Boeing 7E7 Dreamliner Passes Firm Concept Milestone

The Boeing [NYSE:BA] 7E7 Dreamliner program recently defined in broad terms the all-new passenger airplane's size and functionality, in so doing completing a major milestone known as "firm concept."

In passing that milestone the 7E7 team turned its focus to more specifically defining the shape of various parts, structural capabilities of the airplane, and the way the flight controls will operate.

"This is a significant technical accomplishment," said Mike Bair, senior vice president of the 7E7 program. "We are making solid design progress as we make the decisions that will allow us to bring this airplane into service in 2008."

A shorter-range version of the 7E7 has been added to the 7E7 family plan. The shorter-range 7E7 will be the same size as the baseline 7E7 but configured in single-class seating to accommodate about 300 passengers. It also will feature changes in the wing and landing gear to optimize its mission. The anticipated range for the short-range 7E7 is 3,500 nautical miles (6,500 kilometers).

As part of ongoing airplane refinements, the team also revised the projected range of the baseline 7E7 to 7,800 nautical miles (14,500 kilometers) and the stretch 7E7's to 8,300 nautical miles (15,400 kilometers).

"We've examined a number of different range capabilities in this general area for these airplanes," Bair said. "The changes have been fairly subtle, all around the 7,000 to 8,000 nautical mile area. The range may continue to change in the months ahead as we continue to learn more specifics about airline requirements."

Completing "firm concept" concludes the first exploratory round of wind tunnel tests and begins the first design cycle of wind tunnel test and design structural loads.

Another refinement to the 7E7 plan has been the rescheduling of an engine-supplier selection to mid-2004 from the end of this year.

"The three engine manufacturers are showing tremendous cooperation as they evolve the technologies and engine designs for the 7E7 program," said Bair. "We believe enough improvement is being made that it is in the program's best interest to give the engine companies a few more months to evolve their offerings and put forth the best possible solutions. We have discussed this with the engine companies and all three agreed to continue their work on the program."

The 7E7's next major milestone is gaining authority to offer from the Boeing board of directors. That's expected to happen late this year or early in 2004. Other program milestones include initial customer commitments in mid-2004, firm configuration, expected in mid-2005; start of major assembly, planned for 2006; first flight, schedule in late 2007; certification in mid-2008; and first delivery, which will occur shortly after certification.

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For further information:
Lori Gunter
(425) 717-0571