



*Association of Professional Flight Attendants*

*Office of the National President*

February 10, 2017

The Honorable Elaine Chao  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington, DC 20590  
United States

RE: Comments to DOT-OST-2014-0002-2829 on Voice Calls on Planes, February 2017

Dear Secretary Chao:

The Association of Professional Flight Attendants, the world's largest independent mainline flight attendant union representing over 25,000 working men and women, adamantly opposes voice calls on airplanes. Our carrier, American Airlines, is the largest in the world, flying many long haul flights each day and night through one of the most extensive overseas route structures in the industry. As safety professionals who spend countless hours traveling with our passengers and keeping them safe, we see firsthand the dangers of permitting cell phone use for voice calls on our planes.

At issue is a proposed rule by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as to whether each air carrier must disclose their policy on inflight phone use flight to consumers. If the FCC grants overall approval of the technology, as is expected, it will then be up to the individual carriers to establish their own policies. We understand some foreign carriers already allow inflight voice calls and we anticipate that US-based carriers may consider offering the service as well.

APFA opposes voice calls on planes for several reasons including inflight customer experience, passenger comfort, and most importantly, concerns for safety and security. With air rage already a growing problem, voice calls will undoubtedly contribute to increased irritation among passengers who are looking for undisturbed privacy and rest. As customer service professionals, we have not received passenger support for the ability to use cell phones inflight. In fact, we have seen just the opposite. Passengers do not want this added disruption to their flight and we believe that polling numbers will show that flying public overwhelmingly supports the idea of a formal ban. As flight attendants, we have no interest in becoming the cell phone police of our airplanes. We welcomed the decision to allow passengers the use of small, lightweight, handheld electronic devices—such as, tablets, e-readers, and smartphones—at all altitudes because they could be used safely and without disturbing other passengers. Flight Attendants will not take on the added reasonability of enforcing a rule that flies in the face of common sense.

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The Honorable Elaine Chao  
February 10, 2017  
Page 2

Additionally, in a worst case scenario, inflight calls could be used by terrorists to plan and coordinate an attack from the ground. Flight Attendants are First Responders and the last line of defense in maintaining a safe environment in the cabin. Fortunately, we believe we have the support of the flying public including many members of Congress who agree that cell phone calls have no place on airplanes. APFA maintains that flight attendants should not play the role of cell phone police which would only distract from our safety responsibilities.

Our position is nothing new. APFA has long opposed inflight phone calls and testified on this issue in 2014. Just because it is now technically possible to use cell phones in flight without interfering with aircraft operation does not make it a sound or safe policy.

APFA will continue to ask members of Congress to join us in the fight to oppose the use of cell phones during flight. To quote House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bill Shuster, "Let's face it, airplane cabins are by nature noisy, crowded, and confined. ....For the most part, passengers are looking for ways to make their flights go by as quickly and quietly as possible. Pilots and flight attendants are focused on ensuring a safe and comfortable flight for everyone onboard." Allowing voice calls during flight will seriously undermine the entire flight crew's safety efforts.

This proposed rule asks the question of whether airlines should be required to reveal at the time of ticket purchase their policy on inflight voice calls. APFA supports transparency on all issues and believes policies should be articulated clearly and publicly. Passengers deserve to know what each airline policy is at the time of purchasing their ticket. This type of transparency extends to other aviation issues as well as seat size, family seating, emotional support animals and the cost of tickets. The consumer deserves and must be given full and complete information so that the rules are known to all.

We urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to oppose voice calls inflight. Your safety may one day depend on it.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Ross  
APFA National President