



IN-FLIGHT CALLING SHOULD BE UP TO AIRLINES SAYS U.S. TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT

News / Airlines



Airlines should be able to decide whether passengers can make phone calls during flights, a committee told U.S. regulators weighing the issue.

The Transportation Department's Advisory Committee for Aviation Consumer Protection approved the recommendation, Chuck Ardo, a spokesman for Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane, who heads the panel, said in an e-mail.

The committee approved a proposal that said "if safe and secure," the Transportation Department could let airlines decide on mobile-phone use, Kane said during a meeting that was Webcast on Tuesday. The panel, which met in Washington, includes representatives of airlines and consumers, and evaluates the Transportation Department's consumer protection programs.

The Federal Communications Commission in 2013 agreed to consider lifting its ban on in-flight calls. The proposal sparked opposition from travelers, flight attendants and others over the prospect of yapping seat mates on crammed flights. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said he would use his authority to decide whether voice calls are fair.

Even if the FCC determines that cell phones or other mobile devices used during flight wouldn't interfere with cellular networks and revises its ban, Federal Aviation Administration safety regulations would still apply, the Transportation Department said in a notice last year. Aircraft operators would have to determine that equipment won't interfere with aircraft systems before any restrictions are lifted, according to the notice.

The advisory committee's recommendation will form the basis of a report to the Transportation Department, said Blane Workie, an attorney with the Transportation Department.

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