After the success of the Apollo missions, NASA proposed a new strategy for space travel that would make missions easier and less expensive.

In a 1972 address made in San Clemente, CA, President Nixon and NASA administrator Dr. James C. Fletcher announced the US Space Shuttle program. The new space transportation system allowed vehicles to routinely journey from Earth to orbit and back, and reusing vehicles would cost one-tenth the amount of previous launch vehicles.

In his address, President Nixon outlined the benefits of the program, including the ability to deploy and maintain satellites, which could be used for communications and weather forecasting, and improved safety that made journeys less demanding for astronauts. Dr. Fletcher said the program would "change the nature of what man can do in space."
The plan was to have a shuttle in manned flight by 1978. The first full-scale prototype, the Enterprise, was unveiled in 1976, and the first fully functional Space Shuttle orbiter, Columbia, took flight in 1981.

The Space Shuttle orbiter was launched vertically, carrying astronauts and up to 50,000 lbs of payload into a low Earth orbit. After completing its mission, the shuttle could move itself out of orbit and re-enter Earth's atmosphere, then act as a re-entry vehicle and glider before making an unpowered landing at Kennedy Space Center or Edwards Air Force Base.
Space shuttle Atlantis deploys its landing gear before touching down at Edwards Air Force Base on May 8, 1989. **Source**: NASA

The Space Shuttle program flew 135 flights over three decades, aiding in the maintenance of satellites and the construction the International Space Station. Its fleet included Columbia, Challenger, Discovery, Atlantis, and Endeavour. The [final flight was taken by Atlantis](http://www.nasa.gov) in 2011.

**Related articles:**

- [NASA unveils 1st Space Shuttle, September 17, 1976](http://www.nasa.gov)
- [Space Shuttle Columbia is delivered, March 25, 1979](http://www.nasa.gov)
- [Space Shuttle Discovery takes off for 1st time, August 30, 1984](http://www.nasa.gov)
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