

Happy Flying

-Brent Skinner-

Air travel. Major Canadian airlines recently announced a new fee of \$25 per bag for each checked bag for passengers flying economy class. Assuming that you were taking one large suitcase with you and you wanted to bring it home again, this would add \$50 to your annual flight to attend your class reunion or \$100 if your spouse is joining you.

Don't get me wrong. I know that the airline industry is very competitive and that their operating costs are skyrocketing. Airlines are struggling to pay for jet fuel, airport landing fees, tiny packets of salted pretzels and monogrammed airsickness bags. What bothers me is that the airlines announced these new fees as if they were really doing the flying public a favour, by providing us with an individualized price list, so that those muscular passengers who already carry on their giant tote bags full of hockey equipment and sunflower seeds aren't subsidizing us wimps who dump our bags at the airline check-in counter. Only I didn't hear about a price drop for people who only have carry-on baggage.

I see an air travel trend developing and it has kind of got me worried.

Phase 1 happened a few years back. Passengers now use self-serve computer kiosks to choose their seats, and print their own boarding passes.

Phase 2 has just arrived. Passengers will now carry their own suitcases on and off the aircraft.

Phase 3 is just around the corner. Economy passengers will parade stark naked onto the aircraft thereby greatly streamlining security precautions and allowing security staff to focus mainly on the mounds of carry-on luggage. Once in the airliner cabin, economy passengers will be expected to stand up throughout the flight, holding on to plastic straps suspended from the ceiling (much like the Edmonton LRT at rush hour). A typical Boeing 737 will be able to increase economy passenger capacity from 129 seated passengers to 399 standing passengers. Those awful stories about passengers fighting over reclining seats will be a thing of the past, as nobody will be sitting.

Airline safety will still require that a central aisle be kept empty and muscular former baggage handlers will be hired to patrol the aisle, ensure that all passengers are standing up straight, with proper posture, and hand out coffee, tea, peanuts, aspirin and smelling salts to economy passengers.

Phase 4 will see the installation of cargo net rope ladders from the runway to the economy passenger cabin so that the airline can park its discount airliners a full kilometer from the terminal and reduce existing airport license fees. Passengers with disabilities or with small children will still be allowed to board early so as to give them adequate time to heft their luggage up the rope ladder. Family friendly fares will be in place for parents who choose to carry their children during the flight.

Phase 5 will see the imposition of a weight surcharge for all passengers exceeding their ideal body mass index (BMI) as calculated by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in 1952. (This will likely not be as controversial as you might think, as most passengers will have already become very weight-conscious due to the phase 3 naked boarding scheme).

Phase 6 will see the introduction of automated, computer guided aircraft that will replace pilots with remote drone controls operated by 15 year old boys in Southern California who have achieved a minimum of flight level 6 in the X Box flight simulator game.

Of course passengers will always have the choice of upgrading their ticket to business class, which might be a good idea if you are boarding a flight from Edmonton to Sydney, Australia.

I think that my favourite grouch, Andy Rooney, had it right when he wrote, "It is a mystery to me why anyone wants to go anywhere. Getting someplace else is such a pain that staying put is an increasingly attractive alternative to travel. Flight, once a grand and exhilarating experience that took you out of your world and into another in hours, has turned into an event to be endured with clenched teeth. The terrorists, the airlines and the Government have teamed up to destroy what was once a magic delight."

Happy flying.