(and their Martin Company contractors) came about almost fortuitously, as John Dassoulas of APL recalled.

"I had been looking into the possibilities of isotopic power since we first began the Transit program. We had a five-year goal for the life of the operational Transit, and we weren't confident that the hermetic seals on batteries would hold up for five years. But I wasn't aware of the SNAP program at all."[34]

In 1958 the Department of Defense sponsored a big meeting in Pasadena, California about space (satellite) power. Dassoulas attended the conference but did not meet with any of the nuclear power people until, on his return flight, he found himself sitting next to Anderson, who headed the isotope SNAP work at the joint AEC-DOD office. Anderson responded to Dassoulas' expression of interest in isotopic power for the Transit program with an invitation for him to visit the Martin Company's Baltimore facility and to become acquainted with the work there on SNAP.[35]

Following the visit, Dassoulas returned to APL and asked for and received permission to use an isotopic SNAP device on Transit. Plutonium, however, was then unavailable because of AEC restrictions, and APL refused to permit the use of strontium-90 because of the excessive weight of the necessary shielding. The AEC eventually relaxed its policy and agreed to provide the plutonium fuel and SNAP-3A, as a result, was converted from polonium-210 to plutonium-238, permitting a power life of five years.[36]

At the request of DOD a development program was initiated by AEC in February 1961 "to provide two plutonium-238 isotope-fueled generators for TRANSIT satellites to be launched in June and July." The AEC, looking beyond the Transit mission itself, held that "a primary purpose of the flight test is to demonstrate the performance of a SNAP...generator under actual space conditions."[37]

Tests for the safe use of SNAP devices on Transit had been conducted the previous fall. The next spring "safety" remained a critical issue, although both the Transit people at APL and the RTG people at the AEC and Martin looked forward hopefully to a chance to fly the isotopic generator. The planned trajectory of the launch vehicle from Cape Canaveral was to take the Transit over Cuba and South America. This added further qualms to those advising caution because of anxiety about possible Cuban reactions to a fly-over after the Bay of Pigs incident.