

A Positive Outlook

Nevada and the Autonomous Frontier



Jeremy Aguero, Consultant



NASA researchers and students at the University of Nevada, Reno to perform drone simulations that will be used to develop an air traffic control system for smaller unmanned aircraft.

- In March, Hawthorne was the site of the nation's first package delivery by an autonomous drone in an urban setting. The delivery was conducted by Flirtey, an Australian company researching and developing a drone delivery service in partnership with the University of Nevada, Reno.

Four straight months. Four significant developments. And those don't include the January creation of the Center for Advanced Mobility, a state initiative under the Nevada Institute of Autonomous Systems focused on researching and testing self-driving ground-based vehicles.

These advancements are hardly an accident. When Governor Brian Sandoval took office in 2011, he made development of unmanned aerial systems and autonomous vehicles a priority. With more than 300 sunny days a year, vast unpopulated areas, a history of unmanned military flight operations and more restricted airspace than all other states combined, Nevada had several built-in advantages conducive to the unmanned aerial systems industry. The Federal Aviation Administration agreed, making Nevada one of just six locations where unmanned aerial systems could be flown and tested in 2013. That designation, along with the leadership and guidance from the Governor's Office of Economic Development and the Nevada Institute of Autonomous Systems, has pushed Nevada to the national forefront of testing and developing unmanned aerial systems.

Nevada has also been leading the pack when it comes to autonomous vehicles. In 2011, it became the first state to allow driverless cars on its roadways, which opened the doors to companies, notably Google, to test their vehicles in the state. Since then, automakers Tesla and Faraday Future, which each have self-driving vehicle technology, have moved into the state, and the Center for Advanced Mobility was created to firmly establish Nevada as the national leader for developing, testing and building autonomous vehicles.

In just a short time, Nevada has moved to the forefront of the autonomous vehicle industry, bringing innovation and diversification to an economy that desperately needed them. Thanks to the forward thinking and commitment by leaders in government, education and private industry, the state is poised to solidify its position in the field, thereby attracting (and retaining) more bright minds, more cutting-edge technologies and more economic opportunities to push the envelope of this advanced industry. I don't know what the next big innovation in autonomous systems will be, but I have a feeling that Nevada will somehow be in the middle of it.