

NASA hopes to use private transport soon

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The U.S. space agency hopes to turn to the private sector to provide transportation for crew and supplies to the International Space Station.

Space News reports that NASA Administrator Mike Griffin, speaking at a Space Transportation Association breakfast, said he hopes to see a vigorous commercial transportation sector. He said that the best way for NASA to help that develop is to buy services from the private sector instead of handing out contracts.

NASA plans to retire the space shuttle in 2010, switching to the Crew Exploration Vehicle that is now in development. But Griffin suggested that unmanned cargo shuttles could also be used to supply the space station.

He said that NASA will have to maintain its own capacity to get astronauts and their equipment to the station -- "We cannot be hostage to an individual provider that can stop or go out of business." But he said that NASA does not need to be the only provider.

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