

Pilots Benefit from the Next Generation of Air Travel

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Next Generation air taxi operators plan to provide their pilots with high pay and good quality of life benefits because they view finding and retaining qualified pilots as one of their greatest challenges. They plan to share a margin of the opportunity with pilots because qualified pilots will be in short supply. Aircraft orders are on the rise worldwide and pilot shortages are already severe in countries like India and China.

Qualified pilots could get involved in the next generation of air travel in the traditional way by sending resumes to air taxi companies such as DayJet, Linear Air, SATS Air, Pogo Jet or corporate flight departments. There will also be a need for training/safety pilots in VLJ aircraft to aid in the transition for owner pilots stepping up from piston aircraft. Qualified pilots could become "Mentor Pilots" to fly with owner operator pilots as they work toward single pilot certification in their new jets. Mentor Pilots will need a background in some form of flight instruction as well as jet experience. Professional pilots who may not have the instructor background to become Mentor Pilots may also provide a valuable service to owner pilots by riding shotgun in the cockpit to enhance safety and allow for more favorable insurance rates. There may be great reward for entrepreneurial-minded pilots who begin their own air taxi operation at their home airport with their own Very Light Jet and pay themselves not only a salary for their work but also a return on investment that could make their incomes rival those of senior airline pilots.

With an initial investment of \$150,000 per person a small partnership of 6 to 10 partners may be able to start their own VLJ air taxi service. Partnerships should include a mix of skill sets to include a Director of Operations, Director of Maintenance, Chief Pilot, Captains, First Officers and someone knowledgeable in business affairs. There is more information and a free networking feature to help you find partners at www.taxijet.org. Part 135 Air Taxi has no age-60 rule so retired airline pilots could be good candidates for these small partnerships. Pilot members of small partnership owner operations could provide mentor/safety pilot services as a supplement to their air taxi business. Initially small partnership owner operators would probably need to find an existing part 135 Operator willing to act as an "Umbrella Operator." The FAA will probably need about four to six months to get your aircraft on the umbrella certificate so be sure to submit your application in time. You can simultaneously apply for your own part 135 certificate but the process often takes two years or more for final approval. Be sure to read through the FAA's "Operational Control: Revised Operations Specifications A008 and A002" and check with an aviation attorney before finalizing these umbrella arrangements.

Some states provide incentives and tax breaks for new companies that produce jobs in their state. The state of Florida requires that new businesses produce 10 or more new jobs and that the operation be based at certain airports to qualify for the incentives. You can find more information about Florida's programs at www.eflorida.com. Other states also offer incentives so check with the Chamber of Commerce of the individual state for more information. Be sure to inquire about the incentives BEFORE you announce your intentions to base your operation in any particular location or you will forfeit any incentives offered by the state.

Most pilots have something in their blood that compels them back to the cockpit. This yearning has often caused them to utter such self-defeating statements as: "I can't believe they pay me to do this." and "I'd do this job for free." These sentiments should never be shared with those who sit on the opposite side of labor negotiations tables but can now be extolled as a competitive advantage in the next generation of air travel. Now may be the time for furloughed airline pilots who have been working as realtors and insurance salespersons to look to the skies once again.