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A Boeing-built Tracking and Data Relay Satellite (TDRS), scheduled for launch on March 8 from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla., will add to the TDRS fleet's capability to provide clear communications in the busy radio environment of space.

The Boeing 601 satellite named TDRS-I is the second of three built by Boeing Satellite Systems, a unit of The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA] for NASA Goddard Space Flight Center of Greenbelt, Md. The launch is being provided by International Launch Services on a Lockheed Martin-built Atlas IIA rocket. The 40-minute launch window opens at 2:39 p.m. PST (5:39 p.m. EST; 2239 GMT).

The trio of TDRS satellites will replenish and augment the current TDRS fleet, which has served the Space Shuttle and other orbiting spacecraft for almost two decades.

"These highly capable and flexible satellites will operate like a switchboard in the sky," said Jack Wormington, senior vice president of Programs for Boeing Satellite Systems. "Once in place, the three next-generation TDRS satellites will double the capacity of data transmission and will provide nearly continuous communications links between Earth and space for the Space Shuttle, the International Space Station, and with dozens of unmanned scientific satellites in low-earth orbit."

The satellites relay large volumes of user satellite data -- including voice, video and scientific -- from manned missions or orbiting scientific spacecraft back to ground control centers. TDRS supports spacecraft whose research targets range from the birth of stars deep in distant galaxies to the subtleties of environmental phenomena on Earth.

NASA plans to launch the last in the series, TDRS-J, in November 2002. TDRS-H was launched June 30, 2000. The satellites will be placed in geosynchronous orbit in strategic locations above the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Innovative folding antennas that meet NASA's requirements for reflectors with a large surface area, yet low weight can simultaneously transmit and receive at S-band and either Ku- or Ka-band, supporting dual independent two-way communication.

Boeing S&C, headquartered in Seal Beach, Calif., is the world's largest space and communications company. A unit of The Boeing Company, S&C provides integrated solutions in launch services, human space flight and exploration, missile defense, and information and communications. It is NASA's largest contractor; a leading provider of space-based communications; the primary systems integrator for U.S. missile defense; and a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. The global enterprise has customers worldwide and manufacturing operations throughout the United States and Australia.

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