DOT Seeking Ban on In-Flight Cell Phone Use

Andrew Berg

The U.S. Department of Transportation is weighing in on the possiblity that cell phones could be allowed on planes.

In a statement, U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx acknowledged the FCC's recent Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) **[1]**, which suggests the issue isn't a technological one.

"As the FCC has said before, their sole role on this issue is to examine the technical feasibility of the use of mobile devices in flight," Foxx said, adding that he is concerened about the possiblity of passengers talking on cell phones in flight.

Foxx believes DOT's role, as part of our Aviation Consumer Protection Authority, is to determine if allowing these calls is fair to consumers.

The DOT has put into motion a process that will look at the possibility of banning in-flight calls. As part of that process, the DOT promised it will give "stakeholders and the public significant opportunity to comment."

The FCC's NPRM is seeking comment on plans to retain the requirement that cell phones not be used in-flight, with one big caveat. Under the proposal, the use of mobile wireless devices would still be prohibited as a default, unless an airline installs an onboard system to manage the service.

"The prohibition, in fact, would be explicitly expanded. The current rule applies only to phones operating on the 800MHz frequency band and ignores all other cellular frequencies. This regulatory inconsistency is poor policy," Wheeler wrote, in comments released Thursday.

The rule change on which the FCC is seeking comment would extend that prohibition to all frequency bands unless the aircraft is outfitted with on-board equipment that manages a cellular signal before it has the potential to interfere with terrestrial networks. Absent such equipment, the ban would remain in effect.

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