EGNOS ‘Open Service’ available  
A new era for European navigation

During a press conference on 1st October, Antonio Tajani, European Commission Vice-President for Transport Policy, announced the official start of operations for EGNOS, the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service.

This is a major milestone for the project: its primary service is now available to all users equipped with EGNOS-compatible receivers. Most mass-market satellite navigation receivers being sold today are ready for EGNOS.

This is a satellite-based augmentation system that improves the accuracy of satellite navigation signals over Europe. The system consists of transponders aboard three geostationary satellites over the eastern Atlantic Ocean and Europe, linked to a network of about 40 ground stations and four control centres.

The EGNOS ground stations receive signals sent out by the US GPS satellites. Information on the accuracy and reliability of these signals is relayed to users via the geostationary satellite transponders. This allows them to determine their position to within two metres, compared with about 20 metres for GPS alone. The Open Service is provided free of charge.

EGNOS is the first pan-European navigation satellite system. It was developed as a joint project by the European Space Agency (ESA), the European Commission (EC) and Eurocontrol, the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation.

ESA had overall responsibility for the design and development of the EGNOS system and placed a contract with a consortium led by Thales Alenia Space of France, to develop the system. After completing development, the EGNOS system was handed over to the EC on 1st April.

EC now owns and manages the EGNOS system. ESA is the design and procurement agent through a delegation agreement with the EC.

The European Satellite Services Provider, ESSP SaS, founded by seven air navigation services providers and based in Toulouse, manages EGNOS operations. A contract between the EC and ESSP SaS was signed on 30th September. The contract provides for the management of EGNOS operations and the maintenance of the system until the end of 2013.