

**Starlink** is a satellite internet constellation operated by American aerospace company SpaceX,<sup>[3]</sup> providing coverage to over 60 countries. It also aims for global mobile phone service after 2023.<sup>[4]</sup> SpaceX started launching Starlink satellites in 2019. As of August 2023, Starlink consists of over 5,000 mass-produced small satellites in low Earth orbit (LEO),<sup>[5]</sup> which communicate with designated ground transceivers. In total, nearly 12,000 satellites are planned to be deployed, with a possible later extension to 42,000. SpaceX announced reaching more than 1 million subscribers in December 2022<sup>[6]</sup> and 1.5 million subscribers in May 2023.<sup>[7]</sup>

The SpaceX satellite development facility in Redmond, Washington, houses the Starlink research, development, manufacturing, and orbit control teams. The cost of the decade-long project to design, build, and deploy the constellation was estimated by SpaceX in May 2018 to be at least US\$10 billion (equivalent to US\$10.73 billion in 2021).<sup>[8]</sup> SpaceX expects more than \$30 billion in revenue by 2025 from its satellite constellation, while revenues from its launch business were expected to reach \$5 billion in the same year.<sup>[9][10]</sup>

Astronomers have raised concerns about the effect the constellation can have on ground-based astronomy and how the satellites will add to an already congested orbital environment.<sup>[11][12]</sup> SpaceX has attempted to mitigate astronometric interference concerns with measures to reduce their brightness during operation.<sup>[13]</sup> The satellites are equipped with Hall-effect thrusters allowing them to orbit raise, station-keep, and de-orbit at the end of their life. Additionally, the satellites are designed to autonomously and smoothly avoid collisions based on uplinked tracking data.<sup>[14]</sup>

## History

### Background

Constellations of low Earth orbit satellites were first conceptualized in the mid-1980s as part of the Strategic Defense Initiative, culminating in Brilliant Pebbles, where weapons were to be staged in orbit to intercept ballistic missiles at short notice. The potential for low-latency communication was also recognized and development offshoots in the 1990s led to numerous commercial megaconstellations using around 100 satellites such as Celestron, Teledesic, Iridium, and Globalstar. However all entities entered bankruptcy by the dot-com bubble burst, due in part to excessive launch costs at the time.<sup>[15][16]</sup>

In 2004, Larry Williams, SpaceX VP of Strategic Relations and former VP of Teledesic's "Internet in the sky" program, opened the SpaceX Washington DC office.<sup>[17]</sup> That June, SpaceX acquired a stake in Surrey Satellite Technology (SSTL) as part of a "shared strategic

### Starlink



60 Starlink satellites stacked together before deployment on 24 May 2019

<b>Manufacturer</b>	<u>SpaceX</u>
<b>Country of origin</b>	<u>United States</u>
<b>Operator</b>	<u>SpaceX</u>
<b>Applications</b>	<u>Internet service</u>
<b>Website</b>	<u>starlink.com</u> ( <u>https://www.starlink.com/</u> )

#### Specifications

<b>Spacecraft type</b>	<u>Small satellite</u>
<b>Launch mass</b>	<div><div>v 0.9: 227 kg (500 lb)</div><div>v 1.0: 260 kg (570 lb)</div><div>v 1.5: ~306 kg (675 lb)<sup>[1]</sup></div><div>v 2 mini: 800 kg (1,800 lb)</div><div>v 2.0: ~1,250 kg (2,760 lb)<sup>[2]</sup></div></div>

<b>Equipment</b>	<div><div><u>Ku-</u>, <u>Ka-</u>, and <u>E-band</u> <u>phased array antennas</u></div><div><u>Laser transponders</u> (some units)</div><div><u>Hall-effect thrusters</u></div></div>
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<b>Regime</b>	<div><div><u>Low Earth orbit</u></div><div><u>Sun-synchronous orbit</u></div></div>
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#### Production

<b>Status</b>	<u>Active</u>
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vision".<sup>[18]</sup> SSTL was at that time working to extend the Internet into space.<sup>[19]</sup> However, SpaceX's stake was eventually sold back to EADS Astrium in 2008 after the company became more focused on navigation and Earth observation.<sup>[20]</sup>

In early 2014, Elon Musk and Greg Wyler were working together planning a constellation of around 700 satellites called WorldVu, which would be over 10 times the size of the then largest Iridium satellite constellation.<sup>[21]</sup> However, these discussions broke down in June 2014, and SpaceX instead filed an ITU application via the Norway telecom regulator under the name STEAM.<sup>[22]</sup> SpaceX confirmed the connection in the 2016 application to license Starlink with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).<sup>[23]</sup> SpaceX trademarked the name *Starlink* in the United States for their satellite broadband network;<sup>[24]</sup> the name was inspired by the 2012 novel *The Fault in Our Stars*.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Design phase (2015–2016)

Starlink was publicly announced in January 2015 with the opening of the SpaceX satellite development facility in Redmond, Washington. During the opening, Musk stated there is still significant unmet demand worldwide for low-cost broadband capabilities.<sup>[26][27]</sup> and that Starlink would target bandwidth to carry up to 50% of all backhaul communications traffic, and up to 10% of local Internet traffic, in high-density cities.<sup>[28][29]</sup> Musk further stated that the positive cash flow from selling satellite internet services would be necessary to fund their Mars plans.<sup>[30]</sup> Furthermore, SpaceX has long-term plans to develop and deploy a version of the satellite communication system to serve Mars.<sup>[31]</sup>



The SpaceX satellite development facility, Redmond, Washington, in use from 2015 to mid-2018

Starting with 60 engineers, the company operated in 2,800 m<sup>2</sup> (30,000 sq ft) of leased space, and by January 2017 had taken on a 2,800 m<sup>2</sup> (30,000 sq ft) second facility, both in Redmond.<sup>[32]</sup> In August 2018, SpaceX consolidated all their Seattle-area operations with a move to a larger three-building facility at Redmond Ridge Corporate Center to support satellite manufacturing in addition to R&D.<sup>[33]</sup> In July 2016, SpaceX acquired an additional 740 m<sup>2</sup> (8,000 sq ft) creative space in Irvine, California (Orange County).<sup>[34]</sup> The Irvine office would include signal processing, RFIC, and ASIC development for the satellite program.<sup>[35]</sup>

By October 2016, the satellite division was focusing on a significant business challenge of achieving a sufficiently low-cost design for the user equipment. SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell said then that the project remained in the "design phase as the company seeks to tackle issues related to user-terminal cost".<sup>[36]</sup>

## Start of development phase (2016–2019)

In November 2016, SpaceX filed an application with the FCC for a "non-geostationary orbit (NGSO) satellite system in the fixed-satellite service using the Ku- and Ka- frequency bands".<sup>[37]</sup>

In March 2017, SpaceX filed plans with the FCC to field a second orbital shell of more than 7,500 "V-band satellites in non-geosynchronous orbits to provide communications services" in an electromagnetic spectrum that has not previously been heavily employed for commercial communications services. Called the "Very-low Earth orbit (VLEO) constellation",<sup>[38]</sup> it was to have comprised 7,518 satellites that were to orbit at just 340 km (210 mi) altitude,<sup>[39]</sup> while the smaller, originally planned group of 4,425 satellites would operate in the K<sub>a</sub>- and K<sub>u</sub>-bands and orbit at 1,200 km (750 mi) altitude.<sup>[38][39]</sup> By 2022, SpaceX had withdrawn plans to field the 7518-satellite V-band system, superseding it with a more comprehensive design for a second-generation (Gen2) Starlink network.<sup>[40]</sup>

In September 2017, the FCC ruled that half of the constellation must be in orbit within six years to comply with licensing terms, while the full system should be in orbit within nine years from the date of the license.<sup>[41]</sup>

SpaceX filed documents in late 2017 with the FCC to clarify their space debris mitigation plan, under which the company was to:

"...implement an operations plan for the orderly de-orbit of satellites nearing the end of their useful lives (roughly five to seven years) at a rate far faster than is required under international standards. [Satellites] will de-orbit by propulsively moving to a disposal orbit from which they will re-enter the Earth's atmosphere within approximately one year after completion of their mission."<sup>[42]</sup>

In March 2018, the FCC granted SpaceX approval for the initial 4,425 satellites, with some conditions. SpaceX would need to obtain a separate approval from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).<sup>[43][44]</sup> The FCC supported a NASA request to ask SpaceX to achieve an even higher level of de-orbiting reliability than the standard that NASA had previously used for itself: reliably de-orbiting 90% of the satellites after their missions are complete.<sup>[45]</sup>

In May 2018, SpaceX expected the total cost of development and buildout of the constellation to approach \$10 billion (equivalent to \$10,730,000,000 in 2021).<sup>[8]</sup> In mid-2018, SpaceX reorganized the satellite development division in Redmond, and terminated several members of senior management.<sup>[33]</sup>

In November 2018, SpaceX received U.S. regulatory approval to deploy 7,518 V-band broadband satellites, in addition to the 4,425 approved earlier;<sup>[46][47]</sup> however, the V-band plans were subsequently withdrawn by 2022.<sup>[40]</sup> At the same time, SpaceX also made new regulatory filings with the U.S. FCC to request the ability to alter its previously granted license in order to operate approximately 1,600 of the 4,425 Ka-/Ku-band satellites approved for operation at 1,150 km (710 mi) in a "new lower shell of the constellation" at only 550 km (340 mi)<sup>[48]</sup> orbital altitude.<sup>[49][50]</sup> These satellites would effectively operate in a third orbital shell, a 550 km (340 mi) orbit, while the higher and lower orbits at approximately 1,200 km (750 mi) and approximately 340 km (210 mi) would be used only later, once a considerably larger deployment of satellites becomes possible in the later years of the deployment process. The FCC approved the request in April 2019, giving approval to place nearly 12,000 satellites in three orbital shells: initially approximately 1,600 in a 550 km (340 mi) – altitude shell, and subsequently placing approximately 2,800 Ku- and Ka-band spectrum satellites at 1,150 km (710 mi) and approximately 7,500 V-band satellites at 340 km (210 mi).<sup>[51]</sup> In total, nearly 12,000 satellites were planned to be deployed, with (as of 2019) a possible later extension to 42,000.<sup>[52]</sup>

In February 2019, a sister company of SpaceX, SpaceX Services Inc., filed a request with the FCC to receive a license for the operation of up to a million fixed satellite Earth stations that would communicate with its non-geostationary orbit (NGSO) satellite Starlink system.<sup>[53]</sup>

## First launches (2019–2020)

After launching two test satellites in February 2018, the first batch of 60 operational Starlink satellites were launched in May 2019.<sup>[54]</sup>

In June 2019, SpaceX applied to the FCC for a license to test up to 270 ground terminals – 70 nationwide across the United States and 200 in Washington state at SpaceX employee homes<sup>[55][56]</sup> – and aircraft-borne antenna operation from four distributed United States airfields; as well as five ground-to-ground test locations.<sup>[57][58]</sup>

By late 2019, SpaceX was transitioning their satellite efforts from research and development to manufacturing, with the planned first launch of a large group of satellites to orbit, and the clear need to achieve an average launch rate of "44 high-performance, low-cost spacecraft built and launched every month for the next 60 months" to get the 2,200 satellites launched to support their FCC spectrum allocation license assignment.<sup>[59]</sup> SpaceX said they will meet the deadline of having half the constellation "in orbit within six years of authorization... and the full system in nine years".<sup>[51]</sup>

On 15 October 2019, the United States FCC submitted filings to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) on SpaceX's behalf to arrange spectrum for 30,000 additional Starlink satellites to supplement the 12,000 Starlink satellites already approved by the FCC.<sup>[60]</sup> That month, Musk publicly tested the Starlink network by using an Internet connection routed through the network to post a first tweet to social media site Twitter.<sup>[61]</sup>



Falcon 9 lifts off from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station (CCAFS), Florida, delivering 60 Starlink satellites to orbit on 11 November 2019

In November 2020, Starlink beta internet service was opened to the public.<sup>[62]</sup> Starlink beta testers reported speeds over 150 megabits per second, above the range announced for the public beta test.<sup>[63]</sup>

## Commercial service (2021–)

In February 2021, SpaceX opened up pre-orders to the public.<sup>[64]</sup> SpaceX completed raising an additional \$3.5 billion in equity financing over the previous six months,<sup>[65][66]</sup> to support the capital-intensive phase of the operational fielding of Starlink, plus the development of the Starship launch system.<sup>[65]</sup> In April 2021, SpaceX clarified that they have already tested two generations of Starlink technology, with the second one having been less expensive than the first. The third generation, with laser inter-satellite links, is expected to begin launching "in the next few months [and will be] much less expensive than earlier versions".<sup>[65]</sup>



Early Starlink user terminal with dish, as shipped in early 2021

On 6 November 2020, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada announced regulatory approval for the Starlink low Earth orbit satellite constellation.<sup>[67]</sup>

The FCC initially awarded SpaceX with \$885.5 million worth of federal subsidies to support rural broadband customers through the company's Starlink satellite Internet network. SpaceX won subsidies to bring service to customers in 35 U.S. states.<sup>[68]</sup> The \$885.5 million aid package was revoked in August 2022, with the FCC stating that Starlink "failed to demonstrate" its ability to deliver the promised service.<sup>[69]</sup> SpaceX later appealed the decision saying they met or surpassed all RDOF deployment requirements that existed during bidding and that the FCC created "new standards that no bidder could meet today".<sup>[70]</sup>

In March 2021, SpaceX submitted an application to the FCC for mobile variations of their terminal for vehicles, vessels and aircraft.<sup>[71][72]</sup>

In May 2021, SpaceX announced agreements with Google Cloud Platform and Microsoft Azure to provide on-ground compute and networking services for Starlink.<sup>[73]</sup> Viasat made a legal attempt to temporarily halt Starlink launches.<sup>[74]</sup> In June 2021, SpaceX applied to the FCC to use mobile Starlink transceivers on launch vehicles flying to Earth orbit, after having previously tested high-altitude low-velocity mobile use on a rocket prototype in May 2021.<sup>[75]</sup>

By 1 October 2021, SpaceX had sold 5000 Starlink preorders in India,<sup>[76]</sup> and announced that Sanjay Bhargava, who had worked with Musk as part of a team that founded electronic payment firm PayPal, would head the tech billionaire entrepreneur's Starlink satellite broadband venture in India.<sup>[77]</sup> Three months later, Bhargava resigned "for personal reasons" following the Indian government ordering SpaceX to halt selling preorders for Starlink service until SpaceX gains regulatory approval for providing satellite internet services in the country.<sup>[76]</sup>

In 2022 SpaceX announced the *Starlink Business* service tier, a higher performance edition of the service. It provides a larger high-performance antenna and listed speeds of between 150 and 500 Mbit/s with a cost of \$2500 for the antenna and a \$500 monthly service fee.<sup>[78]</sup> The service includes 24/7, prioritized support.<sup>[78]</sup> Deliveries are advertised to begin in the second quarter of 2022.<sup>[79]</sup> The FCC also approved the licensing of Starlink services to boats, aircraft, and moving vehicles.<sup>[80]</sup> Starlink terminal production being delayed by the 2020–present global chip shortage led to only 5,000 subscribers for the first two months of 2022 but this was soon resolved.<sup>[81]</sup>

On 26 February 2022, Musk announced that Starlink satellites had been activated over Ukraine after a request from the Ukrainian government to replace internet services destroyed during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In May 2022, Starlink entered the Philippine market, as the company's first deployment in Asia, due to a landmark legislative change (RA 11659, Public Services Act) about all-foreign allowance of company ownership in regards to utility entities such as internet and telco companies. Starlink was able to obtain a provisional permission from the country's Department of Information and Communication Technologies (DICT), National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and soon began commercial services, aimed at regions with lower internet connectivity.<sup>[87]</sup>



Also in May 2022, Chinese military researchers published an article in a peer-reviewed journal describing a strategy for destroying the Starlink constellation if they threaten national security.<sup>[88][89][90]</sup> The researchers specifically highlight concerns with reported Starlink military capabilities. Musk later announced that "Starlink is meant for peaceful use... to mend the fault in our stars",<sup>[91]</sup> referencing a quote from Julius Caesar, "Men at some time are masters of their fates: The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, But in ourselves, that we are underlings." Suggesting Starlink could enforce peace by taking strategic initiative. The head of Russia's space agency, Dmitry Rogozin, had earlier warned Musk that "you will have to answer in an adult way, Elon, no matter how you play the fool".<sup>[92]</sup>

In 2022, SpaceX unveiled new variants of the Starlink service. On 23 May 2022, SpaceX rolled out *Starlink For RVs*, a service that lets customers pay more to skip waitlists to connect to its broadband satellites without a fixed address, although connection speeds for other users will be prioritized.<sup>[93]</sup> On 7 July 2022 SpaceX announced *Starlink Maritime*, to help support users, and companies, on the ocean. Only working on the water, unable to work on land, the advertised speed for the service is set up to 350 Mbit/s. However it comes at the one time price of \$10,000 for the two user terminals, and \$5,000 monthly price.<sup>[94][95]</sup>

In August 2022, SpaceX secured its first contract for services in the passenger shipping industry. Royal Caribbean Group has added Starlink internet to *Freedom of the Seas* and plans to offer the service on 50 ships under its *Royal Caribbean International*, *Celebrity Cruises*, and *Silversea Cruises* brands by March 2023.<sup>[80]</sup> Starlink services on private jet charter flights in the US by *JSX* are expected to begin in late 2022, and Hawaiian Airlines has contracted to provide "Starlink services on transpacific flights to and from Hawaii in 2023."<sup>[80]</sup>

In September 2022, SpaceX sent out an email to users with pre-orders about a service called *Best Effort*. It allows those still waiting in a full capacity cell to receive the unused bandwidth of their cell, while still being on the waiting list for more prioritized service. The price and equipment are the same as the residential service coming in at \$110 per month.<sup>[96][97]</sup> In December, a monthly 1TB data cap was introduced to subscribers.<sup>[98]</sup>

According to internet analysis company Ookla, Starlink speeds degraded during the first half of 2022 as more customers signed up for the service. SpaceX has said that Starlink speeds will improve as more satellites are deployed.<sup>[99]</sup>

On 1 December 2022, the FCC issued an approval for SpaceX to launch the initial 7500 satellites for its second-generation (Gen2) constellation, in three low-Earth-orbit orbital shells, at 525, 530, and 535 km altitude. Overall, SpaceX had requested approval for as many as 29,988 Gen2 satellites, with approximately 10,000 in the 525–535 km altitude shells, plus ~20,000 in 340–360 km shells and nearly 500 in 604–614-km shells. However, the FCC noted that this is not a net increase in approved on-orbit satellites for SpaceX since SpaceX is no longer planning to deploy 7518 V-band satellites at 340 km (210 mi) altitude that had previously been authorized.<sup>[40]</sup>

In March 2023, the company reported that they were manufacturing six Starlink "V2 Mini" satellites per day as well as thousands of users terminals. The V2 Mini has Gen2 Starlink satellite features while being assembled in a smaller form factor than the larger Gen2 sats. The Gen2 satellites require the 9-meter-diameter Starship in order to launch them. The Starlink business unit had a single cash-flow-positive quarter during 2022, and is expecting to be profitable in 2023.<sup>[100]</sup>

In June 2023, a license to offer internet services in Zambia was granted to Starlink by the Zambian Government through its Electronic Government Division – *SMART Zambia*, following the completion of many prosperous trial projects throughout the nation.<sup>[101][102][103]</sup>

Number of Starlink subscribers over time		
Month	Number of subscribers	Source
February 2021	≈ 10,000	<sup>[82]</sup>
June 2021	≈ 100,000	<sup>[83]</sup>
February 2022	≈ 250,000	
May 2022	≈ 400,000	
June 2022	≈ 500,000	<sup>[84]</sup>
September 2022	≈ 700,000	<sup>[85]</sup>
December 2022	≈ 1,000,000	<sup>[6]</sup>
May 2023	≈ 1,500,000	<sup>[86]</sup>

In July 2023, the Mongolian government issued two licenses to SpaceX to provide internet access in the country.<sup>[104]</sup>

## Services

### Satellite internet

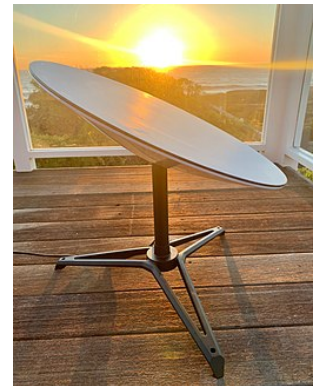
Starlink provides satellite-based internet connectivity to underserved areas of the planet, as well as competitively priced service in more urbanized areas.<sup>[105]</sup>

In the United States, Starlink charged, at launch, a one-time hardware fee of \$599 for a user terminal and \$120 per month for internet service at a fixed service address location.<sup>[106]</sup> An additional \$25 per month allows the user terminal to move beyond a fixed location (*Starlink For RVs*) but with service speeds deprioritized compared to the fixed users in that area.<sup>[107]</sup> Fixed users are told to expect typical throughput of "50 Mbps to 150 Mbps and latency from 20 ms to 40 ms",<sup>[108]</sup> a study found users averaged download speeds of 87 Mbps in 2022.<sup>[109]</sup> A higher performance version of the service (*Starlink Business*) advertises speeds of 150 to 500 Mbit/s in exchange for a more costly \$2,500 user terminal and a \$500 monthly service fee.<sup>[78]</sup> Another service called *Starlink Maritime* became available in July 2022 providing internet access on the open ocean, with speeds of 350 Mbit/s, requiring purchase of a maritime-grade \$10,000 user terminal and a \$5,000 monthly service fee.<sup>[94][95]</sup>

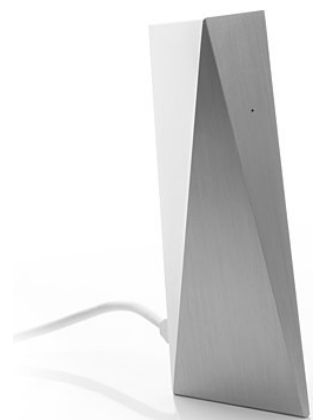
Sales are capped to a few hundred fixed users per 20 km "service cell area" due to limited wireless capacity. Starlink alternatively offers a *Best Effort* service tier allowing homes in capped areas to receive the current unused bandwidth of their cell while they are on the waiting list for more prioritized service. The price and equipment are the same as the residential service at \$110 per month.<sup>[96][97]</sup> To improve the service quality in densely populated areas, Starlink introduced a monthly 1TB data cap for all non-business users which became enforced in 2023.<sup>[98]</sup>

In August 2022 SpaceX lowered monthly service costs for users in select countries.<sup>[110]</sup> For example, users in Brazil and Chile saw monthly fee decreases of about 50%.<sup>[111]</sup>

In February 2023 it was reported that Starlink had 95,000 subscribers in Australia.<sup>[112]</sup> As of May 2023, Starlink reported over 1.5 million active subscribers.<sup>[86]</sup>



Starlink antenna dish (user terminal), assembled, 2021



Starlink WiFi Router

### Satellite cellular service

For a future service, T-Mobile US and SpaceX are partnering to add satellite cellular service capability to Starlink satellites. It will provide dead-zone cell phone coverage across the US using existing midband PCS spectrum that T-Mobile owns.<sup>[113][114]</sup> Cell coverage will begin with messaging and expand to include voice and limited data services later, with testing to begin in 2023. T-Mobile plans to connect to Starlink satellites via existing mobile devices, unlike previous generations of satellite phones which used specialized radios, modems, and antennas to connect to satellites in higher orbits.<sup>[4]</sup> Bandwidth will be limited to approximately 2 to 4 megabits per second total, split across a very large cell coverage area; so limited to approximately 1,000 voice callers in a cell. The size of a single coverage cell has not yet been publicly released, but the satellites are 7 meters long, and the antenna would fold out to be "roughly 25 square meters".<sup>[113]</sup>

In March 2023, SpaceX confirmed that they remain on track to begin testing the service in 2023.<sup>[100]</sup>

In April 2023, One NZ (formerly Vodafone New Zealand) announced that they would be partnering with SpaceX's Starlink to provide 100% mobile network coverage over New Zealand. SMS text service is expected to begin in 2024, with voice and data functionality coming in 2025.<sup>[115][116]</sup> In July 2023, Optus in Australia announced a similar partnership.<sup>[117]</sup>

## Military satellites

SpaceX also designs, builds, and launches customized military satellites based on variants of the Starlink satellite bus, with the largest publicly known customer being the Space Development Agency (SDA).

In 2018 the SDA was formed as part of a Trump Administration effort to resurrect the Reagan-era Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).<sup>[118][119]</sup> SDA accelerates development of missile defense capabilities using industry-procured low-cost low Earth orbit satellite platforms.<sup>[120]</sup> The program was conceived and instituted by Under Secretary of Defense (R&E) Michael D. Griffin (who had decades earlier joined Musk on his trip to Russia to examine ICBMs as part of SpaceX's founding).<sup>[121]</sup> A few months after Space Development Agency was announced, SpaceX Chief Operating Officer Gwynne Shotwell was asked by the United States Air Force, given the nature of the program, whether SpaceX would launch weapons into space for the US military. She affirmed "we would if it's for the defense of this country."<sup>[122]</sup>

In October 2020, SDA awarded SpaceX an initial \$150 million dual-use contract to develop 4 satellites to detect and track ballistic and hypersonic missiles.<sup>[123]</sup> The first batch of satellites were originally scheduled to launch September 2022 to form part of the Tracking Layer Tranche 0 of the Space Force's National Defense Space Architecture.<sup>[124]</sup> The launch schedule slipped multiple times but eventually launched in April 2023.<sup>[125][126]</sup>

The NDSA will be composed of seven layers with specific functions: data transport, battle management, missile tracking, custody/weapons targeting, satellite navigation, deterrence, and ground support.<sup>[127][128]</sup> Historically, space-based missile defense concepts were expensive, but reusable launch systems have mitigated costs according to a 2019 Congressional Budget Office analysis.<sup>[129]</sup> NSDA leverages existing commercial satellite bus development such as Starlink to reduce costs, including free-space optical laser terminals for a secure command and control mesh network.<sup>[130]</sup> The 2019 Missile Defense Review notes space-based sensing enables "improved tracking and potentially targeting of advanced threats, including HGVs and hypersonic cruise missiles".<sup>[131]</sup> However, the Union of Concerned Scientists warns developments could escalate tensions with Russia and China and called the project "fundamentally destabilizing".<sup>[132]</sup> The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace later advocated for a treaty halting development to prevent an arms race in space.<sup>[133]</sup>

Since 2021, Starlink's military satellite development is overseen internally at SpaceX by retired four-star general Terrence J. O'Shaughnessy.<sup>[134][135]</sup> O'Shaughnessy advocated before the United States Senate Committee on Armed Services for a layered capability with lethal follow-on that incorporates machine learning and artificial intelligence to gather and act upon sensor data quickly.<sup>[136]</sup>

SpaceX was not awarded a contract for the larger Tranche 1, with awards going to York Space Systems, Lockheed Martin Space, and Northrop Grumman Space Systems<sup>[137]</sup>.

## Starshield program

In December 2022, SpaceX announced **Starshield**, a program to incorporate military or government entity payloads on board a customized satellite bus (potentially based on Starlink Block v1.5 and v2.0 technology<sup>[138]</sup>). These satellites are heavier, with twice the area as a single Starlink v1.5 and have two pair of solar arrays as opposed to one on Starlink Block v1.5.<sup>[139]</sup> While Starlink is designed for consumer and commercial use, Starshield is designed for US government use, with an initial focus on three areas, namely, earth observation, communications and hosting payloads.



Elon Musk and four-star general Terrence J. O'Shaughnessy in April 2019



Future Under Secretary of Defense Research and Engineering Michael D. Griffin meets with Elon Musk and Larry Williams, former VP of Teledesic in 2005.

Designed to meet diverse mission requirements, Starshield satellites are advertised as capable of integrating a wide variety of payloads, offering unique versatility to users. Starshield satellites will be compatible with, and interconnect to, the existing commercial Starlink satellites via optical inter-satellite links.<sup>[140]</sup>

In January 2022, SpaceX deployed four national security satellites for the US government on their Transporter-3 rideshare mission.<sup>[138][141]</sup> In the same year they launched another group of four U.S. satellites with a single on-orbit spare Globalstar FM-15 satellite in June.<sup>[142][138][143][144]</sup> Their purpose was not disclosed at the time of launch, but was considered likely either technical demonstration, communications, earth observation or signals intelligence.

It is suspected as per the images,<sup>[145]</sup> that the two SpaceX-built Starlink derived Space Development Agency Tranche 0 Flight 1 Tracking Layer infrared imaging satellites launched on 2 April 2023 are also based on the Starshield satellite bus.<sup>[146][145]</sup>

## Military communications

In 2019, tests by the United States Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) demonstrated a 610 Mbit/s data link through Starlink to a Beechcraft C-12 Huron aircraft in flight.<sup>[147]</sup> Additionally, in late 2019, the United States Air Force successfully tested a connection with Starlink on an AC-130 Gunship.<sup>[148]</sup>

In 2020, the Air Force utilized Starlink in support of its Advanced Battlefield management system during a live-fire exercise. They demonstrated Starlink connected to a "variety of air and terrestrial assets" including the Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker.<sup>[149]</sup>

Expert on battlefield communications Thomas Wellington argues that Starlink signals, because they use narrow focused beams, are less vulnerable to interference and jamming by the enemy in wartime than satellites flying in higher orbits.<sup>[150]</sup>

## Use in Ukraine

Starlink was activated at first during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, after a request from the Ukrainian government.<sup>[151][152]</sup> Ukraine's military and government rapidly became dependent on Starlink to maintain Internet access.<sup>[153][154][155]</sup> Starlink is used by Ukraine for communication, such as keeping in touch with outside world and keeping the energy infrastructure working.<sup>[156][157]</sup>

The service is also notably used for warfare. Starlink is used for connecting combat drones, naval drones, artillery fire coordination systems and attacks on Russian positions.<sup>[158][159]</sup> SpaceX has expressed reservations about the offensive use of Starlink by Ukraine beyond military communications and restricted Starlink communication technology for military use on weapon systems.<sup>[160]</sup> SpaceX however kept most of the service online.<sup>[161][162]</sup> Its use in attacking Russian targets has been criticized by the Kremlin.<sup>[163]</sup>

Musk has warned that the service was costing \$20 million per month, and a Ukrainian official estimated SpaceX's contributions as over \$100 million.<sup>[164]</sup> In June 2023, the DoD signed a contract with SpaceX to finance Starlink use in Ukraine.<sup>[165][162]</sup>



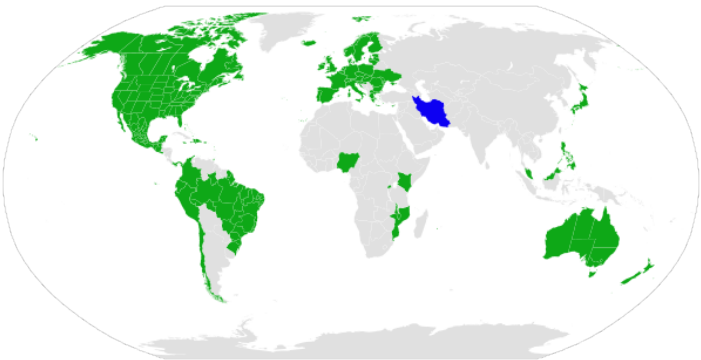
Vitali Klitschko, Mayor of Kyiv, and his brother Wladimir Klitschko with Starlink terminals shipped to Kyiv during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine

## Availability and regulatory approval by country

In order to offer satellite services in any nation-state, International Telecommunication Union (ITU) regulations and long-standing international treaties require that landing rights be granted by each country jurisdiction, and within a country, by the national communications regulators. As a result, even though the Starlink network has near-global reach at latitudes below approximately 60°, broadband services can only be provided in 40 countries as of September 2022.<sup>[166]</sup> SpaceX can also have business operation and economic considerations that may make a



difference in which countries Starlink service is offered, in which order, and how soon. For example, SpaceX formally requested authorization for Canada only in June 2020,<sup>[167]</sup> the Canadian regulatory authority approved it in November 2020,<sup>[67]</sup> and SpaceX rolled out service two months later, in January 2021.<sup>[168]</sup> As of September 2022, Starlink services were on offer in 40 countries,<sup>[166]</sup> with applications pending regulatory approval in many more.<sup>[169]</sup>



Starlink availability by country

- ☐ Approved and activated
- ☐ Activated
- ☐ Unknown

Japan's major mobile provider, KDDI, announced a partnership with SpaceX to begin offering in 2022 expanded connectivity for its rural mobile customers via 1,200 remote mobile towers.<sup>[170]</sup>

On 25 April 2022, Hawaiian Airlines announced an agreement with Starlink to provide free internet access on its aircraft, becoming the first airline to use Starlink.<sup>[171]</sup> By July 2022, Starlink internet service was available in 36 countries and 41 markets.<sup>[172]</sup>

In May 2022, it was announced that regulatory approval had been granted for Nigeria, Mozambique,<sup>[173]</sup> and the Philippines.<sup>[174][175]</sup> In the Philippines, commercial availability began on February 22, 2023.<sup>[176]</sup>

## Countries

#	Continent	Country/Territory	Debut	Notes
1	North America	 <a href="#">United States</a>  <a href="#">Puerto Rico</a>  <a href="#">United States</a> <a href="#">Virgin Islands</a>	Limited trials August 2020, <sup>[177]</sup> public beta November 2020 <sup>[62]</sup>	First authorized region, The FCC approved SpaceX's proposed modification of its license in 2021. <sup>[178]</sup>
2	North America	 <a href="#">Canada</a>	January 2021 <sup>[168]</sup>	
3	Europe	 <a href="#">United Kingdom</a>  <a href="#">Pitcairn Islands</a>	January 2021 <sup>[179]</sup>	Service expanded to Pitcairn Islands in November 2022. <sup>[180]</sup>
4	Europe	 <a href="#">Germany</a>	March 2021 <sup>[181]</sup>	
5	Oceania	 <a href="#">New Zealand</a>	April 2021 <sup>[182]</sup>	<sup>[183]</sup>
6	Oceania	 <a href="#">Australia</a>	April 2021 <sup>[184]</sup>	
7	Europe	 <a href="#">France</a>  <a href="#">Saint Martin</a>  <a href="#">Saint Barthélemy</a>  <a href="#">Guadeloupe</a>  <a href="#">Martinique</a>	Original debut May 2021, <sup>[185]</sup> <sup>[186]</sup> Revoked April 2022, <sup>[187]</sup> Re-approved June 2022 <sup>[188]</sup>	Approval originally given in February 2021 but the <a href="#">Conseil d'État</a> annulled that Decision on 5 April 2022 due to lack of public consultation. <sup>[187]</sup> Approval was given again after consultation was completed on 2 June 2022. <sup>[188]</sup> Service expanded to Saint Martin and Saint Barthélemy in July 2022. <sup>[172]</sup> Service expanded to Martinique and Guadeloupe in September 2022. <sup>[189]</sup>
8	Europe	 <a href="#">Austria</a>	May 2021 <sup>[185]</sup>	
9	Europe	 <a href="#">Netherlands</a>	May 2021 <sup>[190]</sup>	
10	Europe	 <a href="#">Belgium</a>	May 2021 <sup>[191]</sup>	
11	Europe	 <a href="#">Ireland</a>	Limited trials April 2021, <sup>[192]</sup> public beta July 2021 <sup>[193]</sup>	
12	Europe	 <a href="#">Denmark</a>	July 2021 <sup>[194]</sup>	
13	Europe	 <a href="#">Portugal</a>	August 2021 <sup>[195]</sup>	
14	Europe	 <a href="#">Switzerland</a>	August 2021 <sup>[196]</sup>	
15	South America	 <a href="#">Chile</a>  <a href="#">Easter Island</a>	Limited trials July 2021, <sup>[197]</sup> public beta September 2021 <sup>[198]</sup>	Service expanded to Easter Island in November 2022. <sup>[180]</sup>

#	Continent	Country/Territory	Debut	Notes
16	Europe	 <a href="#">Poland</a>	September 2021 <sup>[199]</sup>	
17	Europe	 <a href="#">Italy</a>	September 2021 <sup>[200]</sup>	
18	Europe	 <a href="#">Czech Republic</a>	September 2021 <sup>[201]</sup>	
19	Europe	 <a href="#">Sweden</a>	October 2021 <sup>[202]</sup>	
20	North America	 <a href="#">Mexico</a>	November 2021 <sup>[203]</sup>	
21	Europe	 <a href="#">Croatia</a>	November 2021 <sup>[204]</sup>	
22	Europe	 <a href="#">Lithuania</a>	December 2021 <sup>[205][206]</sup>	
23	Europe	 <a href="#">Spain</a>	January 2022 <sup>[207]</sup>	
24	Europe	 <a href="#">Slovakia</a>	January 2022 <sup>[208]</sup>	
25	Europe	 <a href="#">Slovenia</a>	January 2022 <sup>[209]</sup>	
26	Oceania	 <a href="#">Tonga</a>	February 2022 <sup>[210]</sup>	Emergency relief provided one month after the <a href="#">2022 Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai eruption and tsunami</a> , ground station established in neighboring <a href="#">Fiji</a> for six months
27	South America	 <a href="#">Brazil</a>	January 2022 <sup>[211][212]</sup>	
28	Europe	 <a href="#">Bulgaria</a>	February 2022 <sup>[213]</sup>	
29	Europe	 <a href="#">Ukraine</a>	February 2022 <sup>[151][214][152]</sup>	Initially supplied as emergency relief in response to the <a href="#">2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine</a> . See <a href="#">Starlink satellite services in Ukraine</a> .
30	Europe	 <a href="#">Romania</a>	April 2022 <sup>[215]</sup>	
31	Europe	 <a href="#">Greece</a>	April 2022 <sup>[216]</sup>	
32	Europe	 <a href="#">Latvia</a>	April 2022 <sup>[217]</sup>	
33	Europe	 <a href="#">Hungary</a>	May 2022 <sup>[218]</sup>	
34	Europe	 <a href="#">North Macedonia</a>	June 2022 <sup>[219]</sup>	
35	Europe	 <a href="#">Luxembourg</a>	July 2022 <sup>[172]</sup>	
36	North America	 <a href="#">Dominican Republic</a>	July 2022 <sup>[220]</sup>	

#	Continent	Country/Territory	Debut	Notes
37	Europe	 <a href="#">Moldova</a>	August 2022 <sup>[221]</sup>	
38	Europe	 <a href="#">Estonia</a>	August 2022 <sup>[222]</sup>	
39	Europe	 <a href="#">Norway</a>	August 2022 <sup>[223]</sup>	
40	Europe	 <a href="#">Malta</a>	September 2022 <sup>[166]</sup>	
41	Asia	 <a href="#">Iran</a>	September 2022 <sup>[224]</sup>	Activated in response to Iranian censorship as a result of <a href="#">Iranian protests against compulsory hijab</a> . <sup>[225]</sup>
42	Asia	 <a href="#">Japan</a>	October 2022 <sup>[226]</sup>	First in Asia.
43	North America	 <a href="#">Jamaica</a>	October 2022 <sup>[227]</sup>	
44	Europe	 <a href="#">Finland</a>	November 2022 <sup>[228]</sup>	
45	South America	 <a href="#">Peru</a>	January 2023 <sup>[229]</sup>	
46	Africa	 <a href="#">Nigeria</a>	January 2023 <sup>[230]</sup>	First in Africa.
47	South America	 <a href="#">Colombia</a>	January 2023 <sup>[231]</sup>	
48	Europe	 <a href="#">Iceland</a>	February 2023 <sup>[232]</sup>	
49	Africa	 <a href="#">Rwanda</a>	February 2023 <sup>[233]</sup>	
50	Asia	 <a href="#">Philippines</a>	February 2023 <sup>[234]</sup> <sup>[235]</sup>	Second in Asia, first in Southeast Asia.
51	North America	 <a href="#">Haiti</a>	March 2023 <sup>[236]</sup>	
52	South America	 <a href="#">Ecuador</a>	March 2023 <sup>[237]</sup>	
53	North America	 <a href="#">El Salvador</a>	April 2023 <sup>[238]</sup>	
54	North America	 <a href="#">Panama</a>	May 2023 <sup>[239]</sup>	
55	Africa	 <a href="#">Mozambique</a>	June 2023 <sup>[240]</sup>	
56	South America	 <a href="#">Trinidad and Tobago</a>	June 2023 <sup>[241]</sup>	
57	Europe	 <a href="#">Cyprus</a>	July 2023 <sup>[242]</sup>	



#	Continent	Country/Territory	Debut	Notes
58	North America	 <a href="#">Guatemala</a>	July 2023 <sup>[243]</sup>	
59	Africa	 <a href="#">Kenya</a>	July 2023 <sup>[244]</sup>	
60	Asia	 <a href="#">Malaysia</a>	July 2023 <sup>[245]</sup>	Second in Southeast Asia.
61	Africa	 <a href="#">Malawi</a>	July 2023 <sup>[246]</sup>	
62	North America	 <a href="#">Bahamas</a>	August 2023 <sup>[247]</sup>	

## Technology

### Satellite hardware

The Internet communication satellites were expected to be in the smallsat-class of 100 to 500 kg (220 to 1,100 lb)-mass, and were intended to be in low Earth orbit (LEO) at an altitude of approximately 1,100 km (680 mi), according to early public releases of information in 2015. In the event, the first large deployment of 60 satellites in May 2019 were 227 kg (500 lb)<sup>[54]</sup> and SpaceX decided to place the satellites at a relatively low 550 km (340 mi), due to concerns about the space environment.<sup>[248]</sup> Initial plans as of January 2015 were for the constellation to be made up of approximately 4,000 cross-linked<sup>[249]</sup> satellites, more than twice as many operational satellites as were in orbit in January 2015.<sup>[29]</sup>

The satellites will employ optical inter-satellite links and phased array beam-forming and digital processing technologies in the Ku and Ka microwave bands (*super high frequency [SHF] to extremely high frequency [EHF]*), according to documents filed with the U.S. FCC.<sup>[250][251]</sup> While specifics of the phased array technologies have been disclosed as part of the frequency application, SpaceX enforced confidentiality regarding details of the optical inter-satellite links.<sup>[252]</sup> Early satellites were launched without laser links. The inter-satellite laser links were successfully tested in late 2020.<sup>[253][254]</sup>

The satellites will be mass-produced, at a much lower cost per unit of capability than previously existing satellites. Musk said, "We're going to try and do for satellites what we've done for rockets."<sup>[255]</sup> "In order to revolutionize space, we have to address both satellites and rockets."<sup>[29]</sup> "Smaller satellites are crucial to lowering the cost of space-based Internet and communications".<sup>[256]</sup>

In February 2015, SpaceX asked the FCC to consider future innovative uses of the Ka-band spectrum before the FCC commits to 5G communications regulations that would create barriers to entry, since SpaceX is a new entrant to the satellite communications market. The SpaceX non-geostationary orbit communications satellite constellation will operate in the high-frequency bands above 24 GHz, "where steerable Earth station transmit antennas would have a wider geographic impact, and significantly lower satellite altitudes magnify the impact of aggregate interference from terrestrial transmissions".<sup>[257]</sup>

Internet traffic via a geostationary satellite has a minimum theoretical round-trip latency of at least 477 milliseconds (ms; between user and ground gateway), but in practice, current satellites have latencies of 600 ms or more. Starlink satellites are orbiting at  $\frac{1}{105}$  to  $\frac{1}{30}$  of the height of geostationary orbits, and thus offer more practical Earth-to-sat latencies of around 25 to 35 ms, comparable to existing cable and fiber networks.<sup>[258]</sup> The system will use a peer-to-peer protocol claimed to be "simpler than IPv6", it will also incorporate end-to-end encryption natively.<sup>[259]</sup>

Starlink satellites use Hall-effect thrusters with krypton or argon gas as the reaction mass<sup>[54][260]</sup> for orbit raising and station keeping.<sup>[261]</sup> Krypton Hall thrusters tend to exhibit significantly higher erosion of the flow channel compared to a similar electric propulsion system operated with xenon, but krypton is much more abundant and has a lower market price.<sup>[262]</sup> SpaceX claims that its 2nd generation thruster using argon has 2.4x the thrust and 1.5x the specific impulse of the krypton fueled thruster.<sup>[263]</sup>

## User terminals

The system does not directly connect from its satellites to handsets (like the constellations from Iridium, Globalstar, Thuraya and Inmarsat). Instead, it is linked to flat user terminals the size of a pizza box, which have phased array antennas and track the satellites. The terminals can be mounted anywhere, as long as they can see the sky.<sup>[249]</sup> This includes fast-moving objects like trains.<sup>[264]</sup> Photographs of the customer antennas were first seen on the internet in June 2020, supporting earlier statements by SpaceX CEO Musk that the terminals would look like a "UFO on a stick".<sup>[265]</sup> The antenna is known internally as "Dishy McFlatface".<sup>[266][267]</sup>

In October 2020, SpaceX launched a paid-for beta service in the U.S. called "Better Than Nothing Beta", charging \$499 (equivalent to \$519.7 in 2021) for a user terminal, with an expected service of "50 Mbps to 150 Mbps and latency from 20 ms to 40 ms over the next several months".<sup>[108]</sup> From January 2021, the paid-for beta service was extended to other continents, starting with the United Kingdom.<sup>[268]</sup>

A larger, high-performance version of the antenna is available for use with the *Starlink Business* service tier.<sup>[78]</sup>

In September 2020, SpaceX applied for permission to put terminals on 10 of its ships with the expectation of entering the maritime market in the future.<sup>[269]</sup>

In august 2022 and in response to an open invitation from SpaceX to have the terminal examined by the security community, security specialist Lennert Wouters presented several technical architecture details about the then-current starlink terminals: the main control unit of the dish is a STMicroelectronics custom designed chip code-named *Catson* which is a quad-core ARM Cortex-A53-based control processor running the Linux kernel and booted using U-Boot. The main processor uses several other custom chips such as a digital beam former named *Shiraz* and a front-end module named *Pulsarad*. The main control unit controls an array of digital beamformers. Each beamformer controls 16 front-end modules. In addition the terminal has a GPS receiver, motor controllers, synchronous clock generation and Power over Ethernet circuits, all manufactured by STMicroelectronics.<sup>[270]</sup>

## Ground stations

SpaceX has made applications to the FCC for at least 32 ground stations in United States, and as of July 2020 has approvals for five of them (in five states). Till February 2023 Starlink used the Ka-band to connect with ground stations.<sup>[271]</sup> with the launch of v2 mini they added frequencies in the E band range.<sup>[272]</sup>

A typical ground station right now has nine 2.86 m antennas in a 400 m<sup>2</sup> fenced in area.<sup>[273]</sup>

According to their filing, SpaceX's ground stations would also be installed on-site at Google data-centers world-wide.<sup>[73]</sup>

## Satellite revisions

### MicroSat



SpaceX board member Steve Jurvetson holding a Starlink user terminal in June 2020

MicroSat-1a and MicroSat-1b were originally slated to be launched into 625 km (388 mi) circular orbits at approximately 86.4° inclination, and to include panchromatic video imager cameras to film images of Earth and the satellite.<sup>[274]</sup> The two satellites, "MicroSat-1a" and "MicroSat-1b" were meant to be launched together as secondary payloads on one of the Iridium NEXT flights, but they were instead used for ground-based tests.<sup>[275]</sup>

## Tintin

At the time of the June 2015 announcement, SpaceX had stated plans to launch the first two demonstration satellites in 2016,<sup>[276]</sup> but the target date was subsequently moved out to 2018.<sup>[277]</sup> SpaceX began flight testing their satellite technologies in 2018<sup>[277]</sup> with the launch of two test satellites. The two identical satellites were called **MicroSat-2a** and **MicroSat-2b**<sup>[278]</sup> during development but were renamed **Tintin A** and **Tintin B** upon orbital deployment on 22 February 2018. The satellites were launched by a Falcon 9 rocket, and they were piggy-pack payloads launching with the Paz satellite.

Tintin A and B were inserted into a 514 km (319 mi) orbit. Per FCC filings,<sup>[279]</sup> they were intended to raise themselves to an 1,125 km (699 mi) orbit, the operational altitude for Starlink LEO satellites per the earliest regulatory filings, but stayed close to their original orbits. SpaceX announced in November 2018 that they would like to operate an initial shell of about 1600 satellites in the constellation at about 550 km (340 mi) orbital altitude, at an altitude similar to the orbits Tintin A and B stayed in.<sup>[49]</sup>

The satellites orbit in a circular low Earth orbit at about 500 km (310 mi) altitude<sup>[280]</sup> in a high-inclination orbit for a planned six to twelve-month duration. The satellites communicate with three testing ground stations in Washington State and California for short-term experiments of less than ten minutes duration, roughly daily.<sup>[276][281]</sup>

## v0.9 (test)

The 60 Starlink v0.9 satellites, launched in May 2019, have the following characteristics:<sup>[54]</sup>

- Flat-panel design with multiple high-throughput antennas and a single solar array
- Mass: 227 kg (500 lb)
- Hall-effect thrusters using krypton as the reaction mass, for position adjustment on orbit, altitude maintenance, and deorbit
- Star tracker navigation system for precision pointing
- Able to use Department of Defense-provided debris data to autonomously avoid collision<sup>[282]</sup>
- Altitude of 550 km (340 mi)
- 95% of "all components of this design will quickly burn in Earth's atmosphere at the end of each satellite's lifecycle".

## v1.0 (operational)

The Starlink v1.0 satellites, launched since November 2019, have the following additional characteristics:

- 100% of all components of this design will completely demise, or burn up, in Earth's atmosphere at the end of each satellite's life.<sup>[283]</sup>
- K<sub>a</sub>-band added<sup>[284]</sup>
- Mass: 260 kg (570 lb)
- One of them, numbered 1130 and called DarkSat, had its albedo reduced using a special coating but the method was abandoned due to thermal issues and IR reflectivity.<sup>[285][286]</sup>

- All satellites launched since the ninth launch at August 2020 have visors to block sunlight from reflecting from parts of the satellite to reduce its albedo further.<sup>[287][288][289][290]</sup>

### v1.5 (operational)

The Starlink v1.5 satellites, launched since 24 January 2021, have the following additional characteristics:

- Lasers for inter-satellite communication<sup>[291]</sup>
- Mass: ~295 kg (650 lb)
- Visors that blocked sunlight were removed from satellites launched from September 2021 onwards.<sup>[292]</sup>

### Starshield (operational)

These are satellites buses with two solar arrays derived from Starlink v1.5 and v2.0 for military use and can host classified government or military payloads.<sup>[293]</sup>

### v2.0 (initial deployment)

SpaceX was preparing for the production of Starlink v2.0 satellites by early 2021.<sup>[294]</sup> According to Musk, Starlink v2.0 satellites will be "... an order of magnitude better than Starlink 1" in terms of communications bandwidth.<sup>[295]</sup>

SpaceX hoped to begin launching Starlink v2.0 in 2022. As of May 2022, SpaceX had said publicly that the satellites of second-generation (Gen2) constellation would need to be launched on Starship, as they are too large to fit inside a Falcon 9 fairing.<sup>[272]</sup> However, in August 2022, SpaceX made formal regulatory filings with the FCC that indicated they would build satellites of the second-generation (Gen2) constellation in two different, but technically identical, form factors: one with the physical structures tailored to launching on Falcon 9, and one tailored for the launching on Starship.<sup>[113][296]</sup> Starlink v2.0 is both larger and heavier than Starlink v1 satellites.

Starlink second-generation satellites planned for launch on Starship have the following characteristics:<sup>[297][296]</sup>

- Lasers for inter-satellite communication<sup>[298]</sup>
- Mass: ~1,250 kg (2,760 lb)
- Length: ~7 m (23 ft)
- Further improvements to reduce its brightness, including the use of a dielectric mirror film.<sup>[299]</sup>
- On 2,016 of the initially licensed 7,500 satellites:<sup>[300]</sup> Gen2 Starlink satellites will also include an approximately 25 square meter antenna that would allow T-Mobile subscribers to be able to communicate directly via satellite through their regular mobile devices.<sup>[113]</sup> It will be implemented via a German-licensed hosted payload developed together with SpaceX's subsidiary Swarm Technologies and T-Mobile.<sup>[300]</sup> This hardware is supplemental to the existing K<sub>u</sub>-band and K<sub>a</sub>-band systems, and inter-satellite laser links, that have been on the first generation satellites launching as of mid-2022.

Further, in October 2022, SpaceX redefined some early v2.0s so there are 3 different busses of v2.0s:<sup>[301]</sup>

- **Bus F9-1 (planned)**, 303 kg mass, having roughly the same dimensions and mass as the current V1.5 satellites.
- **Bus F9-2 (initial deployment)** (sometimes called "V2 mini"<sup>[113]</sup>), 800 kg mass and measuring 4.1 m (13 ft) by 2.7 m (8 ft 10 in) with a total array of 120 m<sup>2</sup> (1,300 sq ft). The Solar arrays are 2 in number. It could offer around 3-4 times more usable bandwidth per satellite.<sup>[302]</sup> They are smaller than Starlink's original ones (and so can be launched from existing rockets), have four times the capacity to the ground station to increase speed and capacity. This is due to a more efficient array of antennas and the use of radio frequencies in the E band range.<sup>[272]</sup>



- **Bus Starship (planned)**, 2000 kg mass.

## Launches

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Between February 2018 and February 2023, SpaceX successfully launched 4002 Starlink satellites into orbit, including prototypes and satellites that later failed or were de-orbited before entering operational service.<sup>[303]</sup> In March 2020, SpaceX reported producing six satellites per day.<sup>[304]</sup>

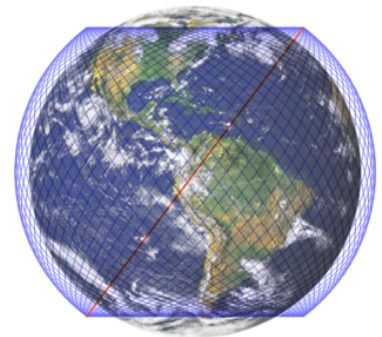
The deployment of the first 1,440 satellites was planned in 72 orbital planes of 20 satellites each,<sup>[305]</sup> with a requested lower minimum elevation angle of beams to improve reception: 25° rather than the 40° of the other two orbital shells.<sup>[49]:17</sup> SpaceX launched the first 60 satellites of the constellation in May 2019 into a 550 km (340 mi) orbit and expected up to six launches in 2019 at that time, with 720 satellites (12 × 60) for continuous coverage in 2020.<sup>[306][307]</sup>

Starlink satellites are also planned to launch on Starship, an under-development rocket of SpaceX with a much larger payload capability. The initial announcement included plans to launch 400 Starlink (version 1.0) satellites at a time.<sup>[308]</sup> Current plans now call for Starship to be the only launch vehicle to be used to launch fewer of the much larger Starlink version 2.0.

## Constellation design and status

### First Generation

Contains all v0.9 and first generation satellites. Tintin A and Tintin B as test satellites are not included.



The Starlink constellation, phase 1, first orbital shell: 72 orbits with 22 each, therefore 1584 satellites at 550 km altitude

Phase	Group designation	Orbital shells		Orbital planes <sup>[309]</sup>			Committed completion date		Deployed satellites 23 June 2023 <sup>[310]</sup>	
		Altitude (km)	Authorized satellites	Inclination	Count	Satellites per	Half	Full	Active	Decaying/deorbited
1 <sup>[311]</sup>	Group 1 <sup>[312]</sup>	550 km (340 mi)	1584 <sup>[313]</sup>	53.0°	72	22	March 2024 (aimed) 1 August 2022 (achieved) <sup>[314]</sup>	March 2027	1457	268
	Group 2	570 km (350 mi)	720	70°	36	20			404	4
	Group 3 <sup>[315]</sup>	560 km (350 mi)	348	97.6°	6	58			233	10
	Group 4	540 km (340 mi)	1584	53.2°	72	22			1567	70
		560 km (350 mi)	172	97.6°	4	43			0	
2 <sup>[316][a]</sup>		335.9 km (208.7 mi) <sup>[a]</sup>	2493	42.0°			November 2024	November 2027	0	
		340.8 km (211.8 mi) <sup>[a]</sup>	2478	48.0°					0	
		345.6 km (214.7 mi) <sup>[a]</sup>	2547	53.0°					0	

a. SpaceX plans to abandon the approved phase 2 configuration.

Early designs had all phase 1 satellites in altitudes of around 1,100–1,300 km (680–810 mi). SpaceX initially requested to lower the first 1584 satellites, and in April 2020 requested to lower all other higher satellite orbits to about 550 km (340 mi).<sup>[317][318]</sup> In April 2020, SpaceX modified the architecture of the Starlink network. SpaceX submitted an application to the FCC proposing to operate more satellites in lower orbits in the first phase than the FCC previously authorized. The first phase will still include 1,440 satellites in the first shell orbiting at 550 km (340 mi) in planes inclined 53.0°,<sup>[305]</sup> with no change to the first shell of the constellation launched largely in 2020.<sup>[319]</sup> SpaceX also applied in the United States for use of the E-band in their constellation<sup>[320]</sup> The FCC approved the application in April 2021.<sup>[321][322][323]</sup>

On 24 January 2021 SpaceX released a new group of 10 Starlink satellites, the first Starlink satellites in polar orbits. The launch surpassed ISRO's record of launching the most satellites in one mission (143), taking to 1,025 the cumulative number of satellites deployed for Starlink to that date.<sup>[324][325]</sup>

On 3 February 2022, 49 satellites were launched as Starlink Group 4-7. A G2-rated geomagnetic storm occurred on 4 February, caused the atmosphere to warm and density at the low deployment altitudes to increase. Predictions were that up to 40 of the 49 satellites might be lost due to drag.<sup>[326]</sup> After the event, 38 satellites reentered the atmosphere by 12 February while the remaining 11 were able to raise their orbits and avoid loss due to the storm.<sup>[327][328]</sup>

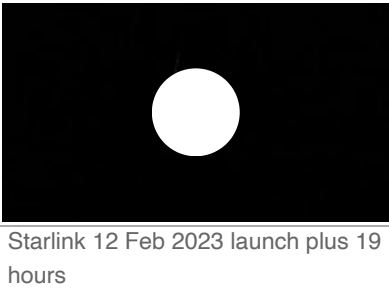
In March 2023 SpaceX submitted an application to add V-band payload to the second generation satellites rather than fly phase 2 V-band satellites as originally planned and authorized.<sup>[329]</sup> The request is subject to FCC approval.

Second Generation (2A)

Phase	Group designation	Orbital shells		Orbital planes <sup>[330][a]</sup>			Committed completion date		Deployed satellites 16 August 2023 <sup>[310]</sup>	
		Altitude (km)	Planned satellites	Inclination	Count	Satellites per	Half	Full	Active	Decaying/deorbited
1 <sup>[b]</sup>	Group 5 <sup>[310]</sup>	530 km (330 mi)	3360 <sup>[b]</sup>	43° <sup>[310]</sup>	28	120	1 December 2028 <sup>[332]</sup>	1 December 2031 <sup>[332]</sup>	696	3
	Group 6 <sup>[310]</sup>	559 km (347 mi) <sup>[333]</sup>							214	12
		525 km (326 mi)	3360 <sup>[b]</sup>	53°	28	120				
		535 km (332 mi)	3360 <sup>[b]</sup>	33°	28	120				

- a. SpaceX abandoned configuration 2 proposed in the amendment<sup>[331]</sup>
- b. The FCC limited phase 1 to 7,500 satellites across 3 shells.<sup>[332]</sup>

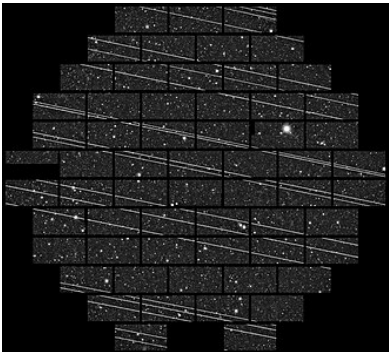
With the unknown of when Starship will be able to launch the second generation satellites, SpaceX modified the original V2 blueprint into a smaller, more compact one named "V2 Mini". This adjustment, allowed Falcon 9 to transport these satellites, though not as many, into orbit.<sup>[334]</sup> The first set of 21 of these satellites was launched on February 27, 2023. SpaceX committed to reducing debris by keeping the Starlink tension rods, which hold the V2 mini-satellites together, attached to the Falcon 9 second stage. These tension rods were discarded into orbit while launching an earlier versions of Starlink satellites.<sup>[335]</sup> Observations confirm these V2 mini-satellites host two solar panels like the Starship V2 satellites.<sup>[336]</sup>



Impact on astronomy

The planned large number of satellites has been met with criticism from the astronomical community because of concerns over light pollution.<sup>[339][340][341]</sup> Astronomers claim that the number of visible satellites will outnumber visible stars and that their brightness in both optical and radio wavelengths will severely impact scientific observations. While astronomers can schedule observations to avoid pointing where satellites currently orbit, it is "getting more difficult" as more satellites come online.<sup>[342]</sup> The International Astronomical Union (IAU), National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO), and Square Kilometre Array Organization (SKAO) have released official statements expressing concern on the matter.<sup>[343][344][345]</sup>

On 20 November 2019, the four-meter (13') Blanco telescope of the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory (CTIO) recorded strong signal loss and the appearance of 19 white lines on a DECam shot (right image). This image noise was correlated to the transit of a Starlink satellite train, launched a week earlier.<sup>[346]</sup>



Signal pollution in a 333-second exposure image taken from the Blanco four-meter (13') telescope at the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory in November 2019.

SpaceX representatives and Musk have claimed that the satellites will have minimal impact, being easily mitigated by pixel masking and image stacking.<sup>[347]</sup> However, professional astronomers have disputed these claims based on initial observation of the Starlink v0.9 satellites on the first launch, shortly after their deployment from the launch vehicle.<sup>[348][349][350][351]</sup> In later statements on Twitter, Musk stated that SpaceX will work on reducing the albedo of the satellites and will provide on-demand orientation adjustments for astronomical experiments, if necessary.<sup>[352][353]</sup> One Starlink satellite (Starlink 1130 / DarkSat) launched with an experimental coating to reduce its albedo. The reduction in g-band magnitude is 0.8 magnitude (55%).<sup>[354][355]</sup> Despite these measures, astronomers found that the satellites were still too bright, thus making DarkSat essentially a "dead end".<sup>[356]</sup>

On 17 April 2020, SpaceX wrote in an FCC filing that it would test new methods of mitigating light pollution, and also provide access to satellite tracking data for astronomers to "better coordinate their observations with our satellites".<sup>[357][358]</sup> On 27 April 2020, Musk announced that the company would introduce a new sunshade designed to reduce the brightness of Starlink satellites.<sup>[357]</sup> As of 15 October 2020, over 200 Starlink satellites had a sunshade. An October 2020 analysis found them to be only marginally fainter than DarkSat.<sup>[359]</sup> A January 2021 study pinned the brightness at 31% of the original design.<sup>[360]</sup>

According to a May 2021 study, "A large number of fast-moving transmitting stations (i.e. satellites) will cause further interference. New analysis methods could mitigate some of these effects, but data loss is inevitable, increasing the time needed for each study and limiting the overall amount of science done".<sup>[361]</sup>

In February 2022, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) established a center to help astronomers deal with the adverse effects of satellite constellations such as Starlink. Work will include the development of software tools for astronomers, advancement of national and international policies, community outreach and work with industry on relevant technologies.<sup>[362]</sup>

In June 2022, the IAU released a website for astronomers to deal with some adverse effects via satellite tracking. This will enable astronomers to be able to track satellites to be able to avoid and time them for minimal impact on current work.<sup>[363]</sup>

The first batch of Generation 2 spacecraft was launched in February 2023. These satellites are referred to as "Mini" because they are smaller than the full-sized Gen 2 spacecraft that will come later. SpaceX uses brightness mitigation for Gen 2 that includes a mirror-like surface which reflects sunlight back into space and they orient the solar panels so that observers on the ground only see the dark sides.<sup>[364]</sup> The Minis are fainter than Gen 1 spacecraft despite being four times as large according to an observational study published in June 2023, being 19% as bright as Gen 1 when placed in the final "brightness-mitigated" orbit. Minis appear 12 times brighter before they reach the target orbit.<sup>[365]</sup>

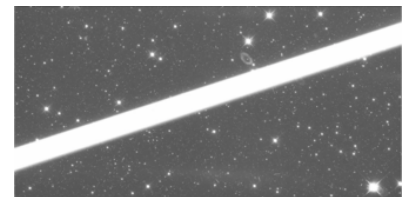
## Increased risk of satellite collision

The large number of satellites employed by Starlink may create the long-term danger of space debris resulting from placing thousands of satellites in orbit and the risk of causing a satellite collision, potentially triggering a phenomenon known as Kessler syndrome.<sup>[366][367]</sup> SpaceX has said that most of the satellites are launched at a lower altitude, and failed satellites are expected to deorbit within five years without propulsion.<sup>[368][369]</sup>

Early in the program, a near-miss occurred when SpaceX did not move a satellite that had a 1 in 1,000 chance of colliding with a European one, ten times higher than ESA's threshold for avoidance maneuvers. SpaceX subsequently fixed an issue with its paging system that had disrupted emails between ESA and SpaceX. ESA said it plans to invest in technologies to automate satellite collision avoidance maneuvers.<sup>[370][371]</sup> In 2021, Chinese authorities lodged a complaint with the United Nations, saying their space station had performed evasive maneuvers that year to avoid



Starlink in Tübingen, Germany



Starlink 1619 seen by the Hubble Space Telescope



Timelapse of recently deployed satellites<sup>[337][338]</sup>



Starlink satellites.<sup>[372]</sup> In the document, Chinese delegates said that the continuously maneuvering Starlink satellites posed a risk of collision, and two close encounters with the satellites in July and October constituted dangers to the life or health of astronauts aboard the Chinese Tiangong space station.<sup>[373][369]</sup>

All these reported issues, plus current plans for the extension of the constellation, motivated a formal letter from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) on behalf of NASA and the NSF, submitted to the FCC on 8 February 2022, warning about the potential impact on low Earth orbit, increased collision risk, impact on science missions, rocket launches, International Space Station and Radio frequencies.<sup>[374]</sup>

SpaceX satellites will maneuver if the probability of collision is greater than  $10^{-5}$  (1 in 100,000 chance of collision), as opposed to the industry standard of  $10^{-4}$  (1 in 10,000 chance of collision).<sup>[375]</sup> SpaceX has budgeted sufficient propellant to accommodate approximately 5,000 propulsive maneuvers over the life of a Gen2 satellite, including a budget of approximately 350 collision avoidance maneuvers per satellite over that time period.<sup>[301]</sup>

As of May 2022, the average Starlink satellite had conducted fewer than three collision-avoidance maneuvers over the 6 preceding months.<sup>[301]</sup> Over 1,700 out of 6,873 maneuvers were performed to avoid Kosmos 1408 debris.<sup>[375]</sup>

## Competition and market effects

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In addition to the OneWeb constellation, announced nearly concurrently with the SpaceX constellation, a 2015 proposal from Samsung outlined a 4,600-satellite constellation orbiting at 1,400 km (870 mi) that could provide a zettabyte per month capacity worldwide, an equivalent of 200 gigabytes per month for 5 billion users of Internet data,<sup>[376][377]</sup> but by 2020, no more public information had been released about the Samsung constellation. Telesat announced a smaller 117 satellite constellation in 2015 with plans to deliver initial service in 2021.<sup>[378]</sup> Amazon announced a large broadband internet satellite constellation in April 2019, planning to launch 3,236 satellites in the next decade in what the company calls "Project Kuiper", a satellite constellation that will work in concert<sup>[379]</sup> with Amazon's previously announced large network of twelve satellite ground station facilities (the "AWS ground station unit") announced in November 2018.<sup>[380]</sup>

In February 2015, financial analysts questioned established geosynchronous orbit communications satellite fleet operators as to how they intended to respond to the competitive threat of SpaceX and OneWeb LEO communication satellites.<sup>[381]</sup> In October 2015, SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell indicated that while development continues, the business case for the long-term rollout of an operational satellite network was still in an early phase.<sup>[382]</sup>

By October 2017, the expectation for large increases in satellite network capacity from emerging lower-altitude broadband constellations caused market players to cancel some planned investments in new geosynchronous orbit broadband communications satellites.<sup>[383]</sup>

SpaceX was challenged regarding Starlink in February 2021 when the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), a political interest group representing traditional rural internet service providers, urged the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to "actively, and aggressively, and thoughtfully vet" the subsidy applications of SpaceX and other broadband providers. At the time, SpaceX had provisionally won \$886 million for a commitment to provide service to approximately 643,000 locations in 35 states as part of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF).<sup>[384]</sup> The NRECA criticisms included that the funding allocation to Starlink would include service to locations—such as Harlem and terminals at Newark Liberty International Airport and Miami International Airport—that are not rural, and because SpaceX was planning to build the infrastructure and serve any customers who request service with or without the FCC subsidy.<sup>[384]</sup> Additionally, Jim Matheson, chief executive officer of the NRECA voiced concern about technologies that had not yet been proven to meet the high speeds required for the award category. Starlink was specifically criticized for being still in beta testing and for unproven technology.<sup>[385]</sup>

While Starlink is deployed worldwide, it has encountered trademark conflicts in some countries such as Mexico.<sup>[386]</sup>

## Similar or competitive systems

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- OneWeb satellite constellation – a satellite constellation project that began operational deployment of satellites in 2020.<sup>[387]</sup>

- **China national satellite internet project** – a planned satellite internet offering for the Chinese market.<sup>[388]</sup>
- **Kuiper Systems** – a planned 3,276 LEO satellite Internet constellation by an Amazon subsidiary.
- **Hughes Network Systems** – a current broadband satellite provider providing fixed, cellular backhaul, and airborne antennas.
- **Viasat, Inc.** – a current broadband satellite provider providing fixed, ground mobile, and airborne antennas.
- **O3b** – Medium Earth orbit constellation that provides access to mobile phone operators and internet service providers. It covers only the equatorial region.

## See also

- **AST SpaceMobile** – a satellite-to-mobile-phone satellite constellation working with large mobile network operators such as Vodafone, AT&T, Orange, Rakuten, Telestra, Telefónica, etc. with the objective to provide broadband internet coverage to existing unmodified mobile phones
- **Orbcomm** – an operational constellation used to provide global asset monitoring and messaging services from its constellation of 29 LEO communications satellites orbiting at 775 km
- **Globalstar** – an operational low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite constellation for satellite phone and low-speed data communications, covering most of the world's landmass
- **Iridium** – an operational constellation of 66 cross-linked satellites in a polar orbit, used to provide satellite phone and low-speed data services over the entire surface of Earth
- **Lynk Global** – a satellite-to-mobile-phone satellite constellation with the objective to coverage to traditional low-cost mobile devices
- **Teledesic** – a former (1990s) venture to accomplish broadband satellite internet services
- **Project Loon** – former concept to provide internet access via balloons in the stratosphere

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## External links

- Official website (<https://www.starlink.com/>)
- Official Starlink Availability Map (<https://www.starlink.com/map>)
- Starlink Satellite and Groundstation Locations, Data Links, path projection, environmental Information etc. ([starlink.sx](https://starlink.sx/)) (<https://starlink.sx/>)
- Starlink Coverage Area, Satellite and Groundstation Locations for Starlink, OneWeb and GPS constellations ([satellitemap.space](https://satellitemap.space/)) (<https://satellitemap.space/?constellation=starlink>)
- Complete Starlink Satellite Catalog allowing tracking location details from user location. (<https://www.karhukoti.com/Satellites/?search=STARLINK>)
- Starlink Satellite Locations and Information on individual coverage area, connections, etc. (<https://www.satflare.com/track.asp?q=starlink>)
- See A Satellite Tonight (<https://james.darpinian.com/satellites/?special=starlink>) shows when Starlink satellites can be seen.
- Shows real-time Starlink satellites position (<https://www.heavens-above.com/StarLink.aspx?lat=32.0141&lng=34.9334&loc=%d7%98%d7%99%d7%a8%d7%aa+%d7%99%d7%94%d7%95%d7%93%d7%94&alt=0&tz=>)
- Starlink Professional Installers Directory (<https://starlink.internet-exchange.site>)
- List of Starlink dish firmware updates (<https://www.starlinkhardware.com/firmware-updates/>)
- A User Friendly Real-Time SpaceX Satellite Locator (<https://satellitemap.space/?constellation=starlink>)

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