

## **Nasa tests laser-powered plane**

**A remote-controlled plane powered from the ground by a laser beam has been tested by the US space agency (Nasa).**

In what is thought to be an aviation first, the development could lead to the creation of aircraft that do not need to carry onboard fuel.

The flight of the small, model plane was conducted in a hanger at Nasa's Marshall Space Flight Center in Alabama.

"It really is a groundbreaking development for aviation," said Robert Burdine, laser project manager for the test.

The 300-gram (11-ounce) plane, with a 1.5-metre (five foot) wingspan, was launched from a platform.

The laser tracked the aircraft in flight, directing its energy beam at specially designed photovoltaic cells carried on the fuselage to power the plane's propeller.

"The craft could keep flying as long as the energy source, in this case the laser beam, is uninterrupted," said Mr Burdine.

"This is the first time that we know of that a plane has been powered only by the energy of laser light."

As the plane does not need to take on fuel or batteries, it would have more room for scientific instruments or communications equipment.

Scientists think it could eventually be used for surveillance and to provide communication links.

"A telecommunications company could put transponders on an airplane and fly it over a city," said David Bushman, project manager for beamed power at Dryden

Flight Research Center in California.

"The aircraft could be used for everything from relaying cell phone calls to cable television or Internet connections."

Nasa reportedly sees great potential in using laser power for developing new planes.

"We think this is a step in the right direction," said Mr Bushman.

Story from BBC NEWS:  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/americas/3182744.stm>

Published: 2003/10/11 00:07:18 GMT

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