

Attack Sub Chief Talks SSN(X), Maintenance Challenges



The Los Angeles-class submarine USS Cheyenne (SSN 773) passes through the newly procured entrance structure that closes in the Superflood Basin. *U.S. NAVY / Jim Cleveland*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The admiral in charge of the U.S. Navy's attack submarine program gave an update on the SSN(X) program while talking about the root causes of challenges the service faces from maintenance backlogs during an address at the Naval Submarine League's annual symposium in Arlington, Virginia, Nov. 2.

Rear Adm. Jonathan Rucker, program executive officer for

attack submarines (PEO SSN), said that the Navy was in the midst of looking at the trade space for SSN(X), which involves technology assessments and capability reviews leading up to an analysis of alternatives.

"This is really a team effort," he said. "We're working with the shipbuilders, we're working across government, we're working across industry to see what technologies are going to make the most sense.

"We want to learn from other platforms, so we put in the most capability we can but obviously we will not set [ourselves] up for capability that will not deliver," he added.

He noted that the program has delivered 21 Virginia-class submarines to date with another 17 under contract or in construction, with two planned for delivery this year and two next year as well.

But the main struggle he highlighted had to do with the maintenance backlog the fleet faces, particularly when it comes to submarines. Of the 57 attack submarines in the fleet, 18 of them are unavailable because of maintenance.

"We should be down much lower," Rucker said. "We should be at 10. ... So we're not where we need to be. That's just a fact."

He identified three main causes for this: planning, material and shipyard throughput.

With regard to planning, he noted that 30% of maintenance is unplanned, which is a major driver of maintenance time. The program's goal is to reduce that figure to 10% by 2026, he said.

Rucker also said that about half of the material for maintenance isn't ordered until the start of the submarine's availability, leading to delays because there is often a long lead time associated with that material.

He vowed to take efforts to address all three areas in order to get the maintenance backlog under control.