

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

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- How do people commute to work in your town or city?
- 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.

permission

revolutionise

basically

turned heads

altitude

decibel

futuristic

ban

essential

propellers

1. _____ means to completely change something for the better.
2. _____ means to not allow something by law.
3. A(n) _____ is a unit used to measure how loud a sound is.
4. When something is _____, it looks very modern and new.
5. _____ means the same as 'in the most important ways.'
6. The _____ is how high something is above the ground or sea.
7. If something is _____, it is very necessary and important.
8. If something _____, it made people look at it because it was interesting or unusual.
9. _____ are the parts of a plane or helicopter that spin to make it move.
10. _____ is when someone says you are allowed to do something.

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

1. Stella's bright red dress _____ as she walked into the room.
2. Smartphones have _____ the way we communicate with each other.
3. The plane reached a(n) _____ of 30,000 feet.
4. You need written _____ from your parents to go on the school trip.
5. The city council decided to _____ cars from the city centre on Sundays.
6. These two digital cameras look very different, but they _____ do the same thing.
7. A loud rock concert can reach between 100 and 120 _____.
8. The building has a(n) _____ design with glass walls and solar panels.
9. One of the _____ on the drone broke when it crashed into the tree.
10. It's _____ that you pay attention to the safety demonstration on a plane.

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

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- 1 It's not a bird or a plane, and it is definitely not a helicopter. Instead, some New Yorkers recently saw an aircraft flying around the city, which developers say could revolutionise travel in New York.
- 2 Joby Aviation's fully electric aircraft carried out flights from JFK airport in Queens to Manhattan recently, which turned heads to anyone looking up. It has a futuristic design, (somewhere between a helicopter and a drone) and can travel up to 200 miles per hour.
- 3 It can travel from JFK to Manhattan in about 10 minutes, compared with more than an hour in a car, and about the same on public transport. Importantly, Joby claims it is quieter than a helicopter. But one of the important things to know is that it is not a helicopter.
- 4 "It's an aircraft," Eric Allison, chief product officer at Joby Aviation, told the Guardian. "It takes off and lands like a helicopter, but it has six propellers ... when it's flying over a city environment, and flying over at 1,000 feet, which is about the minimum altitude, it's basically silent," Allison said.
- 5 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 tourist helicopters fly around Manhattan all the time. But Joby hopes their lower decibel, and more environmentally-friendly, aircraft will be enough to revolutionise New York air travel.
- 6 However, there are New York groups who are fighting to reduce helicopter noise, and ban flights that aren't essential. Stop the Chop, a group which operates in New Jersey and New York, have been putting up with "loud helicopter flights over our homes, parks and open spaces" for years.
- 7 Certainly Joby may be better for the environment. 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.
- 8 It is also a lot quieter than a helicopter. It produces about 45 decibels, the company says, whereas helicopters produce more than 100 decibels. In other words, helicopters are just really, really noisy, in a way the Joby is not. However, it does make a lot of noise when it takes off and lands. But can this aircraft really have that much of an effect on New Yorkers?
- 9 We'll have to wait to find out because Joby is still waiting for permission to fly from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and its New York test flights were only allowed to take place over water.
- 10 Perhaps the Joby is only going to change how rich people get around New York. Joby says the price of a flight from Manhattan to JFK airport will be about the same as a "premium car service", which appears to cost a minimum of \$200, compared with \$11.75 on public transport.
- 11 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 or False according to the information in the article.
- The Joby aircraft recently completed several test flights between JFK airport and Manhattan. True / False
 - The journey from JFK airport to Manhattan by car takes approximately 10 minutes. True / False
 - A premium car service from Manhattan to JFK costs 11.75 dollars. True / False
 - The Joby aircraft produces about 45 decibels once it's in the air. True / False
 - Tourist helicopters are currently banned from flying over Manhattan. True / False
 - The Joby is currently not allowed to operate flights. True / False

4 Key language

- a. Match the phrasal verbs from the article to the correct definitions.
- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 1. carry out | a. (of an aircraft) to leave the ground |
| 2. find out | b. to do research or a study |
| 3. get around | c. to discover or learn something |
| 4. put up with | d. to travel from one place to another (often in a city) |
| 5. stuck with | e. to manage to deal with something that is annoying or difficult |
| 6. take off | f. to have to continue using something even though it's old or inconvenient |
- b. Complete the sentences with the phrasal verbs from the previous activity in the correct form.
- I can't _____ the noise from the construction site any longer.
 - The plane is ready to _____, so please fasten your seatbelts.
 - We're _____ this old car until we can afford to buy a new one.
 - Scientists will _____ more tests before approving the new medicine.

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5. It's easy to _____ the city by bike because there are lots of cycle lanes.
6. I need to _____ what time the meeting starts tomorrow.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Would you like to travel in an electric aircraft like the Joby? Why or why not?
2. What do you think is the best way to travel around a big city: by car, by public transport, by bike, or on foot? Why?

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 groups 1–5 should present their case 'for' or 'against' to the council group. The council will then vote on whose arguments they think are the best.

Step 1: Divide the class into three to six groups. Give each group one 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)

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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: The groups present their arguments to the council (Group 6).

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