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●NASA、火星上の商業衛星通信サービス構築に意見募集

【Reuters, 2014/07/23】

NASA は 23 日、火星上で商業的に通信衛星ネットワークを所有・運用する案について意見の募集を開始した。

火星探査には地球との通信システムが不可欠だが、現在使われている通信衛星は 2001 年、2005 年に打上げられたもので、老朽化も進んでいる。

2018 年、2020 年には火星上の生命の痕跡を探る探査機が打上げられるが、現状では 2020 年代には通信環境に不備が生じる可能性もある。

このため NASA は従来の通信システムに代わる新たなモデルを検討。NASA 火星探査プログラムの幹部、リサ・メイ氏は、商業的に運用される通信サービスは NASA 自身が構築・運用するよりも安価で高機能になる可能性を秘めているという。NASA は現時点ではアイデアを求めているだけで、具体的な計画の立案や資金の確保はまだ行っていない。

(参考) 本件報道記事

NASA puts out call for satellite communication services – on Mars

Wed, Jul 23 2014

By Irene Klotz

CAPE CANAVERAL Fla. (Reuters) - In what may be the ultimate in long-distance telephone service, NASA on Wednesday put out a call for a commercially owned and operated satellite network on Mars.

The U.S. space agency needs to keep in touch with its rovers, landers and orbiters that have been chipping away at studies and experiments to learn if the planet most like Earth in the solar system ever supported life.

The robotic probes, however, are useless if they cannot relay their results, and the two communication satellites currently in orbit are getting old. The Mars Odyssey spacecraft was launched in 2001. Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter followed in 2005.

The aging of NASA's Mars communications system comes as the United States, Europe, Russia and India mount a fresh wave of science campaigns, including two atmospheric probes slated to arrive at Mars in September and two life-hunting rovers due to launch in 2018 and 2020.

"There is a potential communications gap in the 2020s," NASA wrote in its solicitation, which was posted on the agency's procurement website.

"With that in mind, NASA is interested in exploring alternative models to sustain and evolve the Mars relay infrastructure," the solicitation said.

A commercially operated communications service could be less expensive and more capable than what NASA could build and operate on its own, while providing "appropriate return-on-investment," to the service provider, NASA Mars exploration program executive Lisa May said in a statement.

For now, NASA is just seeking ideas, with no firm plans or funding to purchase commercial communication services on Mars. Proposals are due by Aug. 25.

The solicitation is open to all organizations, including U.S. industry, universities, nonprofit groups, NASA and other government centers, as well as international organizations.

(Reporting by Irene Klotz; Editing by Ken Wills)

Source: Reuters, 2014/07/23

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