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Boeing [NYSE: BA] and representatives from about 70 airlines and financial institutions spent two days in Seattle this week discussing the all-new 7E7 Dreamliner airplane's progress as Boeing moves toward finalizing the airplane's configuration next year.

In addition to meeting with customers in smaller, face-to-face sessions all year long, the 7E7 program hosted a cross-section of customers for the second consecutive year in a large-meeting setting. Called the Progress Summit II, the meeting featured open discussion about customer requirements, concepts for standardizing and simplifying the 7E7, and airplane financing.

"As in the past on such airplanes as the 777, our customers' contributions to the process of defining the airplane have been essential to Boeing getting it right," said Boeing 7E7 Program Vice President, Sales, Marketing and In-Service Support John Feren. "The perspective and insight our customers have shared with us to help make the 7E7 the best value proposition is truly amazing."

Finalizing the 7E7's configuration by mid-2005 is the next major milestone. After that, the first 7E7 enters production in 2006, with flight test during 2007 and certification, delivery and entry into service during 2008.

Financial institutions are more active in the 7E7's development than for past airplanes because their input is driving how the program can make the airplane a valuable asset over its lifecycle.

"We had a good dialogue with the financial institutions about what concerns, ideas and needs they have to help make 7E7 succeed over its entire lifecycle," Feren added.

During the meeting Boeing also discussed potential 7E7 services and support packages and plans for simplifying and standardizing the airplane to save airlines time and money. It will make information about those topics available next year.

Boeing launched the 7E7 family in April with a 50-airplane order from ANA (All Nippon Airways). Air New Zealand, First Choice Airways, Blue Panorama and Primaris Airlines have also ordered 7E7s.

The 7E7-8 Dreamliner and 7E7-9 airplanes will carry 217-257 passengers in tri-class configurations on routes of 8,500 and 8,300 nautical miles (15,700 and 15,400 kilometers) respectively. A third 7E7 family member, the 7E7-3 Dreamliner, will accommodate nearly 289 passengers in a two-class configuration and be optimized for routes of 3,500 nautical miles (6,500 km). The 7E7s will provide passengers with a better flying experience, including an improved cabin environment with more room and conveniences.

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