Concept Design Pushes Boeing Engineers to Consider Innovative Approaches for 7E7

Boeing [NYSE: BA] today released a new image of its super-efficient 7E7 commercial airplane. Engineers are using this 7E7 concept to push their thinking to more innovative exterior designs for the new airplane.

The new image shows a distinctive nose shape, new wing tip concepts and a sculpted vertical tail structure.

"The basic shape of large commercial jet airplanes has remained essentially unchanged since the introduction of the Boeing 707 nearly 50 years ago," said Mike Bair, senior vice president of the 7E7 program. "There's a good reason for that. The shape is optimal for achieving lift, fighting drag and producing efficient, comfortable flight."

Subtle touches, however, can be added to produce a more unique shape without affecting the performance of the airplane. Engineers are studying these touches for consideration on the new 7E7.

"We are using this concept similar to how automobile designers use concept cars, to stretch our imaginations, to consider new possibilities and to help us design the best possible product for our customer," Bair said. "The conventional image that we have shown the world for the past four months is very much our baseline design. But we want to go beyond baseline to something that people will know by sight -- like the way we all know a 747 when we see one."

Designers will continue to consider alternative design features through the summer and finalize the airplane configuration by the end of the year.

"Airplane designs change during development," Bair said. "I don't expect the 7E7 will look exactly like either the baseline image we've shown since January or this concept image. I expect we will take the best of both to come up with something unique that meets the needs of our customers and satisfies the flying public."

The 7E7 is being developed as a 200- to 250-seat airplane that will fly between 7,000 and 8,000 nautical miles at speeds similar to today's fastest twin-aisle commercial airplanes -- the 777 and 747. It will be the most advanced and efficient commercial airplane in its class and will set new standards for environmental responsibility and passenger comfort.

The market potential for a new airplane of this size is forecasted at up to 3,000 units over the next 20 years. The company expects to formally offer the new airplane to customers in early 2004.

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