AIRPORTS BLAME AIRLINES FOR AVIATION-FUNDING STANDSTILL

News / Airports / Routes

Airports are **blaming airlines**' opposition to a proposal increasing the amount of money passengers can be charged to help pay for facility improvements for a standoff in Congress that is threatening federal aviation funding.

Airport groups in Washington have been pushing Congress to nearly double the cap on the fee that is added to every plane ticket, which is known as the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC), from $4.50 to $8.50.

Airlines have countered that passengers are already charged enough fees by the federal government when they purchase airfare.

The feud has occurred against a backdrop of a Sept. 30 deadline for Congress to renew expiring funding for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which includes money that is used to pay air

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traffic controllers.

The American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) said Monday that airlines should drop their opposition to the facility charge to help clear the way for Congress to pass an extension of the expiring FAA bill.

"It's groundhog day...again. The airlines continue to oppose self-help for airports while helping themselves to billions of dollars in bag fees and other ancillary charges," AAAE President and CEO Todd Hauptli said in a statement.

"With the federal government on the verge of a possible shutdown and with the path forward for a long-term FAA bill far from certain, it's time for Congress to reject airline rhetoric and provide airports with the certainty and flexibility they are seeking to address growing infrastructure needs through a modernized PFC program," Hauptli continued.

The fight between airlines and airports over passenger fees has simmered all year as the deadline for lawmakers to approve a new funding bill for the FAA has approached.

The FAA's current funding bill is scheduled to expire in September, and airports are hoping to convince lawmakers to include the increase in the PFC cap in a potential extension of the agency's spending bill.

Airports have been pushing Congress to raise the cap on the fee to help pay for a backlog of improvement projects, arguing that it has not been adjusted since 2000.

They argue that airlines are being hypocritical by opposing airport facility fees while they charge passengers for a host of things, like checking baggage.

"Since 2008, airlines have collected more than $22.8 billion in baggage fees and more than $18.6 billion extra in ticket change and cancellation fees," AAAE said on Monday. "That total of more than $41.4 billion in baggage and ticket change fees does not include other airline ancillary charges such as pet transportation, sale of frequent flyer award miles to airline business partners and standby passenger fees."

Airlines have countered that passengers are charged enough fees and taxes already and that airport projects are adequately funded in other ways such as the FAA's separate Airport Improvement Program.

"Pushing to nearly double the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC), the Airport Tax paid by passengers every time they travel through an airport, is not only unnecessary, it is invented out of thin air," the group that lobbies for airlines in Washington, Airlines for America, said in a blog post about the PFC increase proposal.

"American families and the U.S. economy can't afford another tax increase, especially for a funding crisis that doesn't really exist," the airline group continued.

Congress established the PFC in 1990. The FAA says, "Airports use these fees to fund FAA-approved projects that enhance safety, security, or capacity; reduce noise; or increase air carrier competition."

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