

FCC to auction airliner Internet spectrum

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The Federal Communications Commission is holding a groundbreaking auction Wednesday that will lead to in-flight Internet for U.S. airline passengers.

Nine companies are expected to bid for the frequencies, which will allow flyers to surf the Web and even chat on the phone using Voice over Internet Protocol telephony.

Such services are already available on some international aircraft equipped with Boeing's Connexion service, which relays wireless broadband signals from the aircraft to a satellite and then down to ground networks.

The frequencies up for auction are in the 800 Megahertz band and are currently reserved for the pay telephones installed on airliner seats that work on credit cards, which haven't seen a lot of use in recent years.

The New York Times said Wednesday that while the airborne Internet service sounds attractive, some airliners have indicated a reluctance to install the necessary transmission equipment, which can be both expensive and heavy at a time when fuel costs are a major burden.

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