

# Airports, hotels reconfiguring wi-fi speed, rates for travelers

By Susan Stellan, New York Times

As airlines try to persuade passengers to pay for Internet access at cruising altitudes, more airports and hotels are offering it free on the ground.

Half of the busiest airports in the United States now have free Wi-Fi, including Denver, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Phoenix and Houston. Dallas/Fort Worth plans to join that list in September, teaming with AT&T in a service that will give travelers 40 minutes of free Wi-Fi in exchange for viewing a 30-second advertisement.

That type of sponsored access is one way airports are balancing consumer pressure for free access to Facebook, Twitter and e-mail accounts with the cost of providing a bigger pipe for growing data needs. As devices demanding Wi-Fi proliferate, airports and hotels are also turning to tiered pricing models: offering limited Internet access free and a faster premium service to customers willing to pay.

Denver International Airport, which has offered free advertiser-supported Wi-Fi since 2007, is switching to a tiered pricing model this week. Working with Boingo Wireless, the airport is upgrading its network to give travelers free basic Internet service or more bandwidth for a \$7.95 day pass (for a laptop) or \$4.95 an hour (for a smartphone).

A business traveler sending a large file to a client is the type of customer who may opt for the premium speed.

“If you don’t see it going fast enough, you’d have that option

of upgrading to the paid service,” said John Ackerman, the airport’s chief commercial officer. “Is your time or your money more important to you? That’s a personal choice we’re going to allow you to make.”

While the free service will still require viewing a 15- to 30-second commercial every half-hour, Ackerman said passengers should see improvements in the speed of the complimentary service, which has been a source of complaints.

The Boingo contract guarantees the Denver airport a minimum share of the Wi-Fi revenue – more than \$500,000 over three years for the airport – with the potential for higher earnings as advertising opportunities evolve.

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