

WHAT'S NEXT IN AIR TRAVEL? LET YOUR IMAGINATION TAKE FLIGHT!



Attention, time travelers: the future is boarding now. As the pace of technological innovation continues to accelerate, we're approaching a period of transformation in the aviation industry. Surprises on the horizon encompass everything from the duration of flights to the physical shape of aircraft, and each development has the potential to change the way we experience flight.

What will take off next? Here's a roundup of recent predictions.

The most startling change could take place in the cockpit. With unmanned drones taking flight and driverless cars being road-tested, [the BBC reports](#) that we already have the technology necessary to pilot a plane without having a human pilot on board.

NASA isn't considering removing engines from aircraft, but it is researching the advantages of moving the engines to the rear of the plane. It's all part of a scheme called [Boundary Layer Ingestion \(BLI\)](#), designed to reduce jet engines' fuel burn, emissions, and operating costs. The theory is that placing engines near the back of the aircraft would reduce drag. NASA also maintains an online [future aircraft image gallery](#) that offers a sneak preview of what we may see in the air just a decade or two from now.



Image credits: Double bubble Concept: Don Foley. Boundary Layer Ingestion Illustration: NASA / Lillian Gipson

At Boeing, futurologists are “[ignoring the parameters of what is currently possible](#)” as they research new materials that simultaneously reduce aircraft weight and increase strength. One example is the use of metallic “microlattice” structures that are 99.99% air but could become building blocks of next-generation planes.



New Tourist Class seats to be installed on Dreamliner aircraft. Image credits: LIFT BY ENCORE

Aircraft interiors are due for a makeover, too, [The Telegraph reports](#). Writing about the winners of the Crystal Cabin Awards, which were announced at the Aircraft Interiors Expo in Hamburg, the newspaper made particular note of several trends. Increased luxury and privacy in first class and business class seating is one trend on the rise. The article also noted that folding seats designed by Airbus would make it possible to customize seating configurations on flights. Everything from entertainment systems to seat cushions to toilets is up for being reimagined.

We may even see a shift from boarding regulations regarding batteries in checked bags to engineering advances that produce battery-operated planes. [The Economist reports](#) that research into electric propulsion may move that idea from science fiction to fact.

So be sure to keep your passport current. These developments may hit the runways sooner than you expect, and you want to be on board when they take off.

Now, your turn => What is the development you most want to see in future air travel? Send us your idea by [email](#)

We'll publish the best ideas in the next issue of our newsletter.