Navy, Boeing Studying Block II Version of EA-18G Growler Electronic Attack Aircraft

An EA-18G Growler launches from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74). U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Grant G. Grady

ARLINGTON, Va. – Boeing is in the wrap-up stages of a trade study and architecture assessment of an upgrade – called Block II – to the Navy's EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft. The upgrade is an effort to enable the EA-18G to keep up with the dynamic electronic warfare threats.

"It makes sense that we would take something that was designed in the '90s and now enhance it to be relevant for decades to come," said Jennifer Tebo, Boeing's director of development for the F/A-18 and EA-18G, speaking to reporters May 7 at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space exposition.

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"The current thinking on that is that it is a retrofit program," Tebo said.

“There is no official new-build Growler Block II. We will continue to work with the Navy to determine what those needs are, how we might incorporate them into a new build. We’re thinking of a retrofit program that would deliver capability in the 2025 timeframe. We’ve already starting work in earnest and early this year got initial funding from the Navy to start moving to the [System Functional Requirements] phase by the end of this year to deliver that capability on time.”

Tebo said that the Growler Block II enhancements will include some of the upgrades of the Super Hornet Block III program, plus “enhanced sensitivity through the modernization of the sensors on the platform. … It’s about adaptive and distributive processing, having big computers to process and be able to react to the threats that are out there today and into the future.”

“It’s also about enhancing the crew-vehicle interface,” Tebo added. “As the Growler crews get more and more information into the cockpit, they’re going to need a way to reduce the workload to be able to digest and use it effectively. All of that is accomplished through software-defined radios that are enabled through a flexible and adaptable hardware architecture.”

Tebo said the infrastructure and the architecture will “allow us to continually evolve

capability as the threat dynamic changes. The life of the Growler is very, very long. We're setting this up for the Navy to be able to continue add capability rapidly to the Growler.

"It's been a joint effort and it will evolve as we pin down the requirements," she said.

She confirmed that the Next-Generation Jammer and the mid-band and low-band jammers "are considered part of the future of the Growler and Growler Block II."

Boeing's concept of Block II includes the conformal fuel tanks being included in the Super Hornet Block III, but "the Navy will have to decide," she said.

Also to be decided is whether the Growler will go through a service life-extension program. The Super Hornet fleet is going through a service-life extension from 6,000 flight hours to 10,000 hours.

"That is to be decided," Tebo said. "The Growler has a 7,500-hour service life compared to 6,000-hour life of the Super Hornet. [The Growler] has not finished its service-life assessment program yet."