

DBS project may be offered US satellites

BY RAYMOND SNOODY

COMSAT, THE US satellite organisation, is exploring the possibility of offering two "substantially complete" satellites to serve Britain's direct broadcasting by satellite project.

Senior executives from Comsat, the US representative of Intelsat the international satellite telecommunications monopoly, have already visited Britain for talks with potential DBS operators.

Comsat is believed to have had talks with Granada Television, Mr James Lee's National Broadcasting Service, Mr Michael Green, chairman of Carlton Communications and Mr John Jackson's company DBL.

There have also been talks between Comsat and the Independent Broadcasting Authority to see whether the Comsat satellites could meet IBA specifications.

Comsat, through its subsidiary Satellite Television Corporation, planned to launch DBS in the US and placed contracts with RCA for two satellites each providing three channels of television. Plans for a joint venture with CBS, the US television network, came to nothing and Comsat cancelled its DBS plans.

DBS is the provision of new channels of television from high power satellites to dish aerials on individual homes. The basic price of the contract for the two satellites was \$120m.

Mr Ernesto Martin, Comsat vice president for projects, said last night the high power satellites were already assembled and were at the stage of final testing. Mr Martin said the modifications needed to make the satellites suitable for UK use would take 18 months—approximately half the time needed to build satellites from scratch.

The Comsat board has yet to decide whether to make a formal offer to Britain's DBS contractors. If it did, Mr Martin said the price would be aggressive and likely to be pitched slightly below the full market rate.

"The combination of cost, quality and early delivery we could offer could turn out to be crucial on whether there is UK DBS or not," Mr Martin said.

Comsat is expected to take a decision soon on whether to offer its satellites to the UK.

Comsat offers early date for DBS satellite launch

BY RAYMOND SNOODY

COMSAT, THE US satellite organisation, is offering British Satellite Broadcasting, which holds Britain's DBS franchise, an August 1989 launch date for its satellites.

This date would enable Britain's direct broadcasting television service to start in the late autumn of 1989, a year earlier than expected.

Comsat, US representative of Intelsat, the international satellite telecommunications monopoly, says it has a firm August 1989 reservation on the first McDonnell Douglas Delta rocket to carry a commercial rather than military payload.

Mr Ernesto Martin, a Comsat vice-president, said yesterday he thought Comsat was the only short-listed satellite supplier which could offer a television service beginning in 1989. The others short-listed are British Aerospace and Hughes of the US.

It is believed that a senior Comsat executive will be in London next week for negotiations with British a consortium made

up of Granada, Pearson, Virgin, Amstrad Consumer Electronics and Anglia/Television.

Comsat is offering BSB two high-power DBS satellites for \$75m (£46.9m). They were intended for a DBS service in the US but Comsat pulled out of the project.

The satellites need modification for European use—a process which, Mr Martin says, would take 18 months, about half the time needed to build new satellites from scratch.

Later this month in London, Comsat and Matsushita, the leading Japanese consumer electronics company, will announce a new flat aerial for receiving satellite broadcasting.

It will be the first time the aerial has been shown publicly.

Comsat believes that the aerial, which could be fixed to a house wall more easily than the existing dish aerials, should be available in shops for launch of British DBS at a price lower than that of conventional ones.