COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

Who Addresses Community Impacts, Compatibility, and Public Concerns?

Community governance is where aviation systems intersect most directly with public expectations, local priorities, emergency preparedness, workforce development, quality-of-life concerns, and long-range planning decisions. Unlike aircraft certification, airspace management, or operational rules, many community-facing issues involve overlapping local, state, airport, operator, utility, and public responsibilities. This is often where local governments first begin interacting with Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) in a meaningful way.

For many communities, the first questions are not technical aviation questions. Local officials, residents, planners, and community organizations are more likely to ask:

- What is being proposed?
- Why is this operation being proposed here?
- Who benefits from it?
- What impacts should the community expect?
- How safe is it?
- How will it affect surrounding neighborhoods?
- What role does the local government actually have?
- Who responds if something goes wrong?

These are legitimate public-sector questions, even in areas where aviation authority remains heavily federalized. Community governance does not mean local governments regulate aircraft operations directly. Aircraft certification, navigable airspace, operational rules, and aviation safety oversight remain primarily federal responsibilities. However, local governments still play major roles related to:

- land-use compatibility,
- public engagement,
- emergency preparedness,
- infrastructure coordination,
- workforce development,
- transportation planning,
- utility coordination,
- and broader community planning.

In many cases, communities have their greatest practical influence at the infrastructure and community layers of the aviation system. While aircraft certification, operational rules, and airspace management are largely federal responsibilities, local governments often influence where facilities are located, how surrounding land develops, how emergency response is

coordinated, how utilities are planned, and how aviation activity fits within broader community goals.

In practice, many community concerns emerge long before a formal aviation proposal reaches the FAA. Questions about land use, public safety, noise, compatibility, infrastructure readiness, and emergency response often surface during local planning conversations, public meetings, zoning discussions, infrastructure coordination, or economic development efforts.

The role of community governance may also vary significantly depending on the use case. A public safety drone program, a hospital medical logistics route, an airport electrification project, a private-use heliport, a cargo logistics facility, and a future passenger eVTOL proposal may all raise very different community considerations, operational concerns, and planning challenges.

In Utah, many communities are likely to encounter AAM first through operational or public-service applications rather than passenger mobility systems. Public safety operations, infrastructure inspection, emergency response, wildfire support, agriculture, medical logistics, airport modernization, and cargo or logistics activity are likely to arrive earlier and at a broader scale than highly distributed passenger vertiport networks.

Public Engagement and Community Compatibility

Public engagement and education is likely to become increasingly important as aviation activity moves closer to communities, infrastructure, rooftops, logistics centers, and nontraditional aviation environments. Existing airports and heliports already demonstrate that aviation compatibility is not solely an aviation issue. It is also a land-use, planning, transportation, emergency management, and public communication issue.

Community concerns may involve:

- noise,
- privacy,
- visual impacts,
- operational tempo,
- emergency response readiness,
- traffic and circulation,
- lighting,
- environmental concerns,
- and compatibility with surrounding land uses.

Some concerns may relate directly to aircraft operations, while others may focus on supporting infrastructure, operational intensity, or broader quality-of-life impacts associated with aviation activity moving closer to residential or mixed-use environments. In many cases, the community conversation is less about the aircraft itself and more about how the operation changes the surrounding environment.

Public engagement does not change FAA authority over aircraft operations or navigable airspace. However, meaningful engagement can help communities identify concerns early, improve compatibility planning, shape infrastructure siting decisions, coordinate emergency preparedness, and reduce future conflict between operators, infrastructure developers, and surrounding neighborhoods.

This becomes especially important for facilities proposed outside traditional airport environments, including:

- rooftop facilities,
- unmanned logistics sites,
- mixed-use developments,
- private-use aviation facilities,
- and aviation infrastructure near residential areas.

Communities that engage early in the planning process are often in a better position to evaluate long-term compatibility issues before infrastructure decisions become more difficult to reverse.

Noise, Environmental Concerns, and Compatibility Planning

Noise is often one of the first concerns communities raise when discussing aviation activity. Existing helicopter operations already demonstrate how strongly aviation noise can influence community perception, land-use compatibility discussions, and political support for aviation facilities.

Aircraft noise regulation itself is heavily constrained under federal law. Local governments do not establish aircraft noise certification standards or independently regulate aircraft source noise. However, local governments still influence how communities experience aviation noise through:

- land-use compatibility planning,
- zoning,
- buffering,
- site placement,
- transportation integration,
- and development review processes.

This distinction is important because many community conflicts around aviation are not resolved through direct regulation of aircraft operations. Instead, they are often managed through:

- compatible land-use planning,
- operational coordination,
- voluntary procedures,
- public communication,
- and long-range development planning.

Environmental concerns may also include:

- lighting,
- energy demand,
- visual impacts,
- rooftop operations,
- battery systems,
- fuel storage,
- stormwater impacts,
- and cumulative infrastructure effects.

Many of these issues intersect more directly with local planning, building code, fire code, utility coordination, and development review than with federal aircraft regulation itself.

Additional toolkit deliverables address environmental and noise mitigation strategies in greater detail. This section is intended to introduce the governance relationship between communities, aviation activity, and compatibility planning rather than serve as a comprehensive environmental guidance document.

Privacy, Data, and Public Trust

Privacy concerns often emerge quickly when unmanned aircraft systems begin operating closer to populated areas. Communities may raise questions related to:

- surveillance,
- data collection,
- photography or recording,
- hovering near private property,
- and the visibility of unmanned aircraft operations.

While aircraft operations remain federally regulated, local and state laws may still intersect with:

- voyeurism,
- trespass,
- unauthorized recording,
- law enforcement data practices,
- and privacy protections.

These issues can become legally and politically complicated, particularly as operations move closer to residential areas or involve recurring low-altitude activity. Public trust may also be affected by how clearly agencies and operators communicate:

- what data is collected,
- how operations are conducted,
- how complaints are addressed,

- and what safeguards are in place.

Public-sector drone programs introduce additional considerations because local governments may become aircraft operators themselves while simultaneously serving as regulators, public communicators, and emergency responders.

Workforce, Economic Development, and Public Benefit

Community governance also includes workforce and economic development considerations. Local governments, educational institutions, workforce organizations, airports, industry groups, and economic development agencies may all participate in developing:

- workforce pipelines,
- technical training,
- aviation maintenance programs,
- emergency response training,
- unmanned aircraft operations programs,
- and advanced aviation education opportunities.

This differs from pilot or aircraft certification, which remain federal responsibilities.

Communities may also evaluate:

- economic development potential,
- business attraction,
- logistics improvements,
- regional accessibility,
- tourism impacts,
- and broader public-service benefits associated with aviation activity.

Not all aviation use cases create the same public benefits, operational impacts, or infrastructure requirements. Some use cases may provide more immediate or broadly distributed benefits than others. Medical logistics, emergency response, infrastructure inspection, wildfire support, agricultural operations, and regional access may align more directly with some community priorities than highly distributed passenger mobility systems.

The public-benefit discussion also extends beyond passenger transportation. Aviation has historically moved high-value people and high-value cargo. In practice, “high value” may vary depending on the situation. Emergency medical supplies, infrastructure repair components, wildfire response equipment, industrial downtime reduction, and time-sensitive logistics may all become operational drivers for advanced aviation systems.

Emergency Response and Public Safety

Emergency response coordination is likely to become increasingly important as advanced aviation systems evolve. Communities evaluating aviation facilities or operations may need to consider:

- emergency access,
- firefighting capability,
- rooftop rescue considerations,
- hazardous materials response,
- battery fire response,
- evacuation procedures,
- incident command coordination,
- and interoperability between operators and public safety agencies.

Public-sector agencies may also become operators themselves through:

- police drone programs,
- fire response operations,
- infrastructure inspection,
- search and rescue,
- and emergency management missions.

This creates a governance environment where local governments may simultaneously function as:

- infrastructure reviewers,
- emergency responders,
- public communicators,
- and aircraft operators operating under FAA rules.

Utah-specific hazards such as earthquakes, wildfire risk, flooding, severe weather, and long regional travel distances may further influence how communities evaluate aviation capabilities and emergency-response applications.

Additional toolkit deliverables address public safety and emergency preparedness in greater detail. This section is intended to introduce how community governance, emergency response, and aviation infrastructure intersect.

Tribal, Rural, and Regional Considerations

Community governance discussions should also recognize that aviation needs vary substantially across Utah.

Rural communities, tribal communities, tourism regions, agricultural areas, and urbanized areas may all experience different opportunities, constraints, and operational priorities related to aviation infrastructure and operations.

For some communities, aviation may primarily relate to:

- emergency medical access,
- wildfire response,
- agriculture,
- tourism,
- infrastructure inspection,
- or regional connectivity.

For others, concerns may focus more heavily on:

- density,
- land-use compatibility,
- operational intensity,
- transportation integration,
- or neighborhood impacts.

The operational environment, geography, infrastructure base, and community priorities surrounding aviation infrastructure are not uniform across Utah. Local conditions may significantly influence which aviation concepts become practical, useful, or publicly acceptable within different parts of the state.

Responsible | Primary Regulatory or Operational Lead

Local Governments, Airport Sponsors, Public Agencies, Operators, and Communities

Community-facing governance responsibilities are distributed across multiple entities.

Local governments often lead:

- land-use compatibility discussions,
- zoning,
- public engagement,
- emergency coordination,
- and community planning processes.

Airport sponsors may lead community coordination related to airport operations and compatibility planning.

Operators and developers are responsible for communicating operational needs, coordinating with agencies, and addressing operational impacts associated with proposed activities.

Public safety agencies, utilities, transportation agencies, and community organizations may also play major roles depending on the proposal and use case.

Accountable | Primary Entity Responsible for Compliance or Implementation

Operators, Local Governments, Airport Sponsors, and Public Agencies

Operators remain accountable for complying with applicable operational requirements and permit conditions.

Local governments remain accountable for local planning, zoning, emergency coordination, and public decision-making processes associated with land use and infrastructure compatibility.

Airport sponsors remain accountable for airport compatibility obligations and airport planning responsibilities.

Public agencies operating unmanned aircraft systems remain accountable for complying with applicable FAA operational rules and applicable state or local policies.

Consulted | Organizations or Stakeholders Typically Engaged During Planning, Review, or Operations

Depending on the project or operation, coordination may include:

- local governments,
- airport sponsors,
- UDOT Aeronautics,
- emergency responders,
- operators,
- developers,
- utilities,
- transportation agencies,
- MPOs and AOGs,
- educational institutions,
- workforce organizations,
- tribal representatives,
- nearby property owners,
- and community organizations.

Informed | Stakeholders Commonly Affected, Notified, or Engaged

Stakeholders commonly informed or affected may include:

- residents,
- businesses,
- airport users,
- elected officials,
- schools,
- hospitals,

- transportation agencies,
- tourism organizations,
- agricultural operators,
- and the general public.

Important Distinctions

Local governments do not regulate:

- aircraft certification,
- pilot certification,
- navigable airspace,
- or federal operational rules.

Local governments still play major roles related to:

- public engagement,
- zoning,
- land-use compatibility,
- emergency preparedness,
- community planning,
- workforce development,
- infrastructure coordination,
- and broader public policy discussions associated with aviation activity.

Key References

- APA PAS Report 606, Planning for Advanced Air Mobility
- ACRP Research Report 261, Advanced Air Mobility and Community Outreach
- NASA AAM Community Integration Considerations Playbook
- GAO-22-105020, Transforming Aviation: Stakeholders Identified Issues to Address for Advanced Air Mobility
- Utah Code Title 72, Chapter 10
- FAA Fact Sheet: State and Local Regulation of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)