U.S. clears way for wider in-flight Internet deployment

Jim Wolf, Reuters

(Reuters [1]) - The U.S. Federal Communications Commission [2] has cleared the way for wider adoption of in-flight Internet services, aiming to cut by as much as 50 percent the time needed for regulatory approval.

Newly adopted rules should boost competition in this part of the U.S. mobile telecommunications market and promote "the widespread availability of Internet access to aircraft passengers," the FCC said in a statement Friday.

Since 2001, the commission [2] has cleared companies on an ad hoc basis to market in-flight broadband services via a satellite antenna fixed to an aircraft's exterior.

Under a newly adopted framework, the licensing procedures will be simpler, the commission said.

Airlines [3] will be able to test systems that meet the commission's standards, establish that they do not interfere with aircraft systems and then get approval of the Federal Aviation Administration, the FCC statement said.

The FAA, a Labor Department arm responsible for operating the nation's air traffic control system, said in response that the FCC's effort to establish standards "will help to streamline the process" for airlines [3] to install Internet hookups on planes.

The goal is to speed the processing of applications by up to 50 percent, FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said in a separate statement.

The FCC drive to promote broadband aboard planes does not change a ban on the in-flight use of cell phones, which is tied to concerns about interference with ground stations.

Genachowski earlier this month urged the Federal Aviation Administration to allow more electronics [4] on aircraft.

The FAA announced in August that it was forming a government-industry group to study aircraft operators' policies to determine when portable electronic devices may be used safely during flight.

(Reporting By Jim Wolf; Editing by Claudia Parsons)

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