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Boeing has decided to focus its near-term product-development efforts on enhanced versions of the 767 and 777.

"Many customers are telling us that they plan to serve fast-growing travel markets with more long-range, medium-sized airplanes like the Boeing 777 and 767," said Ron Woodard, president of the Boeing Commercial Airplane Group. "That's why we'll focus our near-term resources on further enhancements to these product lines.

"We've been working with some of the world's largest airlines to develop airplanes capable of carrying 550 passengers and have developed an outstanding design for a new 747 family. These airplanes take full advantage of the latest technologies and meet all of our customers' performance objectives," Woodard added. "However, sufficient market demand has not yet developed to justify committing the significant investment required to develop larger versions of the 747."

Boeing will continue studying airplanes capable of carrying more passengers than today's 747. "This remains one of the priorities of our product-development efforts," Woodard said. "When the market develops for such an airplane, we will be ready.

"Airlines continue to express confidence in today's 747," Woodard added, noting that Boeing announced plans last year to double production rates of the 747 while securing 75 new orders for the 747-400. "We're confident the 747 will remain the world's preferred large airplane well into the next century."

Earlier this July, Boeing began offering for sale a new version of the 767. The proposed 767-400ERX, which could enter commercial service as early as the year 2000, will be capable of carrying 303 passengers in a two-class configuration.

Other new products under consideration include larger and longer-range versions of the 777. Potential versions of the 777 being studied are capable of non-stop flights approaching 10,000 statute miles (16,000 km) or carrying more than 400 passengers in a three-class configuration.

The 747-400 provides Boeing with the base to extend the 747 family with potentially larger versions. Some employees will continue working to develop an airplane larger than today's 747. All other Boeing employees currently working on 747 development will be assigned to new jobs within the company during the next several weeks.

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