

The International Space Station and the commercialization of Low-Earth Orbit

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: International Space Station, market driven, commercial

The United States has announced plans to continue supporting the International Space Station (ISS) through at least the year 2024. NASA, working with the other ISS International Partners, will continue to foster greater use of the ISS platform, for both research and commercial activities, while using the ISS as a base for expanding the commercial use of low Earth orbit (LEO). In the United States, NASA remains the primary supplier of capabilities and services in LEO, such as habitation systems, power, cooling, crew health equipment, upmass and sample return, research facilities, cold stowage, crew time, and data transmission. It is the goal of NASA to evolve these systems onboard ISS in such a way that they will support market driven commercial research, as well as NASA's long-term exploration plans. NASA will continue to make investments in these areas through at least 2024 to ensure continue access to LEO. This paper will examine the intersection of the growing commercial transportation and research markets, as well as the ways in which the transition from government to commercial activity in LEO might unfold.