CATAPULT Connected Places

Department for Transport

TRIB Drones Workshop:

Barriers and Pathways to Adoption

Summary report

This report presents the outputs of the **TRIB drones: barriers and pathways to adoption workshop**, which aimed to examine the barriers to, and pathways for, drone integration. The workshop brought together National Highways, Network Rail, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, British Transport Police, Transport for West Midlands, Transport for London, Coventry City Council and Somerset District Council. The outputs are intended to inform future cross-sector collaboration opportunities and research activity. The views in this report are those expressed by the attendees and does not represent the views of HM Government.

The workshop was delivered collaboratively by the Transport Research and Innovation Board (TRIB), DfT's Future of Flight team and Connected Places Catapult.

Overview of DfT's Future of Flight Programme

The Department for Transport's (DfT) Future of Flight (FoF) programme is a joint programme between the government, the Civil Aviation Authority and industry and is overseen by the Future of Flight Industry group which is chaired by the Minister of Aviation.

DfT is working closely with FoF members to drive the commercialisation of drones and advanced air mobility (AAM) technologies. This includes supporting routine beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) drone operations by 2027 and piloted electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) operations from 2028.

The development of the UK's Future of Flight ecosystem is central to delivering on the Government's missions, including kickstarting economic growth and delivering opportunities for all and across the country. The programme is ensuring the right policy, regulatory and legislative framework are in place to unlock the social and economic benefits of new and emerging aviation technology.

The challenges identified during the workshop have been aligned with the Future of Flight programme's current and planned work to deliver continuous improvement and sector alignment.

Key insight

A set of known challenges were presented to attendees to validate, refine and rank, then identify possible solutions. The attendees highlighted that the main barriers to adoption are not drone technology, but regulatory pathways, data, procurement and the integration environment around it. The consensus in the workshop is that drone hardware is largely interchangeable; value is driven by data interoperability, regulatory certainty and integration into core operational systems.

Core barriers to cross-ALB (Arms Length Body) collaboration

- **Data fragmentation:** Inconsistent formats, metadata, ownership and access rules prevent data reuse and shared situational awareness.
- **Regulatory and assurance friction:** Joint assurance (e.g. shared SORAs) exists but is not widely reused, leading to duplication, cost and delay.
- **Procurement constraints:** Outdated frameworks, inconsistent risk thresholds and Tier 1 routing increase cost and reduce market access.
- **Operational disconnection:** Drone outputs often sit outside mainstream asset management, incident response and programme workflows, limiting their ability to inform routine decision making.
- **Capability and confidence gaps:** Uneven workforce capability and public/workforce perception slow adoption and scaling.

Pathways to adoption (possible solutions identified by workshop attendees)

Align regulation and assurance

- Shared BVLOS evidence packs and readiness criteria
- Greater reuse of precedent-based assurance
- Earlier alignment with the Civil Aviation Authority

Treat data as the core asset

- Minimum cross-ALB data and interoperability standards
- Clear contractual data ownership and reuse rights
- Clear guidance on how drone data feeds into existing asset management and digital models

Enable procurement at scale

- Proportionate, outcome-based risk assessment guidance
- Shared procurement frameworks or collaborative buying routes
- Consistent benefits metrics to support joint business cases and value for money decisions

Build capability and trust

- Sector-wide competency frameworks and maturity models
- Clear communications and engagement with workforce and unions
- Stronger commercial and procurement capability within ALBs

Recommended next steps (strategic considerations)

Taken together, the workshop discussions point to a small number of practical steps that could accelerate adoption by addressing regulatory, data, procurement and capability barriers.

- Raise the Future of Flight programme's prioritisation across HMG by articulating a clear UK vision for scaling drone use.
- Task ALBs and local authorities to develop and deliver practical deployment initiatives, working with the CAA and industry.
- Focus early activity on regulation, data standards, business-case metrics and procurement enablers, rather than technology trials alone.

Call to action

The findings in this summary point to a clear opportunity for greater cross-ALB coordination. TRIB is invited to consider how these priority challenges could be taken forward through targeted follow-up activity, particularly focused on business case metric standardisation, data standards and procurement approaches, to support effective buy-in proposals as well as scalable and cost-effective deployment of drone-enabled services.