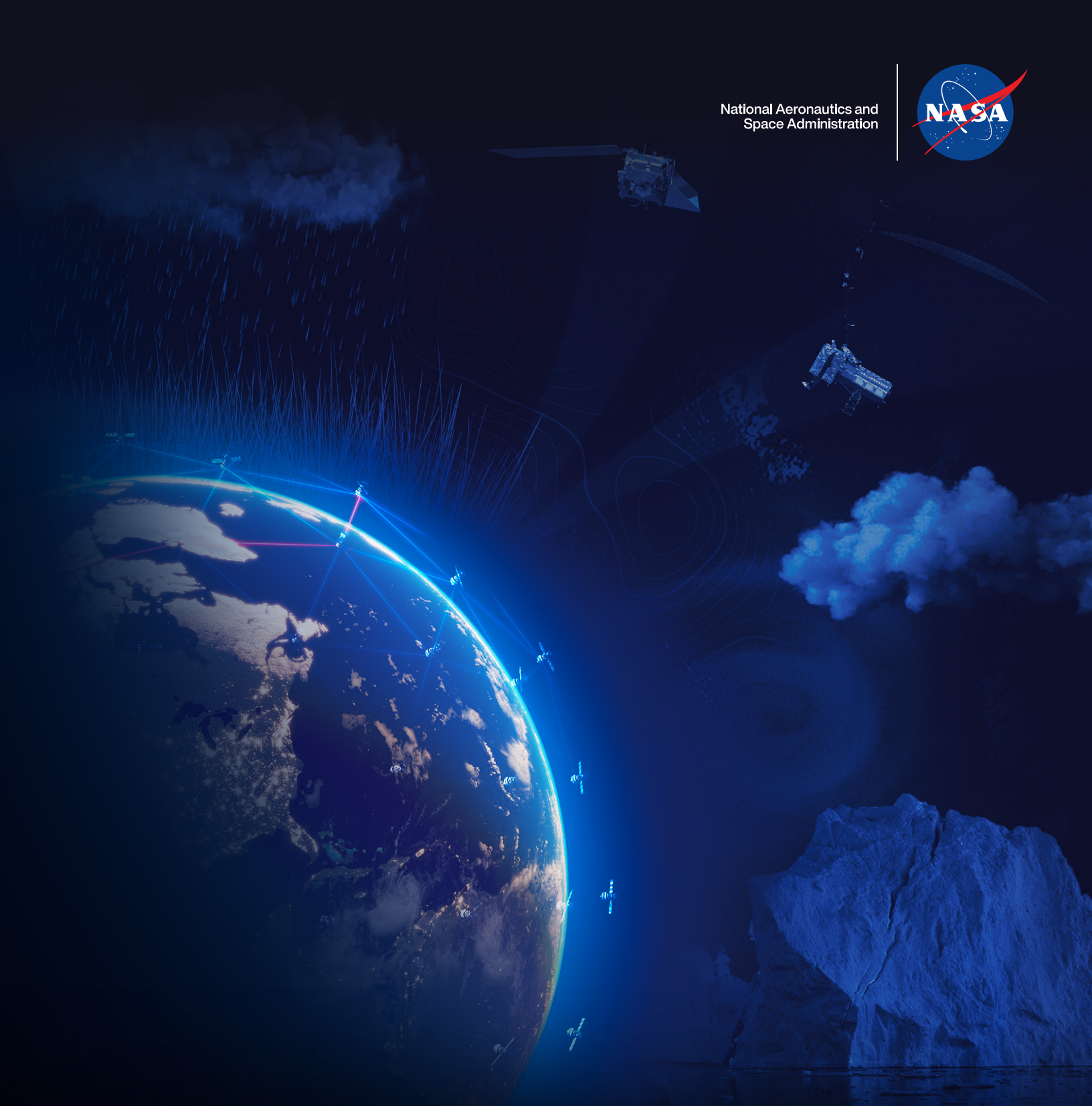
National Aeronautics and Space Administration



COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES PROJECT

Commercializing Satellite Relay Services

COMMERCIALIZING SATELLITE RELAY UNLOCKS:

HIGHER DATA RATES

INCREASED CAPACITY

MORE SIMULTANEOUS USERS

FASTER SCHEDULING TIME

LOWER LATENCY

Space communications are the invisible backbone of every NASA mission, unlocking never-before-seen images, groundbreaking science data, and mission-critical operations. For decades, NASA missions have relied on the Tracking and Data Relay Satellite system to provide near-continuous communications with Earth.

As part of the Golden Age of innovation and exploration, NASA is transitioning from government-owned infrastructure to commercial space communications services. Through the SCaN (Space Communications and Navigation) division's Communications Services Project, the agency is partnering with the U.S. satellite communications industry to expand the services used by millions on Earth to customers in space.

In 2022, the project awarded $278.5 million through funded Space Act Agreements to accelerate the development and demonstration of next-generation commercial capabilities. Current partners - including Amazon LEO, SES Space & Defense, SpaceX, Telesat, and Viasat - began on-orbit demonstrations in 2025 and will continue showcasing their capabilities through 2027.

During the next phase of the project, NASA will release a Request for Proposals to secure a portfolio of offerings from industry. By 2028, science missions will have state-of-the-art commercial capabilities at their disposal, giving NASA greater flexibility to focus government resources on deep space missions to the Moon and Mars.

HIGH-RATE OPTICAL

Commercial services can enable unprecedented data returns through ultra-high-bandwidth optical communications, supporting next-generation exploration while reducing terminal size, weight, and power requirements.



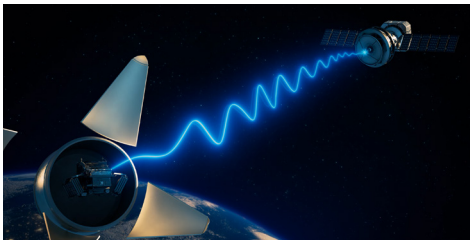
HIGH-RATE RADIO FREQUENCY

Commercial mega-constellations can provide robust, high-capacity communications services that support large science data volumes with proven reliability across diverse mission profiles and operating environments.



TELEMETRY AND COMMAND

Increased access to dependable telemetry and command connectivity can empower scheduling flexibility while ensuring safe spacecraft operations, health monitoring, and command execution throughout all mission phases.



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