

Public Safety Drone Operation Enhances Security at Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival in Winchester, Virginia

Virginia Flight Information Exchange (VA-FIX), funded by VIPC and state agencies, provided essential elements for drone traffic management.

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Drone pilots from state and local police, fire, and emergency services agencies helped increase security at this year's Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival in Winchester, Virginia. In an expansive simultaneous and coordinated public safety drone flight operation during the festival's Grand Feature parade, the drone pilots



relied on the Virginia Flight Information Exchange ([VA-FIX](#)), a digital data-sharing platform that provided critical information about policies and infrastructure and activities on the ground that may have affected their flights, and real time awareness of other aircraft in the area. At the request of local authorities, the drones helped manage traffic issues, support a missing person search, and identify a vehicle of interest for law enforcement.

Since its launch in 2020, VA-FIX has enabled state and local public safety and government agencies to publish information to share with each other as well as UAS Service Suppliers (USS), UAS operators, and the public. VA-FIX promotes transparency about drone operations and

maintains a high level of safety and accountability. VA-FIX was developed through a public-private collaboration with the Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation ([VIPC](#)), the Virginia Department of Aviation (DOAV), the Virginia Department of Transportation and [ATA](#) LLC of Great Falls, Virginia.

"The Virginia FIX concept was conceived during a state UAS working group to address the need for public safety agencies to notify and collaborate with drone operators, particularly during

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Tracy Tynan, Director of the Virginia Unmanned Systems Center at VIPC

widespread events,” said Tracy Tynan, director of the Virginia Unmanned Systems Center at VIPC. “It’s a trusted resource for drone operators to leverage when planning flights and a vital public asset to support the safe and responsible expansion of Virginia’s drone industry.”

During the exercise in Winchester in May, over 20 drone pilots from state and local public safety agencies, including the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and fire and police departments across Virginia and the mid-Atlantic, used the platform to safely fly over 50 sorties without incident. The pilots also used VA-FIX to coordinate their flights, maintain safe separation from one another, ensure safe clearance from non-participant aircraft and provide valuable intelligence to the Winchester Emergency Operations Center.



John Eberhart, Chief Technology Officer of ATA, "VA-FIX is a force multiplier for first responders that enables pilots to work with one another and units on the ground to manage an incident scene or patrol from the skies more efficiently and safely ."

VA-FIX is an Authoritative Supplemental Data Service Provider (A-SDSP) that the operators used for receiving safety advisories, assessing weather conditions, gaining critical knowledge about local infrastructure and topography, and identifying activities and events related to the annual festival and parade.

“The Apple Blossom Festival is an ideal scenario for public safety drone pilots to train because it’s an actual event for them to hone their skills,” said John Eberhart, Chief Technology Officer of ATA. “And as we learn time and time again, VA-FIX is a force multiplier for first responders that enables pilots to work with one another and units on the ground to manage an incident scene or patrol from the skies more efficiently and safely without all of them having to use the same navigation platform.”

As a shared governance model and authoritative source for clearer, higher quality information that is critical for drone pilots, VA-FIX is an essential public contribution for building a UAS traffic management (UTM) system. VA-FIX provides the situational awareness of the ground that is sent to service suppliers for the drone industry that are currently developing UTM systems. These commercial UTM systems, of which there will be multiple options, are designed to operate like air traffic control in the close reaches of the airspace. They will soon be used for drones to fly greater distances beyond the visual line of sight of their operators.

In addition to state and local government officials from Virginia, representatives from Alaska, Pennsylvania, and Ohio attended the fly-in to observe VA-FIX in action and learn more about the benefits such a solution provides for drone operations in their states. Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears, a resident of Winchester and chair of the Virginia Chapter of the Aerospace States Association (ASA), also attended the Fly-In and hosted a reception for the state officials the prior evening.

About Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation (VIPC):

VIPC: Connecting innovators with opportunities. As the nonprofit operations arm of the Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority (VIPA), VIPC is the commercialization and seed stage economic development driver in the Commonwealth that leads funding, infrastructure, and policy initiatives to support Virginia's innovators, entrepreneurs, startups, and market development strategies. VIPC collaborates with local, regional, state, and federal partners to support the expansion and diversification of Virginia's economy. Programs include: Virginia Venture Partners (VVP) | VVP Fund of Funds (SSBCI) | Virginia Founders Fund (VFF) | Commonwealth Commercialization Fund (CCF) | Petersburg Founders Fund (PFF) | Smart Communities | The Virginia Smart Community Testbed | The Virginia Unmanned Systems Center | Virginia Advanced Air Mobility Alliance (VAAMA) | The Public Safety Innovation Center | Entrepreneurial Ecosystems | Regional Innovation Fund (RIF) | Federal Funding Assistance Program (FFAP) for SBIR & STTR | University Partnerships | Startup Company Mentoring & Engagement. For more information, please visit www.VirginialPC.org. Follow VIPC on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

About ATA: ATA, LLC (Advanced Technology Applications) is the full stack data solutions company focused on the DESIGN+BUILD of scalable, sustainable capabilities to improve organizational performance, optimize investments, reduce risk and use data as a strategic asset. ATA's Aviation division is partnering with state and local governments to provide the digital infrastructure needed to safely integrate civil and commercial Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) operations in the National Airspace. Visit ATA's website for more information at www.ata-llc.com and www.ata-uas.com. Follow ATA on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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