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The Future Combat Systems (FCS) program has passed a significant milestone in its progress toward selecting a Class I Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) system. The announcement was made today by Boeing [NYSE: BA] and partner Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), the Lead Systems Integrator team for the U.S. Army's FCS program.

The Micro Air Vehicle (MAV), developed by Honeywell under a two-phased Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency advanced concept technology development contract, has achieved a technology readiness level 6. The readiness level is based on recent successes during government acceptance tests and pre-experimentation flights. The level 6 designation is consistent with FCS requirements to begin transitioning the technology to the FCS program.

"The Micro Air Vehicle has flown more than 200 successful flights, including flying in a representative urban environment," said Mark Franzblau, director, FCS Unmanned Aerial Vehicle system development. "We are confident it will continue to meet or exceed the goals of DARPA's contract and eventually transition to FCS as the preferred Class I UAV platform."

The Micro Air Vehicle contract provides critical development in two key technology areas essential to meeting FCS Class I Unmanned Aerial Vehicle requirements: a ducted fan design providing hover and stare capability coupled with a small heavy fuels engine. The FCS program will continue to work with DARPA and Honeywell to transition the heavy fuel engine technology as it matures through the remainder of the DARPA contract.

Leveraging DARPA's investment in the Micro Air Vehicle technology, Boeing issued a system engineering contract in December 2004 to Honeywell to conduct a gap analysis identifying what additional development was required to transition the DARPA vehicle to an FCS-compliant Class I UAV system. Under the extended, nearly-three-million-dollar contract announced this week, Honeywell will continue the systems engineering analyses leading to a System Functional Review in March 2006. Following a successful review, Boeing intends to award a Class I UAV System Development and Demonstration contract to Honeywell. The development and demonstration phase will continue through FY2014 and will include the development and flight test of unmanned, autonomous vehicle prototypes.

The FCS Class I Unmanned Aerial Vehicle is one of four classes of FCS Unmanned Aerial Vehicle systems that are organic to platoon, company, battalion and brigade echelons and form the airborne component of the FCS network providing protection and information for troops on the ground. Together, they constitute four of the 18 systems, which, together with the network and the soldier, will make up FCS.

The FCS Class I Unmanned Aerial Vehicle will be used for reconnaissance, security and target acquisition operations in open, rolling, complex and urban terrain. Each system -- comprising two air vehicles, a dismounted control device and associated ground support equipment -- will be carried by selected platforms and dismounted soldiers, and will use autonomous flight and navigation with vertical take-off and landing and recovery capability.

A unit of The Boeing Company, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is one of the world's largest space and defense businesses. Headquartered in St. Louis, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is a $30.5 billion business. It provides network-centric system solutions to its global military, government, and commercial customers. It is a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems; the world's largest military aircraft manufacturer; the world's largest satellite manufacturer and a leading provider of space-based communications; the primary systems integrator for U.S. missile defense; NASA's largest contractor; and a global leader in sustainment solutions and launch services.
SAIC is the largest employee-owned research and engineering company in the United States, with annual revenues of $7.2 billion and more than 43,000 employees in over 150 cities worldwide. SAIC engineers and scientists solve complex technical problems in national security, homeland security, energy, the environment, space, telecommunications, health care, and logistics. SAIC: FROM SCIENCE TO SOLUTIONS™.
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