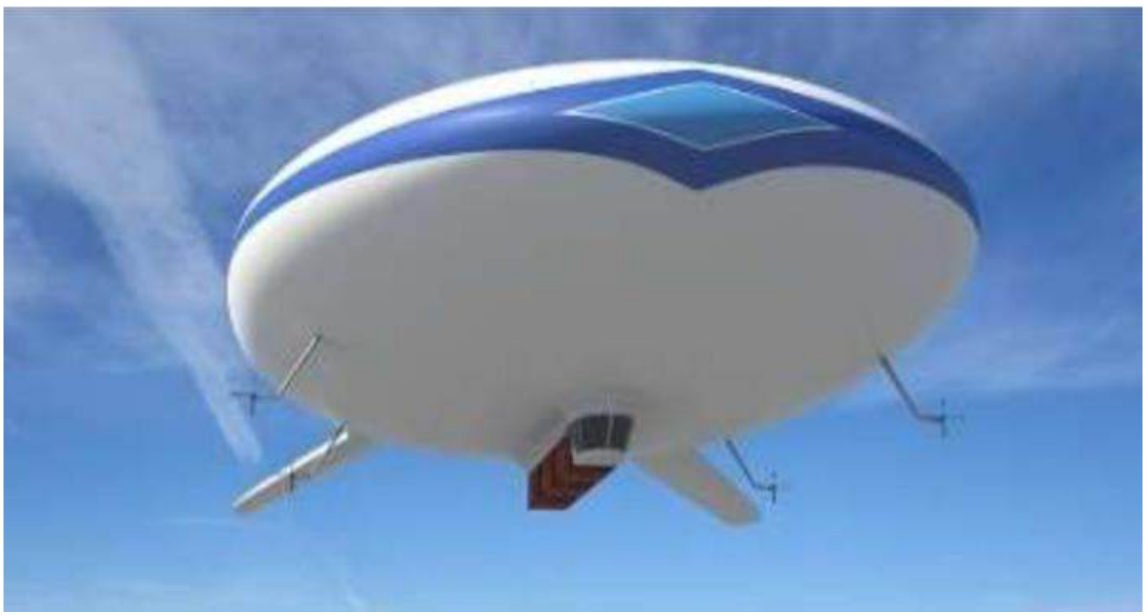
LTA Aerostructures (LTAA) - rigid airships

Peter Lobner, updated 6 November 2024

1. Introduction

LTA Aerostructures Inc. (LTAA) is a Canadian company that was formed as an investment partnership among US-based US-Lighter Than Air Corp. (US-LTA Corp, New York), NEXA Capital Partners and other partners. LTAA was founded in 2014 in Mirabel, Quebec, Canada, with the goal of developing heavy lift, cargo airships capable of providing precision vertical lift and delivery of large tonnage into remote areas with limited or no ground infrastructure.



Lenticular cargo airship design concept. Source: LTA Aerostructures (2015)

In November 2015, LTAA reported that it planned to build a new $60 million manufacturing facility in Mirabel, near Montreal, Canada, where LTAA's heavy lift cargo airships were to be designed, fabricated, assembled and certified. LTAA's President and CEO, Michael Dyment, stated, "Our 10 tonne lift and 70 tonne lift lenticular airships will for the first time meet the cargo and logistics needs of people in remote areas, as well as in the mining and oil and gas industries that must operate there." At that time, it was expected that the new class of heavy lift cargo airship would enter revenue service in 2019.

However, the planned LTAA factory was never built and the company appears to have folded. The former LTAA corporate website, www.lta-aerostructures.ca, no longer is active.

In July 2019, I spoke to a representative from AeroMontréal (https://www.aeromontreal.ca/lta-aerostructures-en.html), a strategic "think tank" created in 2006 to mobilize Quebec's aerospace sector, who confirmed that LTAA no longer is part of their future plans for the region. Instead, Quebec will be implementing a new plan to develop an airship industry in Montreal in collaboration with the French airship manufacturer Flying Whales. In June 2019, Quebec's Economy Minister announced at the Paris Air Show that Quebec intends to buy a minority stake in Flying Whales and construct a production facility in the Montreal area within five years.

The remainder of this section describes the evolution of the LTAA cargo airships that might have been.

2. Business case for Canadian Arctic airships

The initial target markets for these airships included transporting cargo for oil and gas companies exploring in remote regions of northern Canada, and delivering completed housing units, other structures and supplies to improve the living conditions in First Nation communities in these remote regions. On return trips, airships would be able to remove decades of trash for recycling and take Arctic products, such as fish and other locally produced items, to southern markets. The business case for LTA airships is described in the LTAA September 2015 general presentation.

3. Lenticular airship patents

The intellectual property law firm Finnegan (https://www.finnegan.com) reports that they "guided the entire developments of LTA's patent portfolio that includes over 120 patents and pending applications directed to lighter-than-air airship technology. The applications cover airship technologies ranging from hull and empennage configurations, propulsion and power source arrangements, flight control systems, attitude regulation and control, attitude displays, variable buoyancy techniques, solar powered flight, aerodynamic features, and various ornamental designs and configurations."

LTAA's lenticular airship designs were developed by French inventor Pierre Balaskovic, who has long been a champion of lenticular airships. These designs are addressed in the following patents originally held by LTAA's parent company, US-LTA Corp, New York.

The following three patents establish the basic configuration and characteristics of a lenticular, oblate spheroid-shaped airship of the type shown in the following two diagrams. This particular design was the basis for the French Alizé semi-rigid airship, which is addressed in a separate article.

- US patent US7866601B2, "Lenticular Airship," granted 11 January 2011
- US patent US8418952B2, "Lenticular Airship," granted 16 April 2013
- European Patent Specification EP2173613B1, "Lenticular Airship and Associated Controls," published 26 February 2014

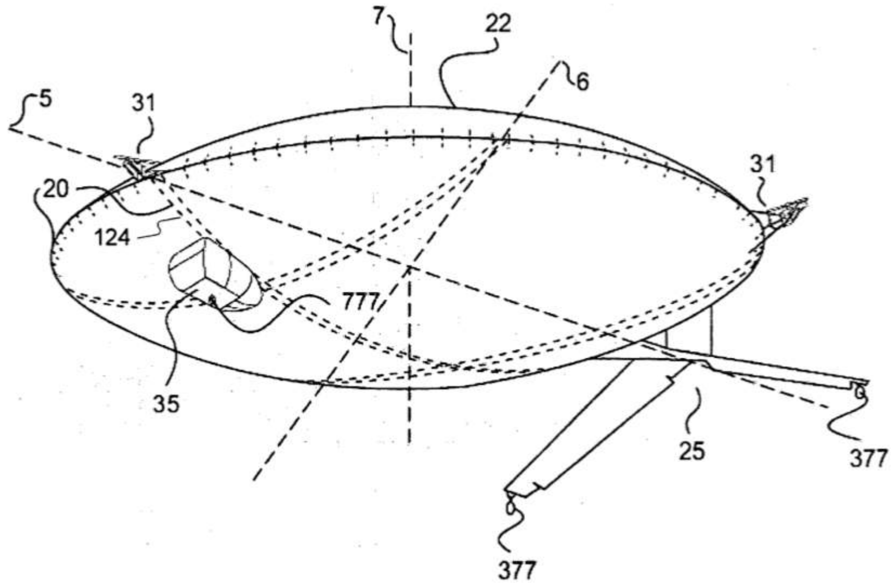


FIG. 1

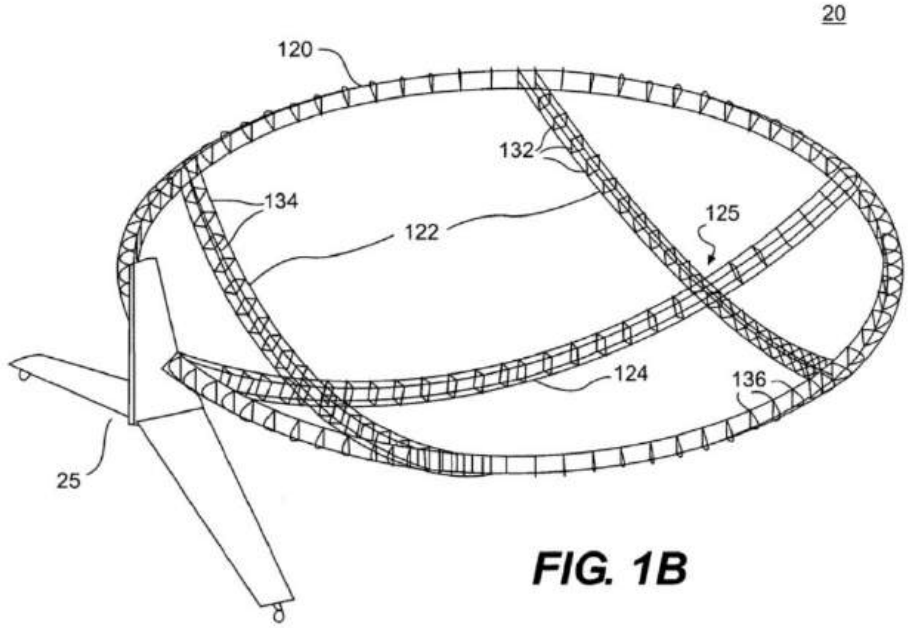


FIG. 1B

Legend

(5) Longitudinal axis, (7) Vertical axis, (20) Support structures, (22) Hull, (25), Empennage assembly, (31) Propulsion assemblies, (35) Gondola, (120) Keel hoop, (122) Lateral frame members, (124) Longitudinal frame member, (377 & 777) Landing gear.

General arrangement drawing (above) & semi-rigid hull & empennage structures (below). Source: US7866601B2

US patent US8596571B2, “Airship Including Aerodynamic, Floatation and Deployable Structures,” published 11 January 2011, lists John Goelet as inventor and US-LTA Corp, New York, as the applicant. This patent applies to the lenticular, elongated oblate spheroid-shaped airship shown in the following diagrams, which is generally similar to the basic LTAA hull shape. This airship has aerodynamic components that are integrated with the hull and are designed primarily to improve the stability of the airship in windy conditions.

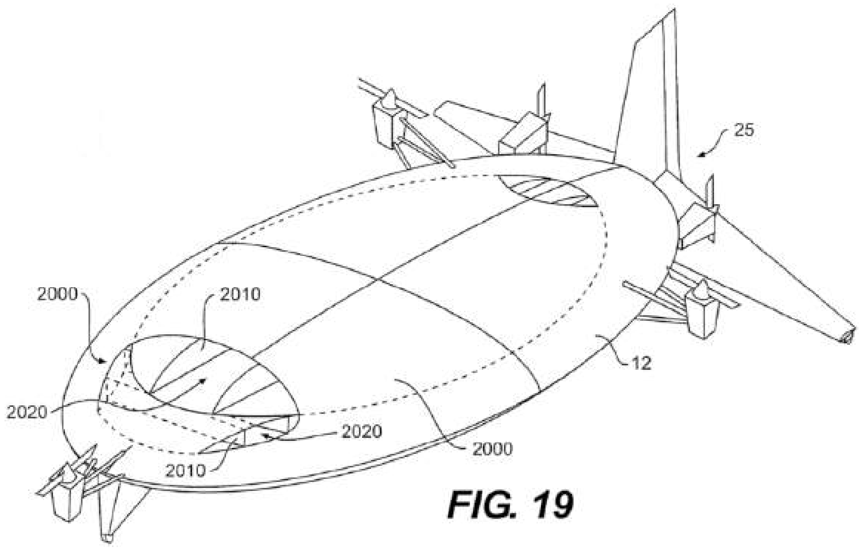


FIG. 19

Hull (12), control surfaces (25) and aerodynamic channels (2000-series).

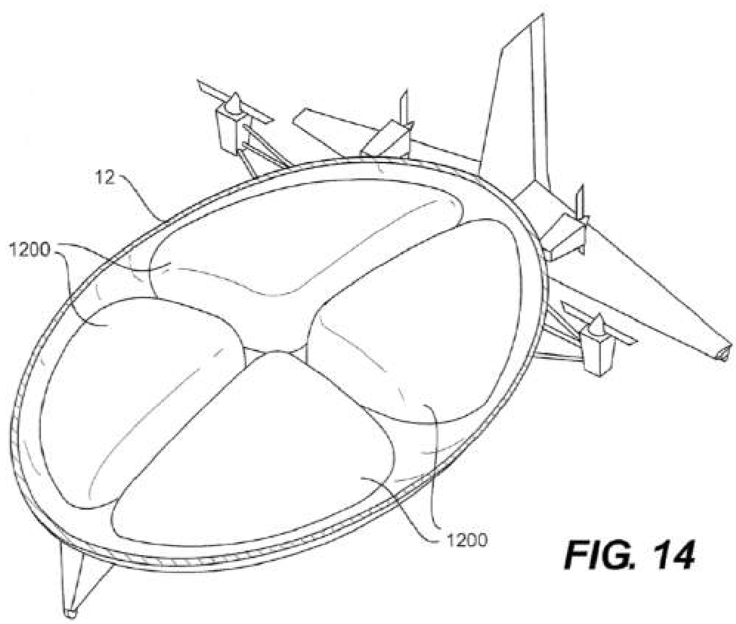


FIG. 14

Hull (12) and one example of helium lifting gas cells (1200).
Source, both diagrams: US8596571B2

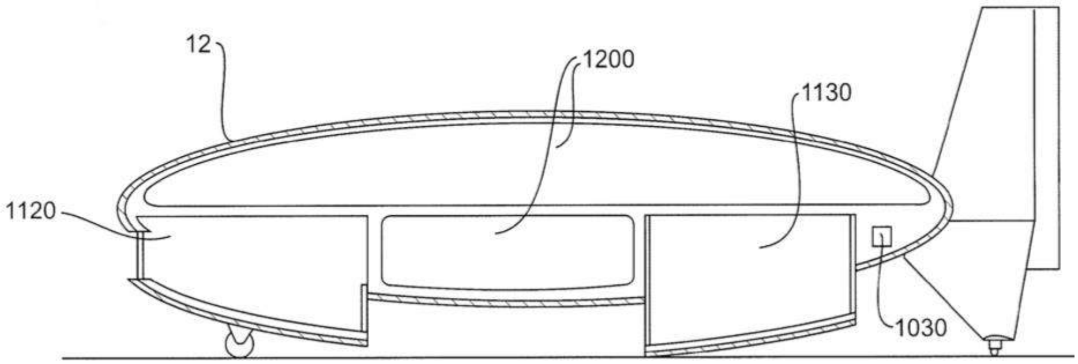


FIG. 16

Hull (12), helium cells (1200), passenger compartment (1120), and freight compartment (1130). Source: Source: US8596571B2

This lenticular airship design is further elaborated and evolved in other patents, including US Patent US8894002B2, “System and Method for Solar Powered Airship,” granted 25 November 2014.

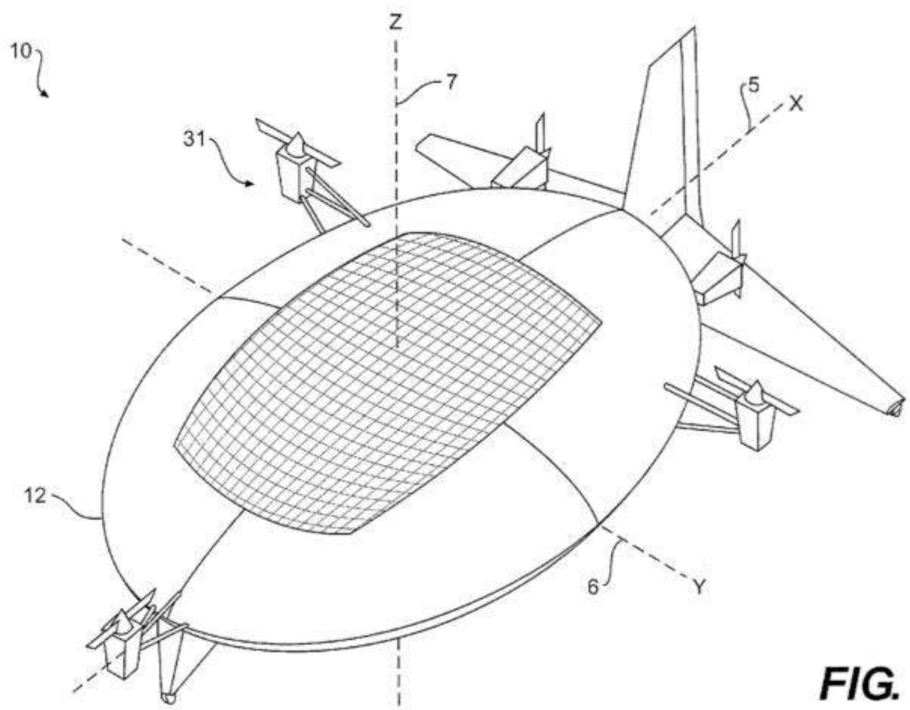


FIG. 1

General arrangement showing solar panels on the top of the hull (12) and propulsion assemblies (31). Source: US8894002B2

A variable buoyancy control system for a solar-powered lenticular airship with a similar overall layout is presented in US patent US8899514B2, “System and Method for Varying Airship Aerostatic Buoyancy,” published 2 December 2014. This patent describes the configuration of the lenticular airship and the arrangement of lifting gas cells into outer (lower pressure) volumes and inner (higher pressure) volumes and the use of a computer system, pumps and valves to manage the airship’s overall buoyancy by moving helium between the outer and inner volumes.

To increase lift:

> “….the computer is configured to increase lift ….by operating….the valves coupled with at least one inner bladder to vent the lighter-than-air gas from the…inner bladder to the outer bladder so as to increase a volume of the lighter-than-air gas retained in the outer bladder.”

To decrease lift:

> “…the computer is configured to decrease lift…by operating…at least one of the valves coupled with …(an) internal bladder and the pump to increase the internal pressure of the….internal bladder using the lighter-than-air gas from the outside bladder so as to reduce a volume of lighter-than-air gas retained in the outer bladder.”

This method of implementing variable buoyancy control in an airship is functionally similar to the Density Controlled Buoyancy (DCB) system invented and developed by Michael Walden and his firm LTAS (Lighter Than Air Solar) in the 1970s. The LTAA system also is similar to the Control of Static Heaviness (COSH) system patented by Worldwide Aeros Corp. (Aeros), demonstrated in flight in 2013 on their prototype airship, the *Dragon Dream*, and implemented in all subsequent Aeroscraft airship designs.

The lenticular airship design representative of the LTA 10 and LTA 70 airships is described in patent US9802690B2, “Cargo airship,” granted 31 October 2017. This is a rigid hybrid airship, with the structure defining the lenticular shape of the airship while providing support for the numerous systems associated with the airship.

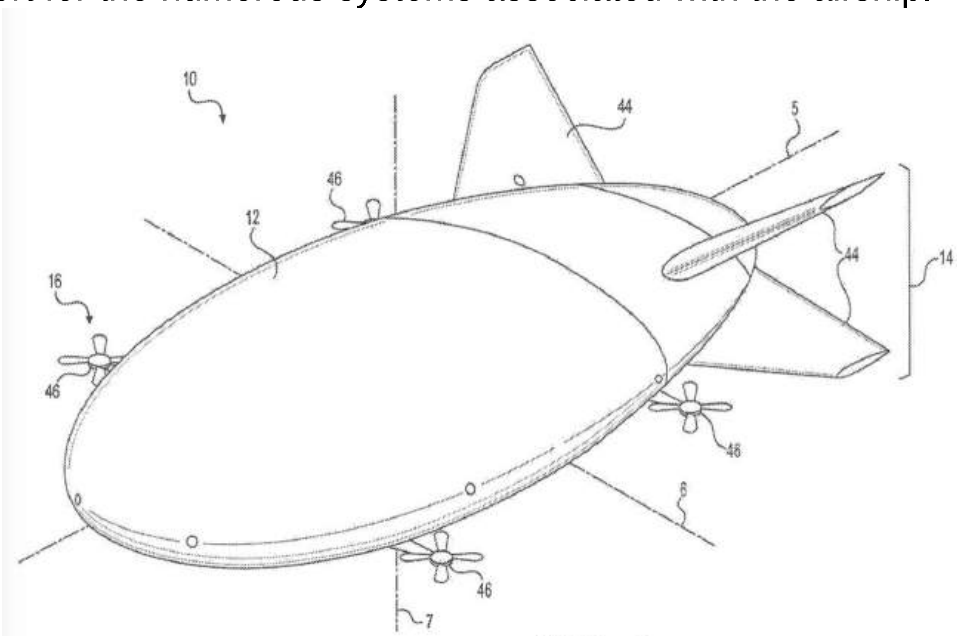


FIG. 1

General configuration of the airship showing the lenticular hull (12), placement of four vectorable thrusters (48) and four large stabilizing fins (44). Source: US9802690B2

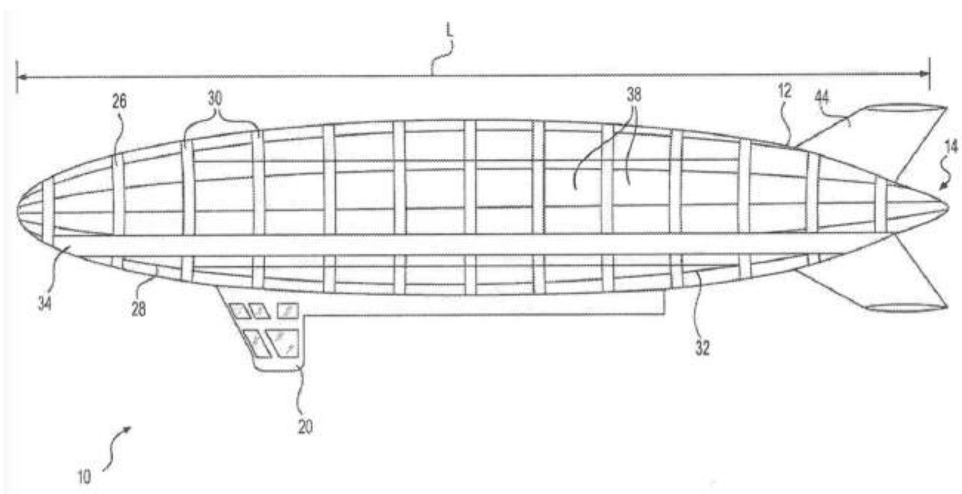


FIG. 2

General configuration of the rigid structure of the airship, including the gondola (20), support structure (26), frame members (28), structural rings (30), longerons (32) and the main structural beam (34) that distributes loads evenly throughout the support structure. Source: US9802690B2

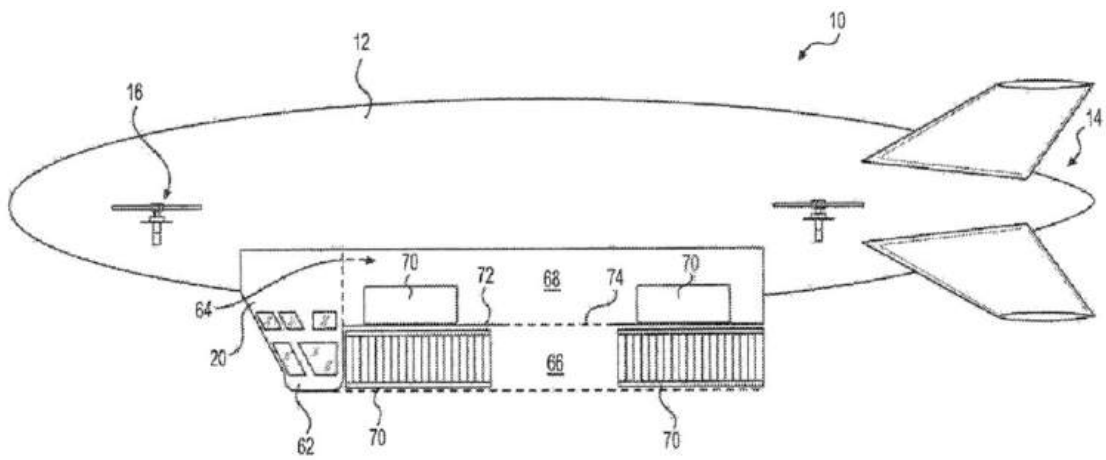


FIG. 11

Side view of the airship showing the lenticular hull (12), the gondola (20), the cargo bay (64), which includes provisions for an internal upper cargo bay (68) and an external lower cargo bay (66), and modular cargo containers (70) suspended in the lower cargo bay. Source: US9802690B2

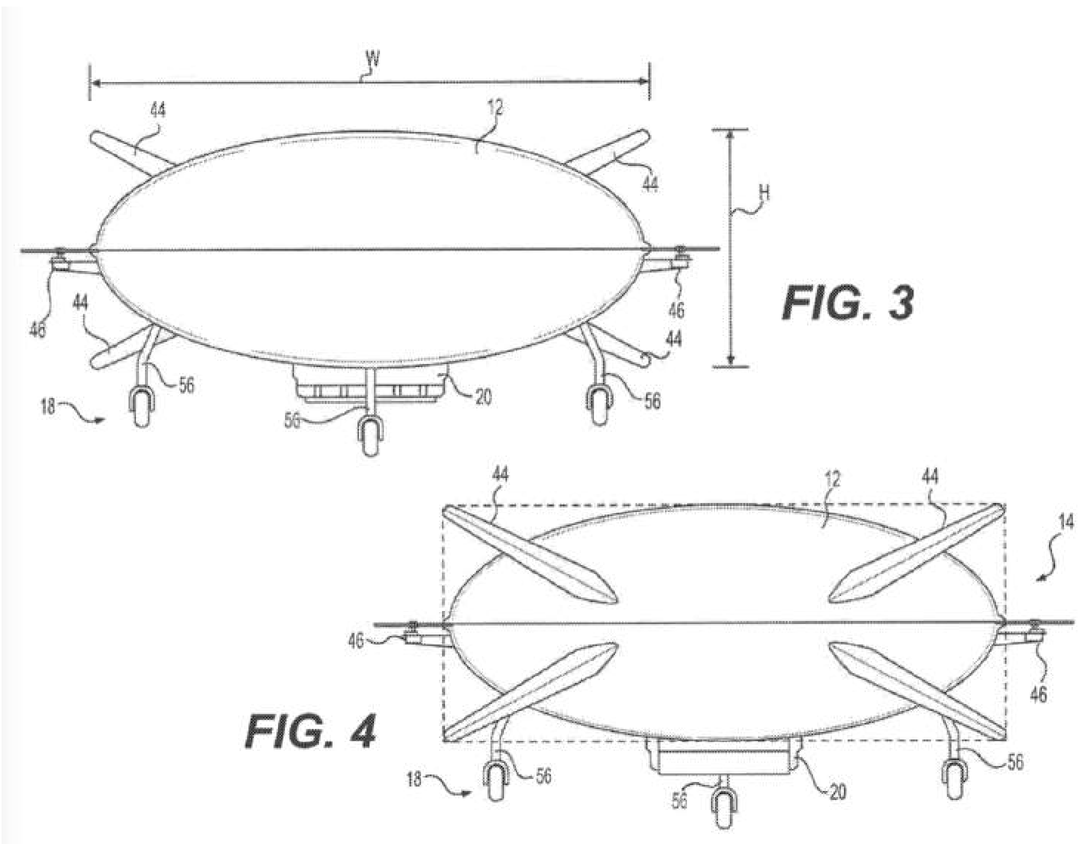


FIG. 3

FIG. 4

Front view (Fig. 3) and back view (Fig. 4) of the airship showing the lenticular hull (12), the gondola (20), the stabilizing fins (44), the vectorable thrusters (46) and the landing gear (56). Source: US9802690B2

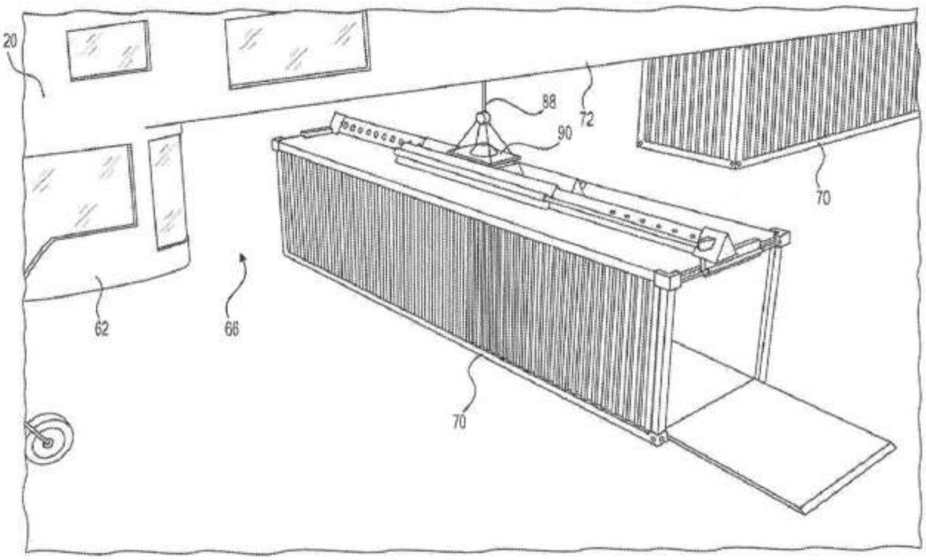


FIG. 17

Cargo handling system shown lifting an ISO standard cargo container (70), a hoist (88), and a cargo attachment member for the cargo (90. Source: US9802690B2

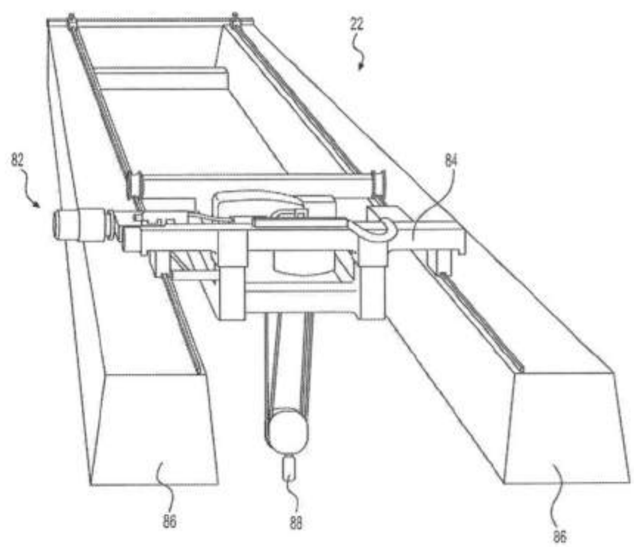


FIG. 16

Cargo handling system (22) showing one hoisting mechanism (82) consisting of a two-rail crane (84), crane rails (86), and hoist (88). Source: US9802690B2

This cargo handling system is very similar to the design developed by SAIC in their 2010 Skybus 1500HL heavy cargo airship design concept, which is addressed in a separate article.

4. LTA 10 & LTA 70 airship general features

General features of LTAA's two airship designs, as described in the firm's presentation at the September 2015 Nunavut Trade Show & Conference, include the following features:

- Rigid airship, advanced carbon/lattice-based composites, including stabilizers
- Patented "lenticular" form, streamlined for performance in high Arctic wind conditions
- Variable buoyancy control system
- Durable ice resistant coatings and snow removal technologies
- Heavy lift capability
- Flexible cargo handling: accommodates ISO intermodal containers, non-standard containers, palletized freight, large outsized freight items and winch-suspended sling loads
- Precision hovering load exchange, including hovering in windy conditions.
- Designed for Arctic operation: year-round in an operating temperature range from +110 to -50 degrees F.
- Engines with thrust vectoring capability
- Cruise speed 65 kph (40 mph); maximum speed 130 kph (81 mph)
- Retractable landing pods
- Minimum or no ground infrastructure required
- Improved operational availability

Load exchange process

With the variable buoyancy control system described in US patent US8899514B2, the LTA 10 and LTA 70 airships have the means to adjust their buoyancy when picking up or dropping off cargo and/or passengers.

It is assumed that the variable buoyancy control system has the ability to establish near-neutral buoyancy in flight and in hover, and that the airship will land from a hover with the assistance of vectoring thrusters. Once on the ground, the airship would be made heavier-than-air so it is stable while cargo is being loaded and/or unloaded. The nose landing gear is designed to be secured to the ground to serve as the pivot point around which the airship moves to point into the wind.

Taking into account the new overall weight of the airship after the load exchange, the variable buoyancy control system will reestablish near-neutral buoyancy on the ground immediately prior to takeoff and then takeoff will be executed with the vectoring thrusters.

LTAA has noted that airships returning from destinations in the Canadian Arctic can be loaded with trash and other cargo that should be removed from the sensitive Arctic environment.

A "precision hovering load exchange" will be more challenging because the airship must maintain a precise airborne geo-location throughout the load exchange transaction. The speed of this transaction will be governed by the size of the load and the rate at which the variable buoyancy control system can change the overall buoyancy of the airship so that suspended loads can be safely delivered at the destination and other loads picked up for delivery to another site.

The LTA 10 and LTA 70 rigid airships

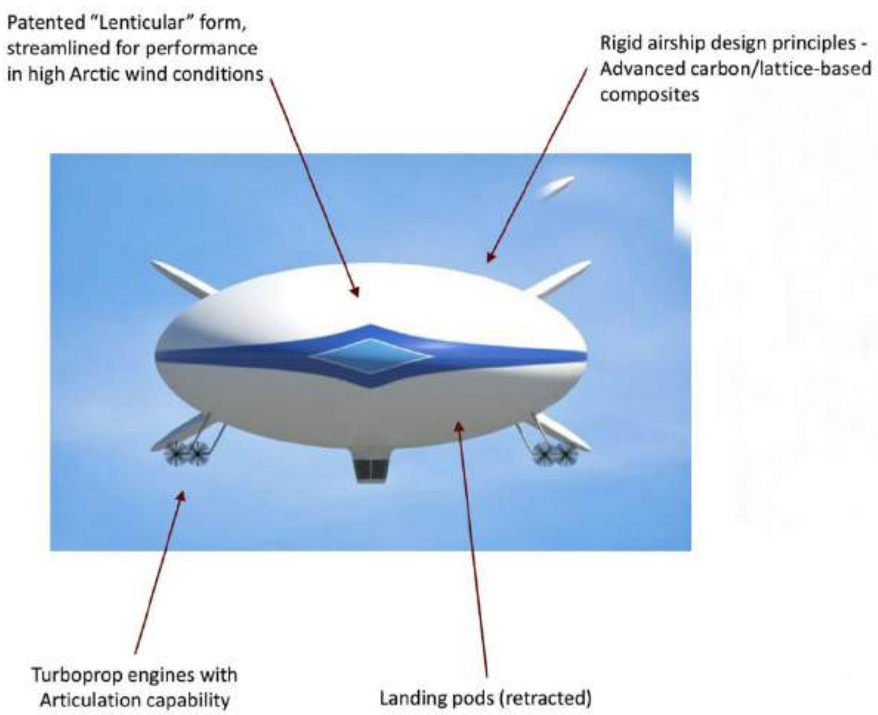
The LTA-10 is aimed at transportation and logistics roles in northern Canada, including government and First Nation logistics and light-to-medium logistics support for commercial mining, oil and gas exploration.

The LTA 70 is a much larger airship designed to provide heavy-lift cargo services in the same region for mining production and extraction activities and facilities construction, including wind farms and other power plants.

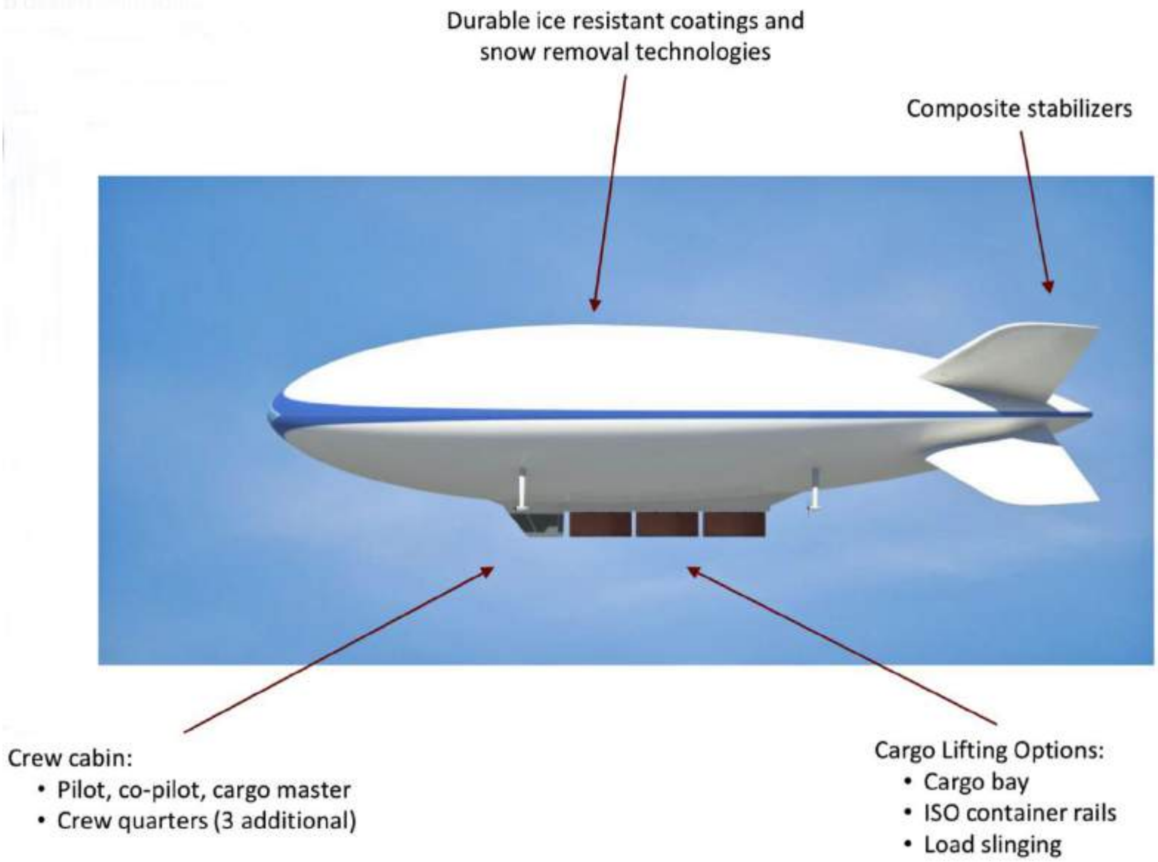
Comparison of the LTA 10 and LTA 70 airships

Parameter	**LTA 10**	**LTA 70**
Length	80 m (262 ft)	152 m (499 ft)
Width, max.	40 m (131 ft)	76 m (249 ft)
Height	22 m (72 ft)	38 meters (124.7 ft)
Envelope volume	27,400 m^3 (967, 622 ft^3) in 10 to 12 gas cells	186,300 m^3 (6,579,122 ft^3), in 10 to 12 gas cells
Crew	3 + 3	3 + 6
Payload	10 metric tons (11 short tons; 22,000 pounds)	70 metric tons (77 short tons; 154,324 pounds)
Cargo volume	300 m^3 (10,594 ft^3)	3,340 m^3 (79,105 ft^3)
Propulsion	4 x vectorable PT-6 turboprop	6 x vectorable electric motors powered by hybrid diesel / solar / fuel cell power system
Speed, max	130 kph (81 mph)	130 kph (81 mph)
Speed, cruise	65 (40)	65 (40)
Range	1,287 km (800 miles)	4,074 km (2,531 miles).

Source: LTAA presentation at the September 2015 Nunavut Trade Show & Conference,

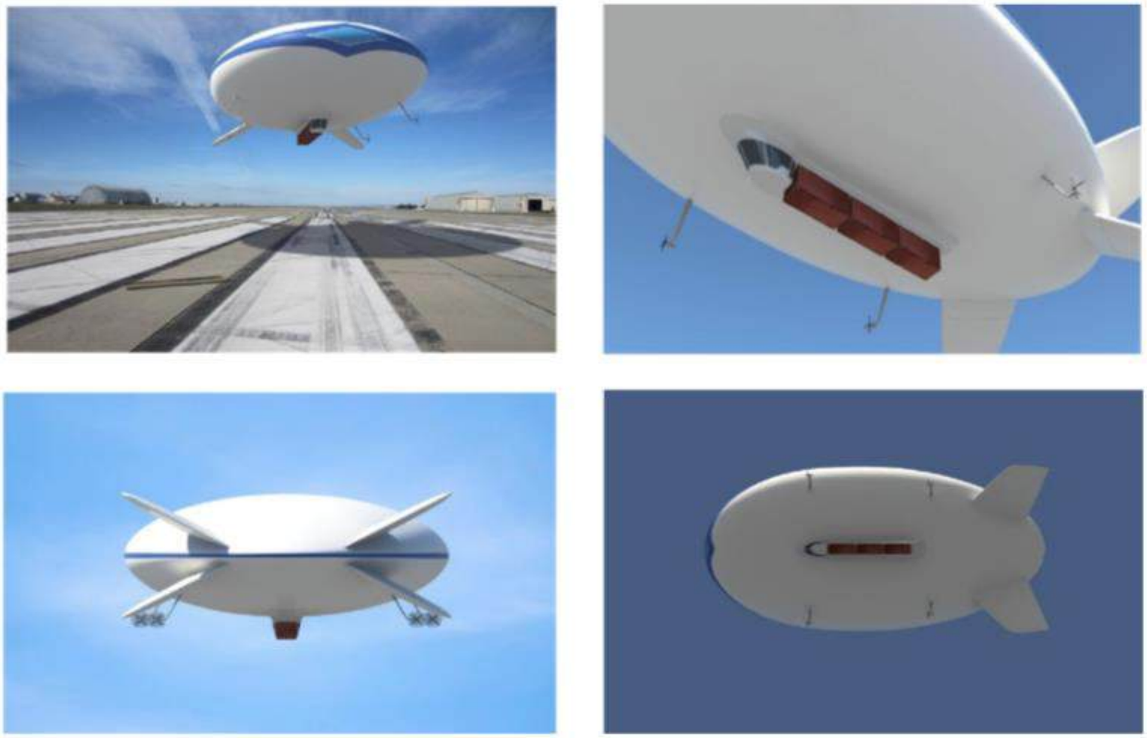


Bow view of an LTA 70 airship.
Source: LTA Aerostructures (2015)



Profile view of an LTA 70 airship.

ISO cargo module handling on an LTA-70.
Source, three graphics: LTA Aerostructures (2015)



Four views of an LTA-70 airship and its cargo module.

Rendering of LTA-70 in flight in the Arctic.
Source, five graphics: LTA Aerostructures (2015)

5. For additional information

- "LTA Aerostructures invests $90 million in Greater Montreal," Press release, 15 July 2014: https://skiesmag.com/press-releases/ltaaerostructuresinvests90millioningreatermontreal/
- Mike Dyment, "LTA Aerostructures – General Presentation," Heavy Lift Cargo Airships for Northern Operations, Nunavut Trade Show & Conference, 24 September 2015: https://nunavuttradeshow.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/7-Dyment-LTA-Aerostructures.pdf
- "LTA Aerostructures Flyer" Issue 2, April 2016: https://silo.tips/download/flyer-issue-2-april-canada-us-announce-collaboration-on-arctic-issues-in-this-is

Patents

- US7866601B2, "Lenticular Airship," Inventor Pierre Balaskovic, filed 18 October 2007 as application US2008/0179454A1, granted 11 January 2011, assigned to LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/US7866601B2/en
- USD670638S, "Airship," filed 20 July 2010, granted 13 November 2012, assigned to LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/USD670638S1/en
- US8894002B2, "System and Method for Solar Powered Airship," filed 14 July 2011 as application US2012/0018571A1, granted 25 November 2014, assigned to LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/US8894002B2/en
- US8418952B2, "Lenticular Airship," filed 3 January 2012 as application US2012/0160959A1, granted 16 April 2013, assigned to LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/US8418952B2/en
- US8596571B2, "Airship Including Aerodynamic, Floatation and Deployable Structures," filed 26 March 2012 as application 2012/0248241A1, granted 3 December 2013, assigned to LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/US8596571B2/en
- US8899514B2, "System and Method for Varying Airship Aerostatic Buoyancy," filed 20 September 2013 as application US2012/0018571A1, granted 2 December 2014, assigned to

LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/US8899514B2/en

- USD743319S1, “Airship,” filed 5 May 2014, granted 17 November 2017, assigned to LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/USD743319S1/en?oq=•USD743319S1
- USD743867S1, “Airship,” filed 3 November 2014, granted 31 October 2017, assigned to LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/USD743867S1/en
- US9802690B2, “Cargo airship,” filed 5 May 2014 as application 2015/0291269A1, granted 31 October 2017, assigned to LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/US9802690B2/en
- Canadian Patent CA2856901C, “Lenticular Airship,” filed 15 October 2007, granted 29 August 2017, assigned to JG Entrepreneurial Enterprises LLC: https://patents.google.com/patent/CA2856901C/en
- Canadian Patent Application CA2929507A1, “Cargo Airship,” filed 3 November 2014, published on 23 July 2015, assigned to JG Entrepreneurial Enterprises LLC: https://patents.google.com/patent/CA2929507A1/en
- European Patent Specification EP2173613B1, “Lenticular Airship and Associated Controls,” filed 7 August 2008, granted 26 February 2014, assigned to LTA Corp.: https://patents.google.com/patent/EP2173613B1/en
- International Publication WO2012/135117A2, “Airship Including Aerodynamic, Floatation and Deployable Structures,” filed 26 March 2012, published 4 October 2012: https://patents.google.com/patent/WO2012135117A2/en
- International Application WO2015/108607A3, “Cargo Airship,” filed 3 November 2014, published 26 November 2015: https://patents.google.com/patent/WO2015108607A3/en

Other *Modern Airships* articles

- *Modern Airships - Part 1*: https://lynceans.org/all-posts/modern-airships-part-1/
    - Aeros - Aeroscraft airships
    - Aeros - Dragon Dream
    - SAIC - Skybus 1500

    - US-LTA Corporation - Model 138S blimp
    - Walden Aerospace / LTAS / LTASI - Lenticular, toroidal, variable buoyancy airships
- *Modern Airships - Part 2*: https://lynceans.org/all-posts/modern-airships-part-2/
    - Alpha & Alizé lenticular airships
    - Flying Whales
- *Modern Airships - Part 3*: https://lynceans.org/all-posts/modern-airships-part-3/