



São Paulo could be among the first to offer electric air-taxis

by Andrew Thompson

Canning House Associate Fellow

What happened?

Brazilian airline Gol Linhas Aéreas Inteligentes on 21 September announced a potentially revolutionary deal to buy or lease 250 UK-made electric-powered helicopters to provide a commercial air-taxi service in the city of São Paulo.

The details

São Paulo seems to have been chosen because it is a large, densely populated city with 22mn inhabitants, massive traffic jams, and lots of helicopter and helipads used by the super-rich to get around. Gol is proposing a bold plan to democratise this sector of air travel, offering to take people to and from major city destinations by air, in a quiet and non-polluting manner, and for a price comparable to a present-day ground-based Uber fare.

To make this vision come true the airline has signed a memorandum of understanding with Ireland-based aircraft leasing company Avolon, to use a fleet of 250 electric air taxis. Earlier this year Avolon had itself signed a deal to acquire 500 of them from a UK aerospace company based in Bristol called Vertical Aerospace (VA), for around US\$2bn. This company has been developing a model known as the VA-X4 eVTOL (eVTOL stands for electric vertical take-off and landing).

The aircraft is still under development, but VA says it hopes test flights will begin this year and it will have regulatory approval in the UK and be in production by 2024 or 2025. Gol is also seeking approval from the Brazil civil aviation regulator. The aircraft is designed to carry four passengers and one pilot, and to be used as a taxi, for cargo deliveries, or for medical evacuations. It will have a range of more than 100 miles and speeds of up to 200mph. It is described as being 200 times quieter than a helicopter and, if using renewable electricity sources, will be close



to a zero-carbon form of transport. Dómhnaí Slattery, chief executive of Avolon, told the Financial Times “It’s going to be an absolute disrupter, we’re going to democratise air travel”.

What does it mean?

Many analysts expect electric air taxis to be a major growth sector over the next 5-10 years. If São Paulo can position itself as an early adopter, it is likely that the city and the Brazilian aerospace industry will seize an important competitive advantage.

About the Author

Andrew Thompson

La Rambla Research Ltd.

As well as being a Canning House Associate Fellow, Andrew is a former foreign correspondent (Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro) and a broadcaster for the BBC’s Latin American Service. Working through La Rambla Research Ltd., he writes about economics, political risk, and business in Latin America.



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