

*Launch Options for the Future: A Buyer's  
Guide*

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## Foreword

Adequate, reliable space transportation is the key to this Nation's future in space. Over the next several years, Congress must make critical decisions regarding the direction and funding of U.S. space transportation systems. These decisions include improving existing launch systems, designing and procuring new launch systems, and developing advanced technologies. America's constrained budgetary environment and the lack of a national consensus about the future of the U.S. space program make Congress's role in this process more difficult and important than ever.

In order to decide which paths to take in space transportation, Congress must first decide what it wants to do in space and what it can afford. A space transportation system designed to meet current needs would be woefully inadequate to support a piloted mission to the planet Mars or to deploy ballistic missile defenses. Accordingly, this special report, which is part of a broader assessment of space transportation requested by the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, and the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, takes the form of a "buyer's guide" to space transportation. It describes the range of launch systems that exist now or could be available before 2010 and explores the costs of meeting different demand levels for launching humans and spacecraft to orbit. It also discusses the importance of developing advanced technologies for space transportation.

In undertaking this special report, OTA sought the contributions of a wide spectrum of knowledgeable and interested individuals and organizations. Some provided information, others reviewed drafts of the report. OTA gratefully acknowledges their contributions of time and intellectual effort. As with all OTA reports, the content of this special report is the sole responsibility of the Office of Technology Assessment and does not necessarily represent the views of our advisors or reviewers.

  
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