

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Is Your State Ready for Drone Commerce? The 2023 State-by-State Scorecard

Commercial drone companies are testing and creating agriculture, medical, and home delivery services in countries around the world. Yet progress in the United States has been slow, in part because of a lack of clarity about federal and state roles in drone and airspace management. To jump-start the drone industry, states can create drone highways—aerial corridors above public roads. In “Is Your State Ready for Drone Commerce?” Brent Skorup presents a state-by-state scorecard (see table 1 on the next page).

Creating a System of Drone Highways

Many states have laws that allow cities to lease the air rights above public roads, vest property owners with air rights, and establish avigation easements. With these laws, states can facilitate future commercial drone operations in low-altitude airspace while Congress and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) develop national drone policies. Creating a clear and coherent framework at the state and local level, such as a system of drone highways, will make parcel delivery faster, improve distribution of medical supplies, and create jobs in the technology and logistics sectors.

Factors for Ranking States’ “Drone Readiness”

Skorup uses six factors to score and rank the 50 states’ preparedness for commercial drone services:

1. *Airspace lease law* (30 points): More than one-third of states currently allow state or local authorities to lease airspace above public roads and private property.
2. *Avigation easement law* (25 points): These laws allow drone flights as long as they are high enough to avoid being a noise nuisance to landowners and passersby.
3. *Task force or program office* (20 points): States that have a drone program office within their department of transportation or a statewide task force will be ahead of the curve and can anticipate future issues before they become problems for operators and residents.
4. *Law vesting landowners with air rights* (10 points): These laws clarify property rights, thereby reducing litigation risk for drone operators and homeowners alike.
5. *Sandbox* (10 points): The term sandbox refers to a designated place to test new technologies under liberal rules for a predetermined duration. A drone sandbox allows early-stage companies to show proof of concept to investors and regulators.
6. *Jobs estimate* (5 points): The number of drone jobs in a state signals future growth in drone commerce.

TABLE 1. STATE RANKINGS, 2023

Overall Rank		Overall Score	Overall Rank		Overall Score
1	Arkansas	90	26	Hawaii	37
2	Oklahoma	74	26	Idaho	37
3	North Dakota	70	26	Indiana	37
4	Arizona	68	29	Tennessee	36
4	Georgia	68	30	Oregon	35
4	North Carolina	68	30	West Virginia	35
7	Minnesota	66	32	Kansas	34
8	Maryland	59	33	Alaska	33
8	Massachusetts	59	33	New Hampshire	33
10	New Jersey	58	35	Florida	32
11	Montana	57	35	Maine	32
11	Nevada	57	35	Pennsylvania	32
13	Virginia	55	35	Utah	32
14	Texas	54	39	New York	25
14	Washington	54	40	Connecticut	24
16	California	50	41	Illinois	23
17	Delaware	47	42	Alabama	15
18	Wisconsin	46	43	Kentucky	11
19	Louisiana	44	43	South Carolina	11
20	Michigan	41	45	Iowa	5
20	Ohio	41	46	South Dakota	4
22	Vermont	40	47	New Mexico	3
23	Missouri	39	48	Mississippi	1
24	Colorado	38	48	Nebraska	1
24	Wyoming	38	48	Rhode Island	1

Note: Because our data source does not provide drone jobs numbers for US territories, we have omitted Puerto Rico from the rankings.