Introduction: Business plans for the commercial use of space are numerous, but only a handful have received meaningful investments—and fewer market validated. Without logical stepping stones of ascending difficulty—and commercial success—the businesses that may emerge from suborbital research will remain an untouchable prospect for all but the most risk-prone angel investors.

Changing Risk Structure: Commerce in any regime is characterized by two types of risk to be mitigated: technical and market. If next generation suborbital activities reach a critical volume of frequent flights, the risk/reward ratio will reach an inflection point. With a growing set of underlying data, the financial world can address suborbital endeavors as forecastable, investable opportunities—progressing from the buds planted by today’s small cadre of speculators.

Non-monetary returns on investment are realizable in the early phases of suborbital flight. The quick turnaround, hands-dirty, low cost approach that will be enabled is likely to lead to novel experimentation, increased risk-taking, and participation by industries formerly uninterested in the microgravity environment.

Analogous Ecosystems: The struggle to identify probable business models has been preceded by the search for a useful analogy to the current state of the space enterprise. Whether it is best represented by the railroad systems, early airmail carriers, or the competition to decipher the east west position (longitude) of a ship at sea matters not. What each of these comparisons is actually looking for is a representation of an ecosystem with all the right parts to stimulate an industry. That ecosystem has triggers necessary for each part of the value chain, including but not limited to: entrepreneurs, engineers, investors, service providers, users, customers, government stakeholders, and even celebrity advocates.

Conclusion: Simple, reliable services competitive on cost, but dense with usefulness provided to multiple segments of buyers will alter the suborbital market. Next generation suborbital research is a logical stepping stone to a much larger pool of investment options in the nascent entrepreneurial space industry because it offers: (a) the flexibility to serve as a portal to an extremely wide array of microgravity research, even new ideas like “citizen science” using iPhones as research platforms, (b) the altered perception of access that accompanies low cost, quick answers, and frequent repeatability. With increased suborbital activities come reduced risk, and a broader investor base.