

## It's not a helicopter: can this electric aircraft transform New York air travel?

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

##### a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- How do people commute to work in your town or city? How environmentally friendly are these forms of transport?
- What do you think are the main advantages and disadvantages of using helicopters to travel around a city?

#### 2 Key words

##### a. Find the words from the box in the article. Then complete the definitions with the words.

blades	constitutes	assuage	stuck with	wince
adamant	decibel	incessant	tilt	to take issue with
bombarded with	in layman's terms	lobby	altitude	vertically

1. To be \_\_\_\_\_ means to continuously feel the effects of something (such as noise or information).
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is to make a small movement of the face in response to pain or something unpleasant.
3. When something is \_\_\_\_\_, it means that it continues without stopping in an annoying way.
4. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ is a unit that measures how loud a sound is.
5. To be \_\_\_\_\_ means to be unable to get rid of, or avoid, something.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ is the height of something above sea or ground level.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ means in a direction going straight up or down.
8. To \_\_\_\_\_ means to move or cause something to move up or down.
9. When you are \_\_\_\_\_, you refuse to change your mind or be persuaded about something.

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10. \_\_\_\_\_ is to disagree with or challenge something that has been said or done.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ are the flat rotating parts of a helicopter that push air.
12. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ is a group of people who try to influence politicians on an issue.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ means to form or make up something.
14. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to make an unpleasant feeling less intense.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ means to explain something in simple language that anyone can understand, without technical vocabulary.

#### b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. The community formed a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ group to campaign against the new airport expansion.
2. Scientists are studying how climate change \_\_\_\_\_ a threat to coastal cities.
3. Debbie was \_\_\_\_\_ about not changing the project deadline despite the team's concerns.
4. The plane reached a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ of 30,000 feet during the flight.
5. Our business has tried to \_\_\_\_\_ customers' fears about data privacy by implementing new security measures.
6. A loud rock concert can reach between 100 and 120 \_\_\_\_\_.
7. We're \_\_\_\_\_ this old computer system until the budget allows for an upgrade.
8. I'm finding it difficult to tolerate my neighbour's \_\_\_\_\_ noise, day and night.

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9. The instruction manual was full of technical jargon, so the engineer explained it \_\_\_\_\_ for the rest of us.
10. The drone's propellers \_\_\_\_\_ forward to change its direction.
11. I couldn't help but \_\_\_\_\_ when I heard how much the new tyres for my van would cost.
12. A helicopter's \_\_\_\_\_ rotate rapidly to keep it in the air.
13. Words can appear in the word search puzzle horizontally, \_\_\_\_\_ or backwards.
14. Environmental activists \_\_\_\_\_ the water company's claim that waste isn't being pumped into local rivers.
15. The council was \_\_\_\_\_ complaints about increased traffic after permission had been granted to build 100 new homes.

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*Joby Aviation says its 'quiet' aircraft travels to Manhattan from JFK in 10 minutes at a 'premium car service' price*

**Adam Gabbatt**

**28 April, 2026**

- 1 It's neither a bird nor a plane, and it is definitely not a helicopter, but instead some New Yorkers recently witnessed an "electric vertical take-off and landing" aircraft buzzing around the city, which developers say could revolutionise travel in New York.
- 2 Joby Aviation's fully electric aircraft conducted multiple flights from JFK airport in Queens to Manhattan recently, which would have turned heads to anyone looking up. It's a futuristic looking design, somewhere between helicopter and drone, and is capable of speeds up to 200 miles per hour.
- 3 That gets it from JFK to midtown Manhattan in about 10 minutes, compared with more than an hour in a car, and about the same on public transport. Crucially, Joby claims it is quieter than a helicopter, something which could satisfy New York's anti-helicopter lobby and also preserve passengers' ears.
- 4 But one of the important things to know about the Joby electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft is that it is not a helicopter. The company is adamant about that.
- 5 "It's an aircraft, but that's about the only similarity," Eric Allison, chief product officer at Joby Aviation, told the Guardian. "It takes off and lands vertically, like a helicopter, but it has six propellers, which point up when it's taking off and landing, and then they tilt forward to allow forward flight like an aircraft."
- 6 People can make up their own minds about whether it looks like a helicopter or not, but Allison's point was that the Joby uses its wings to fly as much as it does its blades. He said the fact it has six propellers makes it safer than some other options, and stressed, as the company does repeatedly, its quietness.
- 7 "When it's taking off and landing 100 meters away from here, it's basically blended into the background noise. And when it's flying over a city environment, and flying over at 1,000 feet, which is about the minimum altitude, it is basically silent," Allison said.
- 8 Helicopters are common in New York. People can take non-electric helicopters to JFK – and they take about the same amount of time to get there – and at any given time tourist helicopters are flying about the sky around Manhattan. But Joby hopes their lower decibel, and more environmentally friendly offering, will be enough to transform New York air travel.
- 9 Whether those things are enough to quiet the New York groups who are fighting to reduce helicopter noise, and ban nonessential flights, remains to be seen. Stop the Chop, a non-profit group which operates in New Jersey and New York, has spent years lobbying against "incessant and loud non-essential helicopter flights over our homes, parks and open spaces".
- 10 Certainly the eco aspect should at least partly assuage Stop the Chop – the group claims each helicopter produces 950lbs of carbon dioxide per hour (an average car produces 22lbs per hour) – whereas the Joby won't produce any.
- 11 But after witnessing both helicopter landings and a Joby landing, it is reasonable to take issue with some of the company's noise claims: specifically the claim that Joby aircraft's "acoustic signature blends into the sounds of everyday city life".
- 12 When airborne, the Joby is undoubtedly quieter than a helicopter. It produces about 45 decibels, the company says, whereas helicopters produce more than 100 decibels. To put that in layman's terms, helicopters are just really, really noisy, in a way the Joby is not. To spend time near a heliport in Manhattan is to be absolutely bombarded with noise: that noise even echoes across New York City's boroughs to affect people hundreds of yards away.
- 13 The Joby doesn't do that, but it does generate a significant amount of noise when it takes off and lands. The company didn't share information on that, but it was certainly enough to make one wince – even if it nowhere near approaches the sensory assault of a regular helicopter.
- 14 The quieter sound is achieved through the multi-propeller design, the company says, and the fact it uses those wings to fly, rather than the massive blades of a helicopter. But can this aircraft really have that much of an effect on New Yorkers?

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- 15 Maybe. But it is not going to be available for quite some time: Joby is still in the process of being certified by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and its New York test flights were only allowed to take place over water.
- 16 Perhaps more realistically this is only going to change travel around New York for rich people. Joby says the price of a flight from Manhattan to JFK airport will be about the same as a "premium car service". What constitutes a premium car service is up for debate, but it appears to cost a minimum of 200 dollars, compared to 11.75 dollars on public transport.
- 17 The Joby might be quieter than a helicopter, but for now, most New Yorkers will be stuck with the subway.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True, False or Not Mentioned according to information in the article.

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. The Joby aircraft recently completed several test flights between JFK airport and Manhattan.                       | True / False / Not Mentioned |
| 2. The journey from JFK airport to midtown Manhattan by car takes approximately 10 minutes.                           | True / False / Not Mentioned |
| 3. Developers have tested the Joby aircraft in other major US cities besides New York.                                | True / False / Not Mentioned |
| 4. A premium car service from Manhattan to JFK costs 11.75 dollars.   | True / False / Not Mentioned |
| 5. Joby Aviation plans to offer discounted fares for New York residents during the first year of operation.           | True / False / Not Mentioned |
| 6. The Joby aircraft produces about 45 decibels once airborne. t.ers are currently banned from flying over Manhattan. | True / False / Not Mentioned |
| 7. The Joby has yet to receive permission to fly from the Federal Aviation Administration.                            | True / False / Not Mentioned |

#### 4 Key language

a. Find and write the words from the article.

- Find a plural noun for the things that turn to move a machine forward. \_\_\_\_\_
- Find an adjective that relates to sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste. \_\_\_\_\_
- Find an adverb that describes something happening again and again. \_\_\_\_\_
- Find a verb that means to change a thing or situation dramatically. \_\_\_\_\_
- Find an adjective that describes something that is modern or technologically advanced. \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Find a verb that means the same as 'to silence'. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Find an adverb that means the same as importantly or significantly. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Find a gerund that describes the sound a bee makes as it flies. \_\_\_\_\_

#### b. Complete the sentences with the words from the previous activity.

1. The architect's \_\_\_\_\_ plans for the development included buildings made entirely of glass.
2. Artificial intelligence is bound to \_\_\_\_\_ the way humans communicate with each other.
3. Management has \_\_\_\_\_ asked for updates, but the sales team has failed to respond.
4. A wasp was \_\_\_\_\_ loudly against the kitchen window desperate to escape.
5. \_\_\_\_\_, all participants must sign the consent form before the study begins.
6. Parents often struggle to \_\_\_\_\_ excited children after a birthday party.
7. One of the \_\_\_\_\_ on the drone was damaged and needed to be replaced.
8. Virtual reality headsets provide a fully immersive \_\_\_\_\_ experience for gamers.

## 5 Discussion

#### a. Discuss these questions.

1. The article suggests that even environmentally-friendly innovations can face opposition from local communities. How can cities balance technological progress with the concerns of residents?
2. If the Joby service became available in your town or city, would you be willing to pay a premium price for a significantly faster journey? Why or why not?

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#### 6 In your own words

a. Work in groups. Follow the instructions to debate the topic below.

#### City Council Debate: Should the Joby Fly in Our City?

**Scenario:** Your city council is deciding whether to approve Joby Aviation's service. Each of the two or more groups should present their case 'for' or 'against' to the council (the council group). The council will then vote on whose arguments they think are the best.

**Step 1:** Divide the class into three groups. Give each group one or more of these roles and the following ideas to consider:

**Group 1 Joby Aviation:** 'for' the service (faster journeys, better for the environment, quieter)

**Group 2 Environmental groups:** question the 'green' claims (suggest investing money in public transport instead)

**Group 3 Wealthy commuters:** 'for' the service (time saved, business benefits and ability to pay)

**Group 4 Local residents:** 'against' the service (noise, safety, quality of life)

**Group 5 Taxi drivers:** 'against' the service (concern about job losses and competition)

**Group 6 Council Members:** stay neutral (ask questions and vote at the end)

**Step 2:** Prepare your arguments for or against the idea.

**Step 3:** Groups 1-5 present your arguments to the council.

**Step 4:** The council votes on whether they are 'for' or 'against' the Joby Aviation service and presents their reasons.