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FROM HERE TO THERE: DEVELOPING AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF COMMERCIAL SPACEPORTS

Abstract

A thriving network of international spaceports will one day enable broader international participation in the space economy by providing satellite launch capability, space tourism, point-to-point suborbital travel, and landing sites for orbital reentry vehicles. Within the United States, a growing network of commercial spaceports has been developing for more than a decade and includes capabilities for both vertical and horizontal commercial launches. As more countries evaluate the development of commercial space infrastructure and capabilities, an opportunity exists to collaborate and develop a network of international spaceports similar to the way that aviation cooperation led to a network of international airports. With the continued development of winged, horizontal, reusable launch vehicle systems, it may be easier than ever to develop this network by utilizing existing airport infrastructure to support future commercial space operations. While many commercial launch vehicle operators and spaceport operators have been taking on the technical challenges of spaceport development, there is still a lot of work to be done to address regulatory challenges. Examples include implementing airspace integration, complying with international treaties, and managing export control policies. This research will review the development of the network of commercial spaceports within the United States and identify some of the challenges and opportunities facing the development of an international network of interconnected commercial spaceports. The author has been a leading consultant on multiple proposed commercial spaceports within the United States, Mexico, and the United Kingdom.