

Skynet 6A successfully passes Preliminary Design Review

Important milestone achieved despite Covid-19

Skynet 6A moves towards detailed design phase with more than 250 working on the programme

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Stevenage, 14 January 2021 – Airbus has successfully completed the first key phase of the Skynet 6A project with the achievement of the Preliminary Design Review (PDR). The project now has permission to move into the next phase leading to the Critical Design Review (CDR).

Airbus was awarded the Skynet 6A contract in July 2020 and teams across its sites in Stevenage, Portsmouth and Hawthorn have been working on the programme to achieve this key milestone. Meetings with the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) were held virtually enabling the review board to take place in October and the PDR being achieved in November.

Richard Franklin, Managing Director of Airbus Defence and Space UK said: “This is excellent news and demonstrates our joint commitment to work in partnership to achieve the programme schedule. The progress we are making in building the UK MOD’s next generation military satellite and getting to this stage, despite current restrictions, really highlights the flexible and strong working relationship we have built with the Defence Digital team. Skynet 6A, to be built entirely in the UK, will significantly enhance the UK’s milsatcoms capability, building on the heritage of the four Skynet 5 satellites which were also built by Airbus, and which are all still operating perfectly in orbit.”

Teams from across the space and ground segments in Airbus worked closely with their MOD counterparts to keep the programme on track.

Skynet 6A will extend and enhance the Skynet fleet. The contract signed with the UK MOD in July 2020 involves the development, manufacture, cyber protection, assembly, integration, test and launch, of a military communications satellite, Skynet 6A, planned for launch in 2025. The contract also covers technology development programmes, new secure telemetry, tracking and command systems, launch, in-orbit testing and ground segment updates to the current Skynet 5 system. The value of the contract is more than £500 million.

The Skynet 5 programme, provided by Airbus as a full service outsource contract, has provided the UK MOD with a suite of highly robust, reliable and secure military communications services, supporting global operations since 2003. Airbus has been involved in all Skynet phases since 1974 and this phase builds on a strong UK commitment

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to space manufacturing in the UK. The programme commenced by using the legacy Skynet 4 satellites and then augmenting them with a fully refurbished ground network before launching the Skynet 5A, 5B, 5C and 5D satellites between 2007 and 2012.

The Skynet 5 programme has reduced or removed many of the technical and service risks for the MOD, whilst ensuring unrivalled secure satcoms and innovation to UK forces. Through the many years of delivering an exceptionally reliable Skynet service the Airbus teams have managed to significantly extend the lifespan of the Skynet satellites many years beyond their design life, offering significant additional value for money and capability to the UK.

The Skynet 6A satellite is based on Airbus' Eurostar Neo telecommunications satellite platform. It will utilise more of the radio frequency spectrum available for satellite communications and the latest digital processing to provide both more capacity and greater versatility than Skynet 5 satellites. The satellite will feature electric orbit raising propulsion as well as electric station keeping systems for maximum cost effectiveness. Complete satellite integration will take place at Airbus facilities in the UK followed by testing using RAL Space testing facilities at Harwell in Oxfordshire supporting the UK Space Agency initiative for sovereign UK end-to-end satellite production and support.

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About Airbus

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