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MassDOT Asks Amazon for Prime Air Proposal Update, Reminds Company of Mandatory Regulatory Review Process

Letter highlights that Amazon delivery drones must gain state approval for takeoff/landing infrastructure

(BOSTON 10/26/2026) — Last week, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Aeronautics Administrator Denise Garcia sent a letter to Amazon reiterating that the commerce giant must undergo a regulatory review process before it can begin operating commercial delivery drones as part of its Amazon Prime Air expansion in Westborough. The letter, highlighting that MassDOT has not received an official notification or request for review, also reminds Amazon that any proposal for the construction of a drone takeoff or landing site will be subject to a suitability review, an environmental review, and at least one public hearing before Prime Air drones can begin flying over Central Massachusetts.

This letter is the latest in a series of moves from legislators and government leaders echoing constituent concerns about the noise, flight routes, operating hours, safety, privacy, cybersecurity, and environmental impacts of Amazon's proposed drone operations. In recent weeks, legislators sent a letter asking Amazon to pause its implementation plan to better engage with the community, established a partnership with the state's federal delegation to review national laws on the matter, and sent a letter to Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey requesting she establish a task force on commercial drones to review applicable laws and make recommendations on necessary policy changes. Further, Westborough Special Town Meeting attendees last week voted 510-13 to establish regulations for unmanned aircraft.

Planned to operate out of the company's existing 200,000 square foot Otis Street fulfillment center in Westborough, Amazon Prime Air would be the first service of its kind in New England and would deliver items under 5lbs to Westborough and 15 surrounding communities. Amazon states that it hopes to eventually make up to 1,000 deliveries per day to addresses within a 7.5-mile radius of its fulfillment center.

"The safety of Massachusetts residents is our top priority, and we take the concerns raised by families in Westborough and surrounding communities seriously," said **Governor Maura Healey**. "Before Amazon can

move forward with its drone delivery plans, it needs to go through the state's review process and address important questions about safety and environmental impacts. Our administration will continue working with local leaders and residents to make sure their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed."

"The tech industry's 'move fast and break things' ethos cannot override the long-held review and permitting processes we have in the Commonwealth that were established to protect hardworking families and the places they call home," said **Senator Michael Moore (D-Millbury)**. "If Amazon wants to fly a fleet of drones in the skies above our communities, they must follow our laws and answer our questions about the specifics of their plan and how exactly it will benefit the people we represent. Whenever Amazon is ready to formalize their proposal and submit to Massachusetts' air navigation facility permitting process, I will be ready to work with MassDOT and local community members to ensure people's concerns are addressed. Thank you to Governor Healey, Lieutenant Governor Driscoll, and Administrator Garcia for working hard to make sure the people of Massachusetts are at the table for this important conversation."

"The MassDOT Aeronautics Division's letter is a reminder that Amazon must still answer to the Commonwealth's review processes, and to the people those processes protect," said **Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury)**. "I am encouraged to see that MassDOT will hold a public hearing before making a decision on issuing a certificate of approval, giving the public the opportunity to ask questions and share their concerns about a proposal that would impact public safety, the environment, privacy, and their quality of life. I thank MassDOT and the Administration for listening to residents of Westborough and other affected Central Massachusetts communities."

"I am very encouraged that MassDOT and the Administration are taking the concerns of Westborough residents seriously. I am particularly pleased that the Administration has committed to a public hearing on the issuance of a certificate of approval for a drone takeoff and landing area," said **Representative Kate Donaghue (D-Westborough)**. "The people of Westborough deserve an opportunity to ask questions and express their concerns."

The Aeronautics Division of MassDOT has authority over the construction and operation of airports, restricted landing areas, and air navigation facilities. Amazon's drones, Administrator Garcia states, "are commercial flights subject to Section 39B. Amazon cannot establish a takeoff and landing area in Westborough—or anywhere else in Massachusetts—without first obtaining a certificate of approval from the Aeronautics Division under Chapter 90." MassDOT's process will include a review of threats to safety and adverse environmental impacts, and Amazon should expect at least one public hearing before a decision is made on a certificate of approval, the letter states.

Amazon Prime Air currently operates in 13 cities in 10 states, but the company has laid out an aggressive expansion roadmap that intends to serve over 500 communities with drone delivery by the end of the year. Prime Air drones typically fly up to 74 miles per hour and cruise to their destination at between 205 and 370 feet above the ground, before descending to 13 feet to drop the package on the customer's property. Amazon states that the drones are loudest during takeoff and landing, but that the sound at cruising altitude is comparable to an electric toothbrush held at arm's length when heard outdoors.

Designed to operate in wind, rain, and snow, Prime Air drones are said to include redundant propellers that can keep them airborne if one fails. They are equipped with cameras for navigation and collision avoidance, but Amazon claims that all image data is encrypted and that Amazon does not sell or commercially collect data from its flights. These technologies have not proven infallible, however – videos online show Prime Air drones dropping a package into a pool and crashing into a residential apartment building. Additionally, news reports

from Texas and Nebraska highlight resident complaints about disruptive noise, with one nearby homeowner likening the constant sound of the drones to a beehive.

Amazon faces a number of hurdles before it can begin launching Prime Air drones in Central Massachusetts beyond a MassDOT air navigation facility permit. The FAA approved Amazon's permit to operate delivery drones beyond a visual line of sight nationally in 2024, though a recent legal challenge brought by 15 US states may complicate this blanket permit. Locally, the Westborough Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) will hear the appeal of the Westborough Building Commissioner's zoning interpretation related to Amazon's site plan application. A September 15th Planning Board meeting began the process, though the dialogue continued into the Board's October 6th meeting. The ZBA is expected to take up the appeal on November 2nd.

The full letter can be found online here.

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