

CLIENT ALERT

USPS Joins the Drone Delivery Domain with RFI for Services

October 3, 2019

The United States Postal Service (USPS) announced last week that it will explore the use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems or “drones” to deliver mail and to collect data. Through a Request for Information (RFI) posted on FedBizOps, USPS is seeking input from interested drone operators and developers to inform a future solicitation for drone delivery and data collection services.

Mail delivery operations will include:

- Long Driveway Delivery: the drone launches from a USPS vehicle, makes a delivery, and returns to the vehicle while carrier continues their route.
- Remote/Difficult Delivery Points: rugged terrain, small islands, and other areas that are difficult to reach by road.
- Ride-Sharing Model: customers use an application to access USPS drone fleet for their own business to customer delivery.
- Infrastructure as a Service: drone service providers leverage USPS drone resources, including vehicles, launching, charging, and data for their own applications, such as farm or power line inspections.

Data collection operations will include mapping for use in future autonomous vehicle initiatives and USPS facility and land management objectives. All flights will be subject to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rules for Public Aircraft Operations.

Unsurprisingly, USPS is especially interested in delivery operations beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS). This capability will be a critical piece of mail delivery flights. The emphasis on BVLOS is consistent with FAA’s recent focus on approving more complex operations. FAA approval of BVLOS operations spiked in the last few months, with many approvals being granted under the UAS Integration Pilot Program (UAS IPP). We discussed some of the recent developments in BVLOS approvals in an earlier client alert, which can be found [here](#).

The USPS program is likely to share many similarities with the UAS IPP. For example, the RFI’s “crawl, walk, run” approach to testing and validation for aircraft and complex operations mirrors the FAA’s philosophy under the UAS IPP. The similarities to the UAS IPP do not extend to the procurement process. Neither the FAA nor the USPS is subject to the Federal Acquisition Regulation, and each agency operates under its own unique set of procurement rules. Companies that applied to the UAS IPP and intend to respond to this RFI should be aware of the differences between the agencies’ contracting processes.

The RFI can be found [here](#). Responses are due by November 4, 2019.

For more information, please contact the professional(s) listed below, or your regular Crowell & Moring contact.

Mary-Caitlin Ray

Counsel – Washington, D.C.

Phone: +1.202.688.3524

Email: mray@crowell.com

Laura Foggan

Partner – Washington, D.C.

Phone: +1.202.624.2774

Email: lfoggan@crowell.com

Cheryl A. Falvey

Partner – Washington, D.C.

Phone: +1.202.624.2675

Email: cfalvey@crowell.com