTOL)**

AAM Aircraft vary in how they take-off and land – from vertical lift such as to short or conventional runway operations – supporting a wide range of potential applications and use-cases across different environments and community needs.



AAM Modalities & Enabling Infrastructure

AAM is not just about innovative aircraft, it's about building a connected transportation system that integrates new aviation technologies into existing and future mobility networks. AAM includes several operational models and supporting systems as highlighted in the table below.

AAM Component	Description
Urban Air Mobility (UAM)	Transporting of passengers and cargo within cities using electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, helping bypass traffic congestion and improve access.
Regional Air Mobility (RAM)	Connecting suburbs, small towns, rural areas, and remote communities, including those separated by water or terrain, to larger transportation hubs.
Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS)	Includes remotely piloted or autonomous aircraft such as small drones (sUAS), electric conventional takeoff and landing vehicles (eCTOLs), and eVTOLs. These systems support cargo delivery, public services, and data collection.
Infrastructure	May begin with underutilized existing infrastructure including but not limited to small airports and/or heliports. As operations scale new infrastructure may be needed including: • **Vertiports** for vertical takeoff and landing aircraft • **Charging stations** for electric aircraft • **Maintenance hubs** for servicing and operations • **Digital infrastructure** such as Uncrewed Aircraft System Traffic Management (UTM), to support automated flight coordination

AAM Applications

There are various potential applications for AAM, ranging from passenger transport and emergency response to cargo delivery and infrastructure inspection. The graphic below highlights several of these applications, illustrating how AAM can support regional mobility goals, enhance multimodal connectivity, and prove a wide range of public benefits.



Appendix B: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Planning Program

North Carolina Department of Transportation
Division of Aviation

FAQ

Program Purpose & Eligibility

What is the purpose of the AAM Planning Program?
The AAM Planning Program is intended to facilitate the development of regional AAM Plans that assess how AAM may best be integrated into communities. The goal is to encourage planning organizations such as Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs), and Council of Governments (COGs) to draft high level planning documents that assess the integration of AAM and its potential benefits.

Can multiple agencies apply for funding?
Yes, applications may be submitted by a consortium of eligible entities for regional planning purposes. One organization must serve as the lead applicant and list its partners in the application.

Can airports apply for program funding?
No, airports are not eligible to apply directly. Only MPOs, RPOs, and COGs are eligible to serve as lead applicants. However, airports are encouraged to collaborate with their regional MPO, RPO, or COG to participate as partners in the planning process.

Can municipalities apply directly for funding?
No. Municipalities are not eligible to apply directly for AAM Planning Program funding. Only MPOs, RPOs, and COGs may serve as lead applicants. Municipalities interested in participating should coordinate with their regional planning organization.

Can private sector entities and non-profits be involved in projects?
Yes, while private entities cannot apply directly, they may participate as partners or stakeholders in the planning process. Their involvement can enhance regional coordination and provide valuable insights into industry trends and infrastructure needs

Funding & Match Requirements

Is there a local match requirement?
Yes, applicants must provide a minimum 10% local cash match. Proposals offering a higher match may be viewed more favorably as a sign of stronger commitment and investment in AAM planning. Local match funds must be provided to NCDOT prior to the notice to proceed (NTP) being issued.

Can in-kind services be used for a local match?
No, the local match must be a cash contribution. In-kind services are not eligible.

Can other funds be used for the local cash match?
Yes, funds from other state or federal agencies, private organizations, or businesses may be used. However, NCDOT-provided state funds cannot be used to fulfill the local match requirement.

Application & Selection Process

How will proposals be selected for funding?
NCDOT Division of Aviation staff will perform an initial review of all applications for completeness and appropriateness. This review includes consultation with other NCDOT staff and professionals experienced in AAM plan development, administration, and implementation.

What are the selection criteria?
Applicants will be evaluated based on:

- Planning context statement
- Local commitment capacity
- Regional coordination
- Planning integration & planning

Is the funding provided on an "all or nothing" basis?
No, there is no fixed maximum or minimum funding amount. NCDOT reserves the right to award partial funding based on available resources and proposal quality.

Can an applicant submit more than one AAM planning project for grant funding?
No, each applicant may submit only one proposal. The final deliverable should be a single, comprehensive regional AAM planning document.
Note: *Joint applicants may only apply once.*

Can funds be used for infrastructure or capital improvements?
No, this program is focused on planning activities only. Capital or infrastructure development, including environmental studies under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), are outside the scope of this planning-focused program and are therefore not eligible for funding.

Can funds be used for feasibility studies?
No, the AAM Planning Program is intended to support early-stage, high-level planning efforts. While feasibility studies are important, they typically follow the development of foundational planning documents. This program focuses on visioning, policy analysis, stakeholder engagement, and integration of AAM into existing transportation and land use frameworks.

Is this funding connected to federal AAM initiatives or funding streams?
While this program is state led, it aligns with federal AAM initiatives and planning guidance. Applicants are encouraged to reference federal resources to ensure consistency and integration.

What type of planning activities are eligible?
Eligible activities include:

- Visioning and goal-setting
- Policy and regulatory analysis
- Stakeholder engagement
- Needs assessments
- Network planning
- Implementation strategies

What does an Advanced Air Mobility plan look like?
AAM Planning Documents should align with NCDOT's broader *Advanced Mobility NC Plan* and resemble traditional planning documents.

Key elements include:
- Vision and goals
- Project background
- AAM benefits
- Existing conditions
- Policy recommendations
- Public and stakeholder engagement
- System plan
- Implementation plan

Additional resources:
- American Planning Association (APA): *Planning for Advanced Air Mobility* (2024)
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA): *Advanced Air Mobility Implementation Plan* (2023)
- USDOT: *Advanced Air Mobility National Strategy* (2025)
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA): *Advanced Air Mobility Community Integration Considerations Playbook* (2023)

Program Administration & Timeline

When will selected applicants receive the funding?
After award notification, NCDOT will coordinate with selected participants to engage a consultant through its on-call Limited Services Contract (LSC) to finalize a scope of work. Each participant will then receive a local agreement from the NCDOT Division of Aviation outlining responsibilities, terms, and deliverables.

What is the time frame for executing Local Agreements between NCDOT and selected applicants?
Local agreements must be executed within three months of receipt.

How long will participants have to complete the plan?
Participants will have two years to complete their project once the NTP has been issued.

Reporting & Support

What are the expectations for reporting and final deliverables?
NCDOT DoA requires participation in peer exchanges, and/or workshops.

What type of assistance is available to local staff preparing an application?
NCDOT Division of Aviation staff are available to answer questions and provide guidance throughout the application process.

For assistance, please contact:

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