Thales to enable advanced drone operations in North Dakota

- Thales is working jointly with the State of North Dakota to enable Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) UAS operations.
- Thales is integrating surveillance, communications and cloud-hosted traffic management services for a first of its kind safety-oriented, system-of-systems solution.
- Key site implementation will validate infrastructure requirements and procedural needs to ensure routine, safe & secure UAS airspace integration.

Thales has successfully completed the preliminary design review for the key site implementation of Vantis, the statewide unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) network, for BVLOS operations in western North Dakota. Thales will deploy surveillance and communications infrastructure in the greater McKenzie County area as part of the beyond visual line of sight network. The sensors and communications network will support mission and network operations.

The civil drone market is best represented by its huge commercial potential and the millions of new drones that are projected to enter our skies over the next 20 years – moving from a world with tens of thousands of flying objects to one with millions. The resulting complexity in the aviation ecosystem presents significant new challenges to security and safety. This will lead to more stringent registration and identification for UAS being required by civil authorities. Regulatory frameworks will influence how operators plan missions, receive flight approvals and identify and track drones securely.

Thales will integrate new and existing infrastructure into a cloud-based traffic management software as a service (SaaS) platform supporting users at the Vantis mission and network operations center located at the Grand Sky facility near Grand Forks, North Dakota. The Thales TopSky UAS Traffic Management (UTM) platform is a first of its kind, cloud platform blending field-proven air traffic control technologies with national, regional and local data to facilitate real-time situational awareness. Its robust capabilities also support proactive health and status monitoring to deliver the security, resilience, availability, affordability and flexibility required for tomorrow’s advanced aviation applications.
system will benefit users of both public and commercial use cases with the later representing those merchants who want drones to be able to conduct delivery, inspection, and other services.

The company’s global experience as a large-scale systems integrator and its open aviation platform enable Thales to work with leading North Dakota companies and strategic partners, including Airspace Link, Appareo, Botlink, Terma, uAvionix and Verizon Skyward, to deliver the statewide network.

Thales is actively engaged in the operational and technical challenges of UAS integration into the global airspace system. Thales is shaping the UAS industry’s future by leading projects with local, regional and national authorities such as the State of New York, the United States Air Force, FAA (USA), CAAS (Singapore) and DSNA (France) to address the unique challenges presented by new airspace users.

“North Dakota’s Statewide UAS Network, known as Vantis, is truly the first of its kind. This robust network, that safely and securely integrates UAS into the national airspace, will serve as an enviable model and the catalyst for broader commercial UAS operations for years to come as it relies on a complete solution addressing the FAA’s safety risk management process.” Jean Ferré, Vice President of Airspace Mobility Solutions, Thales.

About Thales

Thales (Euronext Paris: HO) is a global high technology leader investing in digital and “deep tech” innovations – connectivity, big data, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and quantum technology – to build a future we can all trust, which is vital to the development of our societies. The company provides solutions, services and products that help its customers – businesses, organisations and states – in the defence, aeronautics, space, transportation and digital identity and security markets to fulfil their critical missions, by placing humans at the heart of the decision-making process.

With 83,000 employees in 68 countries, Thales generated sales of €19 billion in 2019 (on a basis including Gemalto over 12 months).

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