

# realitycheck

YESTERDAY'S HYPE MEETS TODAY'S REALITY



**STATS** Estimated cost: \$185 million; actual cost: \$300 million / 26 miles of track

## Airport gives advanced baggage-handling system the boot

➤ Ongoing problems with the advanced, automated baggage-handling system delayed the opening of the Denver International Airport for 16 months until February 1995. Now-defunct BAE Automated Systems designed the system using the Wonderware InTouch human-machine interface from Invensys Systems Inc. The system's cost zoomed from an estimated total of \$185 million to more than \$300 million, due to extra engineering and debugging costs, interest, and penalties.

With 26 miles of track, the system was supposed to shunt bags in small, gray carts from source to destination, tracking and steering the carts onto conveyor tracks. A central computer would track carts in real time and would control per-cart steering. But tracking the carts and dealing with inevitable spills, pileups, breakdowns, and other deviations from ideal overwhelmed the system. After years of trying to fix it or work around it, airport officials have shut down the system. They are dismantling its parts and selling them off for scrap. They plan to replace the system with a more manual one employing handheld bar-code readers and lots of people. You can get more details at <http://ntl.bts.gov/DOCS/rc9535br.html>.—by Bill Schweber