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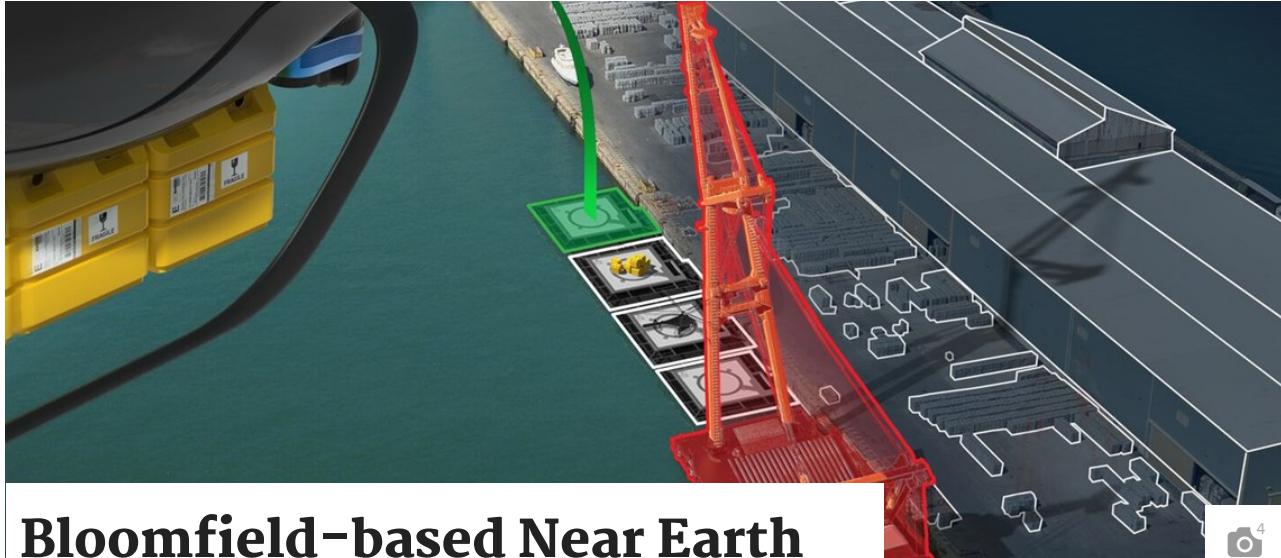
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Bloomfield-based Near Earth Autonomy lands investment from Boeing for self-flying tech



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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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Boeing's 6-month-old Chicago-based venture arm, HorizonX, has invested in yet another Pittsburgh-based company.



Near Earth Autonomy will partner with Boeing to help foster its development of unmanned flight systems, the company announced Thursday. Near Earth is the same Bloomfield-based Carnegie Mellon University spinoff already working with a Silicon Valley company and Boeing competitor, Airbus, to develop [self-driving air taxis](#).



Sanjiv Singh, CEO of Near Earth, was careful to note that this was not an acquisition where Boeing might gobble up the emerging tech for its own competitive advantage.



For the nascent autonomous air industry, it makes sense to

Near Earth Autonomy

Four Quick Questions

Are most things inherently political?

Yes
 No
 Not sure

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invest in the technology, generally, before worrying about specific applications, he added.



Courtney Linder

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“The point is for us to become the industry standard,” Mr. Singh said. “Autonomous [air] vehicles are somewhat further out than the cars on the ground ... it makes sense right now to think about the adoption of this technology rather than specific focuses.”

The most probable areas for early adoption of this technology are in military logistics and for flying in remote areas, where bush pilots typically travel, to autonomously deliver cargo to dangerous or hard-to-reach areas.

Details of the HorizonX investment were not disclosed, but Boeing did note this was the first time the company has invested in autonomous technologies since its venture fund was created in April.

In August, HorizonX led a funding round for C360 Technologies Inc., a Pine-based video solutions startup. That investment was also undisclosed, though the total sum of the round was \$3.5 million.

The investment will allow Near Earth to mature its current suite of hardware and software for aerial autonomy, which includes landing zone assessment tech for helicopters and drones.

In the company’s flagship sensor system, called Peregrine, an array of familiar sensors are at work, including lidar — the light detection and ranging technology that self-driving cars use to “see.”

In 2010, Near Earth helped the U.S. Army make its first autonomous helicopter flight. At the time, unmanned aerial vehicles could only fly in mapped areas without obstructions. That flight proved the possibility for autonomous flight for urban mobility, an emerging area of interest for the company.

“We’re looking at all of the complexities of operating in urban environments and what happens when you lose GPS ... what will it take to fly in the national air space?” Mr. Singh said.

The company currently hires a person every month or two, he said, and he expects that trend to continue with a focus on



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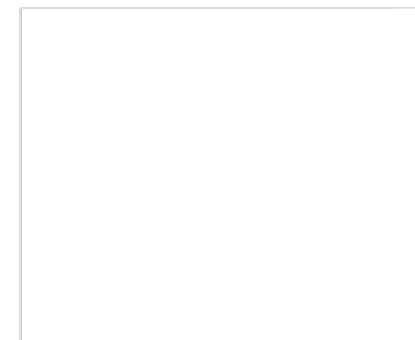
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engineers. Near Earth currently employs 52. As the company grows, he expects to eventually move to a larger space.

Mr. Singh said the company really has to think about what it could take to create a full-fledged product because, unlike self-driving cars which can include normal vehicles retrofitted with a sensor suite, an autonomous aircraft would require a full redesign to carry heavy cargo.

“We can test algorithms and sensors without putting others at risk, very systematically,” Mr. Singh said. “It’s a different route from self-driving cars [where] you’re testing inches from pedestrians... we take a somewhat more conservative approach.”

Still, the lack of obstacles in the air could mean quicker innovation than has been seen with self-driving vehicles. Plus, autonomous tech is already widely accepted where Near Earth operates.

“What I like about where we are today is that we can explain what we’re doing without going to first principle,” Mr. Singh said. “We don’t have to explain what we’re doing — Pittsburgh is a tech city. We’ve gotten used to cars driving around by themselves.”

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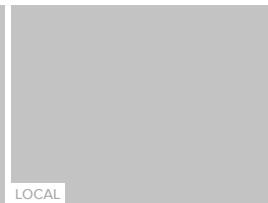
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