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## Michigan Accelerates Its Journey Toward Space

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For some time, Michigan's robust aerospace and defense industry has been somewhat under the general public's radar, at least in comparison to the auto industry. That's changing, and fast, as the local A&D community has been commanding attention of late.

Just last week, for example, the Michigan Launch Initiative (MLI), led by the Michigan Aerospace Manufacturers Association (MAMA), named the Oscoda-Wurtsmith Airport (OWA) as a top candidate to become a "spaceport" for horizontal launches of Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites. The satellites would be company-owned commercial satellites sent into LEO to support a range of functions, including voice and data communications, global internet access, weather monitoring, and autonomous vehicle operation.

MAMA is working to commence satellite launch operations in Michigan in 2022. In addition to the planned horizontal launch site in Oscoda, MAMA is leading efforts to identify and qualify a site in Michigan capable of supporting vertical satellite launches into space, as well a site suitable to function as "mission control" for all of Michigan's satellite launches. Michigan's concerted push toward space is a serious one, has been years in the making, and has already attracted significant sums of public and private investment from players both within and outside of the state.

OWA's recent selection came as part of MLI's ongoing site-selection/qualification process in which it initially considered eight different sites in Michigan. For OWA, one of the next steps in the process will be to obtain launch site licensing through the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). That licensing, while it looks promising for OWA, is no guarantee. For one thing, OWA must meet strict FAA requirements to ensure that it can operate safely as a launch site. Additionally, OWA has competition. Not only is there currently a handful of states that already have

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licensed operational launch sites, but there are other states, like Michigan, hoping to develop launch sites of their own and move into the commercial satellite industry, which, according to MAMA, is worth \$438 billion today and will be worth \$3.2 trillion by 2048.

Despite the strict safety requirements and the competition from other states, OWA is well-positioned to succeed in securing the required FAA licensing. Having Great Lakes surrounding Michigan promotes the argument that Michigan is a safe enough location for a launch site. Compared to other interested states, moreover, Michigan is well-positioned, geographically, to put satellites into their designated polar orbits more directly, with less fuel and flight time, which means cost savings for satellite-owning companies. And don't overlook Michigan's advantage in already having in place the engineering, manufacturing, service-providing and project management wherewithal that can adapt and apply itself somewhat naturally to the support and operation of satellite launch sites.

In fact, in recent years, several Michigan manufacturers, including automotive suppliers, have taken steps to diversify themselves into A&D. As they continue to do so, many of them, along with other companies, would stand to capitalize on the new business opportunities that would surely materialize with satellite launch sites. That's not to mention the continued and increased inflow of interest and investment that would come from outside the state in connection with launch operations. To get an idea of the launch site's potential impact on Michigan's economy, consider that the number of satellites launched into space within the next ten years could be as high as 70,000, according to some industry players, while MAMA estimates that OWA alone could launch 25 satellites per year, at \$15 million dollars in revenue per launch.

Those are attractive numbers, obviously, and they trigger excitement both within the A&D community and among those of us who support it. As Michigan's A&D industry continues to thrive, we at Butzel Long look forward not only to our continued support of MAMA and the MLI, but also to serving our valued clients who seek either to grow their existing A&D businesses or to diversify themselves into A&D.

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