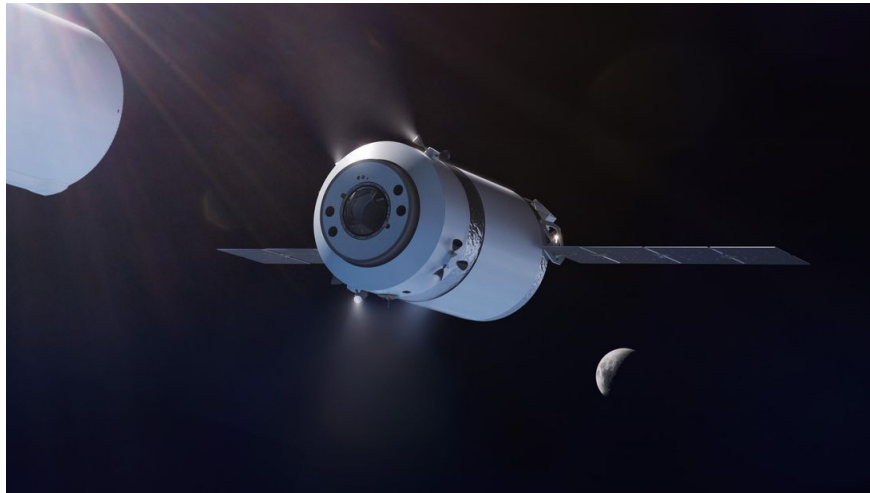


SpaceX signs on to ship cargo to NASA's future lunar Gateway in orbit around the moon

Falcon Heavy and a Dragon XL spacecraft could team up for the deliveries.

SpaceX is already a pro at delivering cargo to the International Space Station. It's no surprise that NASA would also want to enlist Elon Musk's company to deliver supplies to a future spaceship in orbit around the moon.



NASA announced on Friday it has selected SpaceX as the first US commercial provider for a Gateway Logistics Services contract to carry gear to the planned lunar way station. NASA marked the occasion with a SpaceX illustration of a Dragon XL cargo ship on its way to the moon after deploying from a Falcon Heavy rocket.

The Gateway is part of NASA's Artemis program. The program's current focus is to deliver astronauts to the moon in 2024. The space agency envisions the Gateway as a spaceship stocked with living quarters and a science lab that would act as a link between Earth and the lunar surface.

"SpaceX will deliver critical pressurized and unpressurized cargo, science experiments and supplies to the Gateway, such as sample collection materials and other items the crew may need on the Gateway and during their expeditions on the lunar surface," said NASA in a statement.

Cargo spacecraft could stay in residence at the Gateway for up to a year. NASA is looking to dedicate \$7 billion to logistics services for the lunar spaceship. Earlier in March, NASA announced the first two scientific investigations destined for the Gateway.

NASA has its hands full with ambitious Artemis timelines. The Gateway is still far away from reality, though NASA has hopes of launching the first part of the outpost as early as 2022 and completing it by 2026.

The SpaceX contract is part of a larger ongoing NASA move to embrace commercial space efforts. This has worked out well for the ISS; the Gateway will just be a little farther away.

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