

EU edges toward flight use of tablets, smartphones

December 9 2013



A man works on his iPad aboard a flight to Moline, Illinois, on October 29, 2012

Long overdue in an increasingly connected world—or the end of a precious oasis of peace—the European Union on Monday took a first step to allowing expanded use of smartphones and tablets on aircraft.

The EU's Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) judged [airline passengers](#)

would now be able to use portable electronic devices if they are put in "Flight Mode," that is not transmitting, throughout the journey, from take-off to landing.

The next step would be for EASA to see if such devices can be put to full use and connected in transmission mode to the Internet, EU Transport Commissioner Siim Kallas said, adding that he had called for the review to be speeded up.

Up to now, airlines require all devices without exception to be switched off for take-off and landing to prevent possible interference with aircraft electronic systems, a safety risk.

Those devices equipped with "Flight Mode" can then be switched on but those without have to remain off.

"Today we are taking a first step to safely expand the use of in-flight electronics during taxiing, take-off and landing," Kallas said.

"Next we want to look at how to connect to the network while on board," he said, adding that new guidance should come next year.

The airlines will have to decide as an issue of service and passenger comfort whether to continue current practice or take the next step, which may not please everyone, he said.

"Is this the end of the last silent place in the world?" Kallas asked, noting: "After this change ... it is a new reality."

Air travel has increased almost as fast as has use of smartphones and tablets, driving demands that passengers be able to use them freely to stay connected to the Internet while travelling.

Die-hard opponents argue that airline travel provides one of the few havens from the onslaught of the modern interconnected world and should stay that way.

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Citation: EU edges toward flight use of tablets, smartphones (2013, December 9) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-12-eu-edges-flight-tablets-smartphones.html>

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