

GLOBAL FIRST: Urban-Air Port at Consumer Forum

TRBusiness and m1nd-set showcased a worldwide exclusive at a live event this week in a rousing - and fitting - conclusion to the Travel Retail Consumer Forum (20-22 September), the DF&TR industry's first in-person conference and event of its size to take place for close to two years.

In a special occasion for the trade, physical and livestream delegates watched, listened and learned as TRBusiness quizzed Urban-Air Port (UAP) about a unique venture that is seeking to redefine the future of air mobility.

UAP has been attracting considerable attention in the international and business media of late for an innovative infrastructure concept that services a growing ecosystem of unmanned and manned electrical vertical take-off and landing aircraft (eVTOL).

[TR Consumer Forum registered delegates can view the full recording of this conference session - and others - by [clicking here](#)].

From air taxis and autonomous delivery drones to disaster emergency management and mobile defence operations, UAP hubs are designed to facilitate intra-city transport for passengers and cargo with an ambition that stretches into the realms of international travel.

NO MINIMUM ANNUAL GUARANTEES

Founder + Executive Chairman Ricky Sandhu joined Chief Retail Officer – and experienced industry executive – Keith Hunter for a fireside chat with TRBusiness e-zine Managing Editor Luke Barras-Hill in the closing session, 'Reimagining Travel: where Hollywood Meets Reality' of the Travel Retail Consumer Forum (20-22 September).

In a unique twist and very much in the spirit of 'firsts' evident by the inception of the event, 'consumer-i-residence' Noel Philips also took the opportunity to fire questions at UAP on behalf of his vast social media following [Noel Philips boasts over 1.5 million followers across his social media platforms and his content reaches more than 10 million viewers a month Ed].



During the the inaugural TR Consumer Forum, Urban-Air Port announced an invite for brands to participate at its Coventry site in the UK.



EVTOL aircraft will be able to utilise UAPs facilities for passenger loading, charging/refuelling, cargo transportation and other activities. L-R: Ricky Sandhu, Founder + Executive Chairman, UAP; Keith Hunter, Chief Retail Officer, UAP; Noel Philips, aviation and travel reporter and vlogger; and moderator Luke Barras-Hill, Managing Editor, TRBusiness e-zine.

Hunter outlined why the infancy of the eVTOL infrastructure market represents a relative blank slate to mould the retail proposition.

The reality is its a bit of blank canvas, he told TR Consumer Forum delegates. Having been involved so heavily in traditional airport retail, airlines, playing the role of an airline and retailer, assisting brands Ive seen it from all angles and Im very familiar with the challenges we face.

Hunter explained his hopes that UAP can make easier some of the very challenges existing in traditional airport retail.

We want to champion sustainability, we want to work with and collaborate closely with brands and operators and service providers to put together something very special within the Urban-Air Ports, he continued. Weve been very keen not just to focus not only on the brand and retail opportunity, but also the additional services that we can link in so passengers can tailor every aspect of their journey.



Ricky Sandhu, Founder & Executive Chairman, Urban-Air Port: We are starting to pave the way across different sites in the UK and globally with our partnership with Hyundai and our other partners all over the world.

We've focused on the types of ranges and brands we want to work with – and that hopefully want to work with us. There are plenty of brands out there where we see some fantastic innovation and within an Urban-Air Port we have set aside a space where we can showcase several experiential pop-ups.

We will be doing that in a physical space but also through the Urban-Air Port app, said Hunter.

The UAP Urban-Air Choice app allows users to check flight bookings and benefit from other services including a loyalty programme, online advertising, drop and collect parcel delivery, event bookings and customer service.

We've created a suite under Urban-Air Choice which is the collection of retail brand partners, a click-and-collect F&B service and others such as e-charging your vehicle, hiring e-vehicles and e-bikes and getting space in business centres. We are working with all of those service providers to participate in that suite of services, continued Hunter.

In a comment from Sandhu that attracted applause from the audience, UAP confirmed it will not be utilising minimum annual guarantees in its concession arrangements.

We are not getting distracted with that this has to be something that works for all, responded Hunter.

He pointed out that while the space dedicated to retail won't equate to the same scale seen in conventional airports with their presence of shopping boulevards and big duty free areas, the focus will instead be tailored towards experience.

TR Consumer Forum delegates heard that conversations remain ongoing with big tech giants such as Google, LG and Samsung, alongside active dialogue with smart vending companies to potentially offer interactive vending machine solutions.

During the debate, discussion turned to partnerships and what that looks like from a retail perspective.

Hunter confirmed that UAP is concerned with direct relationships with the brands themselves to capitalise on the app-based shopping opportunity, which offers flexibility.

We are not confined by some of those traditional roadblocks in airports, he said. We are open to discussions with brands. We want to work with them closely, we want to work with operators closely and make sure they are represented in the best way. It won't be through onerous contracts, but partnerships.

UAP has struck a partnership with the UK government, Coventry City Council and Hyundai Motor Group to unveil UAPs first site, Air One, in Coventry, UK, set to take place in the coming months.

SECTOR YOU CANT IGNORE

It is gathered that Coventry in the UK was chosen as the initial site due to the combination of its location in

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the UK and historic status as a hub for the automobile and aerospace industry with a local economy able to support future manufacturing industries.

Urban-Air Port secured a £1.2 million/\$1.6 million grant from the UK Research and Innovation's Future Flight Challenge to help bankroll the Coventry project.

Air One, it is claimed, will be the first in a planned rollout of more than 200 zero emission Urban-Air Port hubs in the coming five years (*including future 'Marine One' and 'Resilience One' sites*) as demand for eVTOL aircraft accelerates.

The sites are designed to be scalable in size, modular in the way they function, technology-driven and ultra compact as 3D airports created for the urban environment geared towards handling an eVTOL industry that today counts more than 420 manufacturers globally.

Behind the concept is a desire to make the travel journey as seamless as possible; the aircraft is visible upon arrival at the airport, passengers can dine and shop before boarding.



Urban-Air Port is seeking new brands for its Air One site in Coventry, UK that can offer novel, fresh, sustainable and experience-led propositions.

During the session, Sandhu reported that the burgeoning eVTOL space is forecast to be worth in excess of US\$550 billion by 2030 rising to \$1 trillion by 2040 excluding travel retail and commercial revenue opportunities.

Offering context on the opportunity to leverage infrastructure, he said: Right now we are starting to pave the way across different sites in the UK and globally with our partnership with Hyundai and our other partners all over the world, working with places including Australia, the US, across Europe, South Korea and weve had emails from China.

Its a sector that you cant ignore; you cant have your air journey without an airport, train journey without a train station and you cant get a bus without a bus stop so there is a level of infrastructure that will be needed. Our view is that infrastructure should be designed for a new type of vehicle that enables us to present a very ultra-compact airport solution which provides all that is needed in a very small footprint.

We'll be using hydrogen fuel cells in Coventry to power our EV chargers that will power electrical vehicles and these (eVTOL) vehicles. Its a whole new era that is beginning to unfold.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

TRBusiness questioned the obstacles around such a significant and new schematic in air mobility, chiefly the significant capital investment required to meet infrastructure demands, operational and regulatory requirements, and safety.



Urban-Air Port plans to develop 65 electric Urban-Air Ports in key locations such as the UK, EU, US and Asia Pacific in a tie-up with the Urban Air Mobility Division of Hyundai Motor Group. Air-One - due to open in Coventry, UK - is the first of more than 200 sites being developed by Urban-Air Port in the next five years to meet global demand.

Raising capital is obviously a challenge and a lot of the focus has been on the vehicles themselves as without the vehicles, there is no flight, responded Sandhu, who spoke about lifting knowledge, understanding, perceptions and exposure of the sector in the eyes of the public.

We are working through all the challenges you mentioned with civil aviation, city councils, developers, all major airports in the UK and around the world. We are investing a huge amount to make sure the experience is memorable, familiar and real in Spring next year.

Vlogger Philips recently conducted an interview with UAP and filmed footage of the Coventry site, beamed to his millions of followers across Facebook.

The video has received in excess of 275,000 views across social media [[click here](#) for the Facebook video and reaction from Philips' followers].

To watch an exclusive trailer assembled by Philips and his team and presented at the TR Consumer Forum, click above video.

**Main image source: Hyundai.*