Amazon’s Drones for Deliveries

By Greg Bensinger

Amazon.com Chief Executive Jeff Bezos said the online retailer is developing pilotless flying vehicles he calls “octocopters” that can deliver packages within a half hour of customers placing an order.

Bezos showed Charlie Rose an early version of the drone in development on an episode of the CBS news program “60 Minutes” aired Sunday evening. He said it was possible Amazon could introduce the drones within four to five years, depending in part on Federal Aviation Administration approvals.

“I know this looks like science fiction. It’s not,” Bezos told Rose, according to a transcript of the program sent by “60 Minutes.”

Amazon has been working to cut delivery time through warehouse equipment efficiencies and by building more of them near urban centers. The Seattle retailer has drawn millions of customers to its $79-per-year shipping Prime program which promises unlimited two-day shipping.

Bezos said the drones could carry packages weighing up to five pounds, which makes up 86% of the company’s deliveries, according to the transcript.

“It could be a ten-mile radius from a fulfillment center,” said Bezos. “So, in urban areas, you could actually cover very significant portions of the population.”

Much about the project remains to be seen, however. Amazon will have to contend with cost, noise and safety issues, as well as privacy concerns surrounding vehicles making apparent Amazon deliveries.

“I don’t want anybody to think this is just around the corner,” said Bezos. “This is all an R&D project.”

An Amazon press release timed to the show’s airing says the proposed delivery idea is called Prime Air. A spokeswoman for the company said Amazon had already contacted the FAA about the project.