



Air Passengers' Bill of Rights – Let's do it right

By Perrin Beatty

With the frustrations we all experience when our flights are delayed or cancelled, an Air Passengers' Bill of Rights sounds like a quick and easy solution. At first glance it's hard to understand how anyone could be opposed.

But like many quick and easy solutions to complex problems, the cure would be worse than the disease. Bill C-310 *An Act to Provide Certain Rights to Air Passengers* does not safeguard travellers' interests. Rather, it is costly and potentially harmful to both passengers and airlines alike.

No-one enjoys having to endure cancellations or delays. We have all been there. But is putting a drink and some money in your hand at the expense of safety and affordable travel worth the risk? Bill C-310 would take that risk by levying punitive costs on airlines for cancellations and delays. There are many reasons that determine whether a flight will take off on time, but this bill places the responsibility – and liability – solely on the airlines. In fact, under Bill C-310 penalties to airlines could be over a \$100,000 for a delay or cancellation. That money would have to come from somewhere, and it would not take long for passengers to see the cost of these penalties being added to their airline tickets.

The issue is even more serious than higher travel costs, however. Applying penalties on airlines could also compromise passenger safety by encouraging pilots to make riskier decisions about whether to fly or not. Each pilot makes an individual decision before each flight about whether it is safe to fly the plane. They know that people's lives are on the line, and both their instincts and their training are that their passengers' well-being must always be the highest priority. As passengers, do we really want to add penalties that discourage putting safety first?

A safe, strong, and competitive air transportation sector is essential for the Canadian economy. Bringing together our vast geography and connecting us to foreign markets, air transportation helps businesses grow, create jobs, and compete. Global supply chains and travel systems require Canadians to travel to all corners of our country and the world. Our tourism sector, which employs hundreds of thousands of people in all regions of our country, needs a healthy air transportation sector to bring in domestic and foreign travellers.

For smaller communities and more remote regions, air service can provide an economic and social lifeline. Where these routes generate little profit, adding penalties and fees may be just enough to make it impossible to maintain the service.

Higher air travel costs would harm all parts of Canada and companies of all sizes, but particularly many smaller businesses already struggling to contain expenses.

By all means, let's make air travel more dependable and enjoyable. But instead of passing legislation that would generate major costs and safety concerns, why not bring the airlines, airports, passengers and other stakeholders together to craft an effective and workable plan that respects both passenger rights and safety? Let's make sure we do the job right and avoid quick fixes that create more problems than they solve.

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