



Iowa fliers have hang-ups about proposed cellphone use on planes

The FCC says there's no reason to forbid calls on flights, but passengers fret about chatty neighbors

Dec. 12, 2013 | 4 Comments

Recommend Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

Recommend 0



Jordan Lickteig



Written by Joel Aschbrenner

The ban on midflight cellphone calls could be going down — but not without a lot of noise.

FILED UNDER

Business

The Federal Communications Commission is set to vote today on a proposed rule to allow airline passengers to make midflight phone calls — a proposal that has drawn criticism from travelers, airlines, flight attendants and lawmakers.

The rule would allow cellular service on aircraft above 10,000 feet, replacing a 22-year-old rule that FCC officials said doesn't mesh with today's technology.

If approved, the cellular service rule would face a months-long public comment period and a final vote before it takes effect.

ADVERTISEMENT

Most Popular Most Commented More Headlines

- 1 New Year's Eve Guide: Plan your night out
- 2 Waukee police find suspect dead after standoff
- 3 Transfers telling the tale for Iowa State men both in victory, preparation
- 4 Allen Lazard again affirms ISU commitment, says Notre Dame 'is out of the picture'
- 5 Neighbor: Woman whose son fell from sitter's car is doting mom, 'good person'

Most Viewed





Kevin O'Connell

D.M. AIRLINES RESIST CHANGE, FOR NOW

Airlines that serve Des Moines have expressed little interest in a proposed rule that would allow passengers to make cellphone calls when cruising above 10,000 feet.

Here's what some airlines that fly here had to say:
Delta Airlines

The company doesn't plan to allow in-flight calls.

"Delta has years of customer feedback on the impact on the customer experience and voice communications, and the overwhelming sentiment is to continue with a policy that would not allow voice communication while in flight," said company spokesman Paul Skrbec.

Southwest Airlines

In-flight calls are off the table now, and the company will consider feedback from customers when responding to any new FCC rules, said spokeswoman Michelle Agnew.

"Our customers have told us that in-flight voice communication would be disruptive."

airlines react

Airlines that serve Des Moines have expressed little interest in a proposed rule that would allow passengers to make cellphone calls when cruising above 10,000 feet.

Here's what some airlines that fly here had to say:
Allegiant Air

The airline, which specializes in flights to vacation spots, has not decided on allowing in-flight calls. Spokesman Micah Lillard said many of Allegiant's customers are families and vacationers who are not concerned about the need to make business calls.

United Airlines

"Our customers have expressed concern about how the use of cellphones inflight will impact their experience onboard," the company said in a statement issued last month. "When the FCC makes a proposal available, we will study it along with feedback from customers and crews."

Frontier, American and US Airways

Frontier and American airlines did not respond to requests for comment. US Airways referred a reporter to Airlines for America, an industry trade group.

Ultimately, it would be up to each airline whether to allow cell service on its flights.

No airlines that fly from Des Moines have expressed support of the proposed rule. Delta Airlines said it does not plan to allow in-flight calls, while others including Southwest, Allegiant Air and United Airlines said they will listen to their customers, who so far have voiced opposition to the idea.

The decision could be a no-win for airlines. They risk alienating either the bulk of travelers who, according to recent polling, dislike the idea of allowing midair cellphone calls, or loyal business travelers who want to use their phones, said Sheri Ernico, a director with the transportation consulting firm Leigh Fisher.

"They certainly don't want to have to make this decision," she said.

But don't expect the airlines to remain opposed to in-flight calls if they find a market for the service, Ernico said.

"There is peer pressure," she said. "If one does it, then eventually they'll all give in."

Poll: Americans oppose in-flight calls

An Associated Press-GfK poll released Wednesday finds that 48 percent of Americans oppose allowing cellphones to be used for voice calls while flying; just 19 percent support it. Another 30 percent are neutral.

Among those who fly, opposition is stronger. Looking just at Americans who have taken more than one flight in the past year, the poll said 59 percent are against allowing calls on planes. That number grows to 78 percent among those who've taken four or more flights.

The thought of squeezing in next to a someone carrying on a phone conversation doesn't sit well with most travelers.

"It could become the next crying baby on an airplane," said Jordan Lickteig, a Norwalk resident flying to Toronto for business Tuesday. "Do you really want to sit next to the guy who's talking on his phone for the whole flight?"

Cell phones for cash kiosks easy
Dec. 20, 2013



PHOTO GALLERIES



ISU at the Diamond Head Classic



Grand View claims NAIA title

SPONSORED LINKS

Sponsored Content by Taboola



7 Car Insurance Discounts to Look For
Allstate

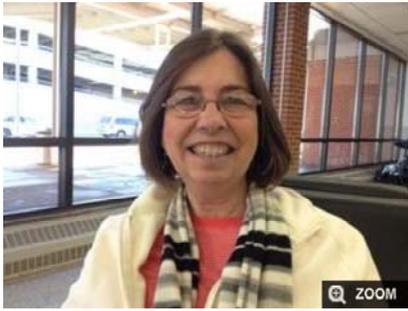


Pastor Mocked for His Biblical Money Cod...
Moneynews

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT





Pam Burress

Pam Burress, who was headed to Baltimore with her job, said she doesn't.

"Are we so attached to these things," she said, holding out her BlackBerry, "that we can't go the length of a plane ride without using them?"

Callers face roaming charges

Increasingly, passengers aren't putting down their electronics. In October, the Federal Aviation Administration approved new rules that allow passengers to keep their smartphones and tablets connected to on-board WiFi throughout the flight, even during take-off and landing. Airlines have since been rolling out so-called gate-to-gate WiFi packages. But like most everything else, they charge for the service.



The cost of in-flight cell service — if approved by regulators and offered by airlines — is not yet clear. On international flights, some of which already allow cellphone calls, charges for calls fall under roaming contracts. Those generally involved a monthly contract and charges for calls and data used.

FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler has said there is no technological reason to ban cellphone calls on planes, noting that the European

Union has allowed them since 2008.

"We understand that many passengers would prefer that voice calls not be made on airplanes. I feel that way myself," he said in a statement. "Ultimately, if the FCC adopts the proposal in the coming months, it will be airlines' decisions, in consultation with their customers, as to whether to permit voice calls while airborne."

Aircraft that allow cellphone calls would have to be fitted with a small device called a picocell that acts as a cell tower but emits a signal so weak that it doesn't interfere with the aircraft's electronics.

'Loud, divisive, and possibly disruptive'

The Association of Flight Attendants has come out against the proposal, citing concerns about phones distracting from safety announcements and causing disputes among passengers.

"Any situation that is loud, divisive, and possibly disruptive is not only unwelcome but also unsafe," the union said in statement.

For some, the access to cell service and the Internet on flights represents the loss of a rare refuge from technology.



"It's a couple hours to zone out," said Art Boten of Des Moines, who was flying to Cleveland for a Christmas party Tuesday. "It's about the only place you can do that anymore."

Still, some welcome the ability to make a phone call midair if needed. "I think it would be great as an option," said Kevin O'Connell, a Toronto resident and Drake graduate who was flying home Tuesday after bagging an eight-point buck on an Iowa deer hunt. O'Connell said he flies a few times a month for work.

"For me," he said, "the best thing is having access to the Internet and email. I think you can communicate with most people online just as well as you can over the phone."

Airlines may consider rules for callers

If midflight phone conversations are allowed, the airlines would be advantaged to set some rules, said Callista Gould, a certified etiquette instructor with the Des Moines-based Culture and Manners Institute. That could be quiet hours when calls aren't allowed during red-eye and early morning flights or special sections where talking on cellphones is allowed.

Gould advised travelers who make calls to keep their conversations quiet and to avoid discussing sensitive personal or business information in close quarters.

As for those stuck next to a talker, "invest in noise-canceling headphones."

Midflight phone calls, Gould said, will likely be something people just get used to.

"Imagine the convenience of it, to be able to make a cellphone call in-flight," she said. "It's one of those things where technology is advancing, and we're probably not going to be able to stop it."

Do you want fewer restrictions on electronics use aboard planes?

Yes, every minute of my work is valuable

Yes, it's annoying to have to disconnect

No, I appreciate being disconnected for a few minutes

I don't fly

I don't know

It doesn't matter either way to me

Vote

View Results

The Associated Press and USA Today contributed to this story.