NASA’s Use of Commercial Satellite Systems: Concepts & Challenges

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Abstract

- Lewis Research Center’s Space Communications Program has a responsibility to investigate, plan for, and demonstrate how NASA Enterprises can use advanced commercial communications services and technologies to satisfy their missions’ space communications needs. This presentation looks at the features and challenges of alternative hardware system architecture concepts for providing specific categories of communications services.
Commercial Utilization

- "In the conduct of these research and development programs, NASA will seek to privatize or commercialize its space communications operations."

- "U.S. Government agencies shall purchase commercially available goods and services to the fullest extent feasible and shall not conduct activities with commercial applications that preclude or deter commercial space activities except for reasons of national security or public safety."

- White House National Space Policy
  Civil Space Guidelines
  Commercial Space Guidelines
  September 19, 1996
Lewis Research Center’s Space Communications Program has a responsibility to investigate, plan for, and demonstrate how NASA Enterprises can use advanced commercial communications services and technologies to satisfy missions’ space communications needs.

- Identify candidate commercial SatCom systems to be leveraged
  - Develop an implementation plan for aligning NASA’s needs with commercial capabilities
  - Select, develop and demonstrate enabling technologies and services to mitigate risk
  - Enhance U.S. industry capabilities and competitiveness
Physical Architectures

- NASA's use of commercial communications systems requires both:
  - physical links and interfaces compatible with commercial space and terrestrial network infrastructures
  - compatible data communication network protocols

- This presentation focuses on alternative architectures for the physical communications system:
  - to establish the necessary framework for interoperability with commercial space and terrestrial networks
  - to effectively enable the suite of desired communications services

Potential Service Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Category</th>
<th>Characteristics &amp; Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrowband communications</td>
<td>Low-rate data, TT&amp;C, personal communications for humans in space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wideband tele-science</td>
<td>Asymmetrical, experiment configuration, command, and scientific data return</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broadband tele-presence</td>
<td>Nearly continuous, real-time interaction with space segment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-capacity storage and distribution</td>
<td>Latency-tolerant, content-rich data, file transfers to PI's and archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-demand integrated services</td>
<td>Real-time video, data, and voice, &quot;Spacecraft on the Internet&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Potential Service Categories

Communications Requirements

- Periodic
  - Coverage
    - High Bandwidth
    - Medium Bandwidth
      - High Data Rate
      - High Coverage
      - Continuous
    - Low Bandwidth
      - Medium Data Rate
      - Medium Coverage
      - Periodic

Responsive Architectural Concepts

Communications Requirements

- Periodic
  - Coverage
    - High Bandwidth
      - Concept 1
        - Low Duty Cycle
        - High Throughput
    - Medium Bandwidth
      - Concept 2
        - Med High Duty Cycle
        - Med Throughput
    - Low Bandwidth
      - Concept 3
        - High Duty Cycle
        - High Throughput
Architecture Concepts

Concept 1
Direct Data Distribution (D³)

Concept 2
Available Standard Services

Concept 3
Commercial Tracking Relay Satellite

Near-Earth Spacecraft

Tracking Terminals

Principal Investigators
Science / Academia Users

Archival Facilities
Corporate Users

Direct Data Distribution (D³)
Architectural Concept 1
Direct Data Distribution ($D^3$)

**Features**
- Onboard data storage and burst data delivery
- 1.2 Gbps downlink in commercial K-band
- ~10 Mbps uplink if needed
- Multi-beam phased array
- Efficient digital modem / codec
- 1.8-m tracking terminals
- Located to maximize contact
- Terrestrial interoperability for wide area distribution
- ~ 72 Gigabits / 1 minute contact
- No reliance on relay satellites
- Experimental capability in 2002

**Challenges**
- Latency tolerant applications only
- Onboard storage sufficient for multiple orbits
- Fast acquisition and tracking
- Limited contact:
  - once per orbit at poles
  - 1 or 2 per day elsewhere
- Commercially owned, licensed, & operated on NASA spacecraft & ground segment
- Close coordination with commercial gateways

Available Standard Services

**Architectural Concept 2**

L-, Ku-, Ka-band
GEO / non-GEO
ComSats

Under-subscribed Areas

Fixed & Mobile Satellite Services

NASA PIs and Archives
Available Standard Services

Features

• Capture available or unused, unmodified commercial L-, Ku-, and Ka-band capacity
• Global narrowband coverage
  -- Multiple 64-kbps circuits
  -- TT&C, Low-rate data, voice,
• Periodic wideband coverage
  -- 1 to 25 Mbps Forward Link
  -- 10 to 155 Mbps Return Link
  -- Interactive telesience, video
• 33 to nearly 100% Coverage
• Narrowband demo in 1998 (STS-91 Spacehab - Inmarsat)
• Wideband demos in 2003

Challenges

• Current global coverage limited to voice rate applications
• Wideband transponders cover populated areas only
• Close coordination to avoid wideband interference
• Handoffs for non-GEO coverage
• Sufficient business case to provide capacity over unpopulated areas
• Regulatory issue regarding S-S use of S-E and E-S allocations

Commercial Tracking Relay
Architectural Concept 3

Ka- & Q/V-band GEO / non-GEO ComSats
Semi-Custom Inter-orbital Tracking Link Subsystem
Emerging Commercial Broadband Services
Terrestrial Networks
NASA PI's and Archives
# Commercial Tracking Relay

## Features
- Semi-custom rf or optical inter-orbital tracking links
- Periodic to continuous broadband coverage
  - 10 to 55 Mbps forward link
  - 155 to 622 Mbps return link
- Interactive telepresence
- Video, Data, Voice, Multicast
- 33 to 100% Coverage
- Commercial Ka- and V-band
- "First generation commercial transceiver" for NASA
- Service demos in 2004
- Available commercially in 2005 to 2010

## Challenges
- Semi-custom modification to planned systems
- Handoffs for non-GEO system coverage
- Sufficient business case to provide global coverage
- NASA / Industry development of a common space interface
- Commercially owned, licensed, & operated on NASA spacecraft

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## Conclusions

- **Opportunities are present and increasing** for NASA missions in near-Earth orbit to use commercial satellite services in the future.

- **No single commercial system** is likely to provide the entire range of services desired by NASA missions.

- Proposed concepts present technical, regulatory and economic challenges, but none appear to be insurmountable.

- **Commercial systems** have limited windows of opportunity for modification.

- Government/Industry collaboration is required on interoperability standards for a common space interface to commercial satellite networks.

- Communications services first provided for NASA may have potential to open new markets for the U.S. satellite industry.