Navy Anticipates Abundance of Technology for Unmanned Maritime Systems, But Infrastructure Also Needed

WASHINGTON –
The Navy may attract more unmanned technology than can handle and deploy as it develops its unmanned surface vehicles and unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), a Navy official said, noting that industry also has opportunities to provide the supporting infrastructure.

"We're going to have way more technology available than we're going to be able to field in an operational manner until we build up infrastructure, Sailor training, pier space, supply network, spare parts, the transportation systems, the logistical support networks or all of the stuff," said Capt. Pete Small, the Navy's program manager for Unmanned Maritime Systems. speaking last week at the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International's Unmanned Systems–Defense. Protection. Security. Conference in Washington.

"I am focused on that and would put out that industry consider that not all of the investment needs to be in cutting-edge machine learning and autonomy,"

Small said. “I’m not implying that we don’t need that, but if we just focus on that without all of the more mundane logistics trails, there’s a whole giant assumption of a logistical infrastructure network to get to the warfighter where the capability is needed, to do a lot to bridge that gap to deploy the system at that far forward point.

“There’s absolutely an industry role in doing that as well,” he said. “We’re going to need help to get all of that stuff.”

He also mentioned the need for infrastructure such as piers, cranes and test ranges to support unmanned vehicle development and deployment.

Small said the Navy does not need to re-learn lessons from the UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] community with regard to providing enough bandwidth and other infrastructure requirements.

“We envision lots of unmanned vehicles providing the capacity that we need,” he said.

The Navy has established one UUV squadron and a surface development squadron on the West Coast. Small anticipates that the Navy will need to establish a second UUV squadron on the East Coast.