

Russia schedules Clipper spacecraft launch

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The first unmanned flight of Russia's Clipper space shuttle has reportedly been set for 2011, with the first manned flight scheduled for 2012.

Nikolai Bryukhanov, deputy director general of the Energia Rocket and Space Corp., told Delovoy Vtornik (Business Tuesday) the Clipper will replace the Soyuz and the Buran spacecraft, becoming Russia's main spaceship for the coming decades.

The Clipper is a shuttle craft with improved aerodynamics, allowing it to cut regular G-forces by 2 to 2 1/2 times, and irregular G-forces by 5 times, the Russian news agency Novosti reported. It will also be able to maneuver during the controlled re-entry stage, increasing the precision of the landing.

The Clipper will be able to deliver a six-man crew to the International Space Station, Bryukhanov said. With a Clipper docked at the station, the permanent ISS crew can be increased by two to three times.

Although Russia can build the Clipper using domestic technologies, the Federal Space Agency believes it will be more effective and strategically important for Russia to involve other nations in the project, Bryukhanov said.

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