

Kings Bay to be First Sub Base Ready for Navy's Columbia-Class SSBN



Rear Adm. John Korka, commander of Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) and chief of civil engineers, during his recent interview with *Seapower*. Lisa Nipp
ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy's submarine base in Kings Bay, Georgia, will be the first base to be readied for the Navy's new Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN), a Navy admiral said.

"Kings Bay will come first, so that [construction] will be in [the] 2023 to 2025 period," Rear Adm. John W. Korka, commander of Naval Facilities Engineering Command, said in an interview with *Seapower*. "About a year later, we will see similar efforts at Bangor [Washington]."

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"In Kings Bay today, the critical SSBN dry dock facility requires upgrades," Korka said. "In support of that requirement, next year we will award a project to recapitalize the dry dock. That work is part of a \$400 million-plus project."

The 12 planned Columbia-class SSBNs will replace the 14 Ohio-class SSBNs in service on ballistic-missile patrols beginning in 2031. The program is on a tight timeline to deliver the new SSBNs in time to assume the patrols, and the Naval Facilities Engineering Command has program officials embedded with Program Executive Office-Submarines to coordinate the infrastructure requirements of the Columbia sub program.



An artist rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine. U.S. Navy

“Each new class brings a new capability, so that translates to unique training and refitting associated with supporting any new platform,” Korka added.

“I tell people to keep in mind, though, that as we are bringing the Ohio class offline, we still need to maintain the facilities to support that program and that submarine and, at the same time, we are transitioning to bringing on the Columbia class. Training and maintenance spaces are critical in that arena. I will add that there is an opportunity to use the existing spaces, but there is a requirement for a certain amount of expansion.”

Korka added: “It’s important to note that we are introducing a new platform while there is still an operational requirement for an existing platform. As such, we need to make sure our team has the requirements right and possesses the agility of being able to change direction without losing the pace of construction. That is going to be critical element to our success – being able to adjust to meet the emerging requirements while keeping the timeline on track. That is where agility plays a key role.”



The Ohio-class guided missile submarine USS Georgia prepares to exit the dry dock at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Georgia, following a refit. Kings Bay will be the first base readied for the Columbia class SSBN. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Bryan Tomforde

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Rear Adm. John Korka, NAVFAC commander

Korka’s command also has been heavily engaged in upgrading the

infrastructure in Philadelphia to support the Columbia construction.

“What many people may not know is that the Navy produces the propulsor components and propellers at the Naval Foundry and Propeller Center in Philadelphia,” he said.

“The facilities at the Naval Surface Warfare Center portion of the annex that were part of supporting the Columbia class needed power upgrades. They additionally required construction of the power propulsion facilities primarily designed to do all the testing of components associated with the electrical drive system of the Columbia class. We awarded that project in 2015 and will complete it in the coming months. It has a full-tilt testing cell to characterize and certify the acoustic signature performance. The propulsion system then is barged up to Groton [Connecticut] to Electric Boat, where it will be installed into the submarines. This project is active and progressing along. There are other projects in Philadelphia supporting the manufacturing elements and testing labs as well, and work associated with those projects will continue.”

“There also is a submarine propulsor manufacturing support facility that is tracking to be awarded this year as well as planning and design efforts for the training and refit facilities in support of the Columbia class,” he said.