

Government ministers visit spaceport ahead of first UK launch

Science Minister, George Freeman, and Transport Technology Minister, Jesse Norman, joined representatives from the UK Space Agency to meet those behind the mission and saw Virgin Orbit's LauncherOne rocket and its carrier aircraft, Cosmic Girl – which will launch from Spaceport Cornwall – up close.

Ministers also toured the spaceport's new Space Systems Integration Facility, the first of its kind at a spaceport in the UK, where the satellites have been integrated into the rocket ready for launch. Spaceport Cornwall will deliver 150 direct jobs and 240 indirect jobs by 2030.

Science Minister George Freeman said:

The first ever satellite launch from UK soil, here at Spaceport Cornwall, will be a giant leap for our fast-growing commercial satellite and space sector. This is one of our most innovative industries, generating new opportunities in Cornwall and beyond, with high-growth companies such as Space Forge, Surrey Satellites, Astroscale, Inmarsat, Open Cosmos, and the thriving Scottish space cluster.

By establishing the UK as the leading European base to launch small satellites, we can build on our existing strengths in areas such as space manufacturing, in-flight manufacturing, satellite and debris retrieval, and launch licensing insurance and finance, to create jobs across the country, grow the economy and attract international investment.

Transport Technology Minister Jesse Norman said:

We have one of the most advanced space sectors in the world, and the first commercial space launch from the UK will be a landmark moment both for the country and for our transport sector.

The mission, which has been named 'Start Me Up' in tribute to the iconic British band, the Rolling Stones, will be the first orbital launch from the UK, meeting a key ambition of the Government's National Space Strategy, as well as being the first commercial launch from Europe and the first international launch from Virgin Orbit.

Both Cosmic Girl – an adapted Boeing 747 – and LauncherOne arrived separately in Cornwall last month, and the rocket is now in place under the wing of the aircraft.

Ian Annett, Deputy CEO at the UK Space Agency, said:

We are at the dawn of a new era for space launch in the UK and about to achieve the goal of putting satellites into orbit in 2022. This is an immensely proud moment for the UK Space Agency and all those who have worked so hard to make this ambition a reality.

Establishing orbital launch capabilities in the UK is already bringing new growth through investment and jobs into Cornwall and other communities across the UK, inspiring a new generation of space professionals whether in science, engineering, law and other disciplines.

Melissa Thorpe, Head of Spaceport Cornwall, said:

It's been phenomenal to welcome so many supporters of the UK space sector here to Spaceport Cornwall ahead of our first launch.

My team and I loved showing the world how much work and how much international collaboration is going into making this world-first a reality. This marks just the beginning of a global movement with Space For Good at its core.

Dan Hart, CEO Virgin Orbit, said:

We're honoured to be part of this historic mission to open up the UK's first international spaceport in Cornwall. With this mission we break new ground across the commercial space sector and important allied collaboration in space. Our company is here to serve our customers and their ambitions. Virgin Orbit is up and running and working to obtain final approvals to move forward.

The UK Government's [National Space Strategy](#) sets out how the UK will become the first country in Europe to launch satellites into orbit in 2022. Spaceport Cornwall is one of seven spaceport sites being developed across the UK which will help unleash a wave of innovation and create hundreds of new jobs across the country. All UK launches are subject to receiving a licence from the Civil Aviation Authority.

Councillor Louis Gardner, Cornwall Council portfolio holder for economy, said:

We're delighted that ministers were able to visit Spaceport Cornwall as we gear up for the UK's first ever satellite launch.

This is an incredibly exciting time, not only for the Spaceport and those directly involved in "Start Me Up" but for Cornwall as a

whole, and I'd like to pay tribute to all those involved for their hard work and dedication in getting us to this point.

We have a long and storied history of engineering excellence in Cornwall, and the potential benefits that Spaceport Cornwall brings to our economy have never been clearer. From new jobs and new investment to inspiring the next generation of tech pioneers and space professionals, this promises to be yet another red letter day in our shared history.