

TRAVEL TIPS

Airlines: Safety Solutions May Be In The Bag

(TVA) - Experts have mapped out a number of ways to make air travel even safer—and to take away some of the hassle associated with higher security.

For instance, Congress passed the Aviation and Transportation Security Act in 2002. The act called for investing billions to train security agents and to buy metal- and bomb-detecting equipment for passengers and bags at airport checkpoints. In addition, the act authorized a security fee of up to \$10 per round-trip passenger. The fees are meant to help cover baggage-screening costs.

Experts say, however, that while the TSA and other acts have helped enhance safety, they've done little to actually solve a major security issue faced by airlines: the number of bags being transported.

The Problem

Screening bags is an expensive and time-consuming process. Currently, the airline industry transports about one and a half billion bags per year—nearly double the amount of passengers who fly annually. Airline experts say encouraging passengers to travel with less baggage could not only make flying safer, but that it could



A new proposal for handling luggage could make flying even safer.

make the entire traveling process faster.

New Solutions

One proposed solution is to have government and airlines provide travelers with economical alternatives to checking their bags. For instance, what's being called the Universal Express (USXP) plan would let travelers ship their luggage before their departure date using the United States Postal Service or parcel carriers (UPS, FedEx, Airborne, etc.). Such carriers transport about five billion packages annually. The plan would still let pas-

sengers check their bags on airplanes if they choose, but would assign a per-bag security fee to each piece of luggage.

Rather than having to take baggage through check-in points and security lines, the plan would give passengers a number of choices that could cut airport waiting time and make flying safer.

Cutting Costs

It's also believed that the proposal would actually help drive down the cost of shipping bags. As more travelers ship bags, the theory holds, their collective bargaining power over parcel carriers would increase. That could lead to lower prices.

The company USXP includes Luggage Express and Virtual Bellhop. The businesses pick up luggage at a traveler's home and drop it off at his or her destination.

A final bonus to the proposed baggage plan: It could mean the end of lost luggage. Shipping services generally provide enhanced baggage-tracking technology. That means travelers can keep track of just where in the world their bags are, at almost any given moment.

For more information, visit www.usxp.com.