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Boeing today completed computer upgrades to West Virginia University's personal rapid transit (PRT) system, allowing it to return to passenger service.

The company was awarded a \$4 million contract in July 1997 to replace the system's 25-year-old computers, incorporate a real-time operating system, rehost the old software code to the new modern Pentium-based PCs and conduct simulation testing.

Boeing in 1971 helped design and build the university's PRT system in Morgantown, W.V., an effort that connected two separate campuses, allowing quicker movement to and from classes.

"Although we're no longer in the rapid transit business, we agreed to take on the new contract largely because we believe it is important to take care of our customers," said Gene Hall, Boeing PRT project manager. "As part of our effort, we've given the university the necessary tools to take care of future upgrades and maintenance themselves."

The university's PRT system consists of 72 vehicles, five passenger stations, a central control/maintenance center and 8.7 miles of single-line guideway. Spacing and movement of the vehicles is controlled by a system of computers located at each station and in the control center.

Boeing originally constructed the cars and stations, supplied the electronics and was the system's prime integrator.

"Boeing has done an excellent job and we appreciate that since the early 1970s they've been available and willing to help when needed," said Bob Hendershot, West Virginia University PRT systems manager.

In operation since October 1975, the PRT system has carried more than 48 million people. The National Society of Professional Engineers named the system one of the nation's top 10 outstanding engineering achievements of 1972. In 1997, the New Electric Railway Journal chose the system as the best in the people-mover class for North American transportation systems.

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