

Trai gives approval for mobile calls, net surfing while flying

Airlines Will Have To Meet Security Norms

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: India will soon join the growing league of countries where air passengers can make phone calls, send messages or go online while flying. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on Friday gave a green signal for the use of internet and mobile communications on board aircraft flying in the 9.6 million sq km Indian airspace (includes space above the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal).

“Both internet and MCA (mobile communications onboard aircraft) should be permitted as in-flight connectivity (IFC) in the Indian air space,” said TRAI in its recommendations. Internet services through Wi-Fi onboard should be made available only when electronic devices are permitted to use in-flight/airplane mode, it added. Mobile phones cannot be used when aircraft (in flight) is below 10,000 feet. An aircraft crosses that altitude within 4-5 minutes of take-off.

Passengers on board airlines/aircraft that provide the option of internet and mobile connectivity will be able to log onto Wi-Fi or use their mobile phones to connect to the network service provider subscribed by the airline.

A number of countries allow inflight Wi-Fi. Over 75 airlines across the world offer internet services aboard flights. These include carriers that fly into India, like Air France, KLM, Lufthansa, British Airways, Singapore Airlines, Emirates, Etihad, and Qatar Airways. Till now, either these services were not offered on board aircraft that fly into India or if they were, the services would be switched off once the aircraft entered the Indian air space.

IDEA MOOTED 3 YEARS AGO

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Final nod comes almost three years after aviation ministry first mooted the idea ➤ Airlines will be subject to certain security norms, with a mechanism to lawfully intercept and monitor the in-flight internet traffic ➤ So far, no Indian airline has put a date to when they'll start offering the services ➤ Foreign airlines that already offer the service but had to 	 <p>switch it off while entering Indian airspace also silent on the issue so far</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Globally, airlines offer in-flight Wi-Fi, but mobile calls are seen as “too much of a nuisance” for fellow travellers
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For in-flight connectivity, service provider can be foreign, says Trai

Mumbai: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is expected to issue a circular soon, allowing in-flight Wi-Fi and mobile connectivity.

Trai has recommended that a separate category of “IFC (in-flight connectivity) service provider” be created to permit IFC services in Indian airspace. “The IFC service provider should be required to get itself registered with DoT and it need not

necessarily be an Indian entity,” it said. The IFC service provider should be permitted to use either the Indian National Satellite System (INSAT) or foreign satellite capacity leased through the Department of Space. “To promote the adoption of IFC services in Indian airspace, the IFC service provider should be

imposed a flat annual licence fee of a token amount of Re 1. The same may be reviewed and amended at a later stage, if need be,” Trai said.

“The regulatory requirements should be the same for both Indian-registered and foreign-registered airlines for offering IFC services in Indian airspace,” it said.

Currently, airlines like Jet Airways and Vistara offer a library of preloaded content that passengers can download onto their electronic devices by linking to the airline’s Wi-Fi system. This service doesn't provide connectivity; so, one can't access the internet or make calls or send mails or messages from 35,000 feet.

According to a 2017 study by global consultant Roland Berger, passengers in increasing numbers want to have online access in the air and choose flights accordingly. “On-board internet will serve as an additional sales channel through which customers will be able to shop, buy flight upgrades, or spend frequent flyer miles,” said the study.

HOW INTERNET IS PROVIDED ON AIRCRAFT

Broadly, there are two ways to get an internet signal onto something that is 35,000 feet above ground

1 GROUND-TO-AIR

- Technology uses ground-based mobile broadband towers
- Aircraft installed with antennae on the fuselage pick up signals from ground towers that are closest to flight path
- The technology isn't highly reliable for on-board connectivity on flights that fly over vast water-bodies like the oceans



2 VIA SATELLITE

- To be more popular in the future
- Satellite technology overcomes the hurdle of receiving signals over vast water-bodies
- Aircraft antennae connect to satellites in geostationary orbit (satellites that rotate along with the Earth and so, in effect, remain stationary with respect to the Earth) using receivers and transmitters
- All information between ground and aircraft is passed via satellite
- Once aircraft's antennae pick up signals, on-board routers distribute the Wi-Fi signal throughout the aircraft
- Satellite connection can offer speeds of about 12 Mbps



Laptop connectivity is the most expensive

HOW COSTLY IS IT?

- In-flight connectivity is much more expensive than on-ground connectivity
- Most airlines charge based on use | whether Wi-Fi is used on phone, tablet, or laptop
- Gogo, a popular US-based in flight broadband internet service provider that gives service to 17 airlines, offers a 'monthly airline plan', valid on domestic flights in the US, Canada and Mexico

OFFERED FOR FREE

Such airlines include Bangkok-based Nok Air | Norwegian Air Shuttle | Turkish Airlines | US's JetBlue Airways | China's Air China and China Eastern | Hong Kong Airlines

THE FUTURE

➤ Inmarsat, a British satellite telecommunication company, predicts that over half of the world's aircraft will be equipped for in-flight Wi-Fi within six years. This is

set to become a billion-dollar revenue sector by 2020

➤ Honeywell Aerospace estimates the global market for connected aircraft at \$7 billion and a rapid Wi-Fi adoption by

nearly 25,000 planes by 2025. Honeywell's JetWave hardware connects aircraft to Inmarsat's GX Aviation service to provide in-flight internet service with speeds up to 50 Mbps

