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Alaska Airlines Announces WiFi In-Flight Plan



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Alaska Airlines is aiming to be the first U.S. carrier to offer WiFi access to its customers, as the company announced it will conduct test a satellite-based in-flight wireless Internet service next year. Airline passengers with WiFi-enabled devices, such as laptops or smart phones, would be able access the Internet via wireless hotspots in the aircraft cabin.

[Alaska Airlines](#) said Tuesday it will be the first U.S. carrier to test a satellite-based in-flight wireless Internet  service next year and may equip its entire fleet.

There have been several moves across the industry to offer passengers [Internet access](#) while they're traveling.

Test Run

Seattle-based Alaska plans to install Westlake Village, Calif.-based [Row 44's](#) broadband service on one [Boeing](#) (NYSE: BA)  737 jet next spring.

Row 44's [system](#)  is designed to work over water and across international borders. Alaska Airlines said the service is intended to work on all its routes, which include flights within the lower 48 states and to Alaska, Hawaii, Canada and Mexico.

If it works, Alaska may add the service to all 114 of its aircraft.

Customers with WiFi-enabled devices, such as laptops or smart phones, will connect to the system through wireless hotspots in the aircraft cabin.

A dome-shaped device mounted on top of the plane will house the antenna that receives and transmits satellite signals.

Alaska Airlines, the nation's ninth-largest carrier, is researching various pricing options, spokesperson Amanda Tobin Bielawski said.

Other Airlines

AMR's [American Airlines](#) announced last month that it would test a high-speed air-to-ground [Internet service](#) on some of its Boeing 767 jets. For that system, [AirCell](#) said it would build cellular towers throughout the continental United States to transmit the broadband signals.

AirCell said American will charge a fee, and that details on pricing would not be announced until the service is ready to roll out.

About a year ago, Boeing pulled the plug on a planned in-flight Internet service after it failed to sign on enough airlines. Called "Connexion" by Boeing, it offered high-speed in-flight Internet hookups via satellite that cost US\$10 for the first hour and \$27 for 24 hours.

First announced in April 2000, Connexion suffered a major setback with potential U.S. airlines after the 2001 terrorist attacks triggered an industrywide downturn.

Boeing had deals with major international carriers such as Germany's Lufthansa, Japan Airlines, Korean Air, and Singapore Airlines, but large U.S. carriers were reluctant to invest in the service. [ECT](#)

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