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## **Passengers face new charge for extra legroom in economy class**

By: David Millward

*IdeaWorks contributed information to this article - - see italics.*

Continental, which flies to the United States from seven British airports, is introducing the new levy from the middle of the month.

A £130 levy on exit row seats, which have an additional seven inches of legroom, would add 33 per cent to the airline's cheapest return ticket to Newark, one of the airports serving New York.

The move comes against a backdrop of cash-strapped carriers devising a raft of additional charges as they try to make ends meet.

But Continental's move is the most radical yet with the price varying according to not only the length of the flight, but also demand on the day.

Passengers will only be told of the additional cost when they check in at the airport.

It will hit those flying to the United States from Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Belfast as well as Heathrow.

A charge of £65 (\$99) for a one-way flight across the Atlantic has been disclosed by the airline as a 'guide' price but Continental said it would be based on 'market demand' and admitted that it could go even higher.

"Pricing of premium seating, like fares, varies according to several factors, including market demand," an airline spokesman said.

"Our customers want more choices," said Jim Compton, Continental's executive vice president and chief marketing officer. "Seats with additional legroom are higher-value seats, and we want to offer them to customers who recognize that value."

But Simon Evans, chief executive of the Air Transport Users Council, was alarmed at the prospect of a variable charge.

"But you have to admire their ingenuity in getting extra money," he added.

Traditionally passengers have not been expected to pay extra for different seats in the same cabin. But gradually cash-strapped carriers have imposed additional charges, much to the fury of passengers.

Last year British Airways announced fees for passengers who wanted to choose their seat in advance would have to pay to do so.

It put a £50 price tag on exit row seats, and £20 for anyone picking an aisle or window seat. However it does not push the price up when a plane is full.

Given that airlines tend to follow each other, similar charges could be introduced by other carriers.

In recent years, passengers have seen services which were traditionally included in the price of ticket being subject to additional fees.

Initially, it was in-flight food and drink on budget airlines such as EasyJet and Ryanair; mainstream carriers have since followed suit. Baggage allowances were then cut on almost all airlines and now early boarding also has a price tag attached on many airlines. In America even pillows are now chargeable.

***Jay Sorensen, chief executive of Idea Works, an airline industry expert from Wisconsin, believes the trend will continue, predicting that airlines will vary baggage charges according to the length of the flight and that passengers could find themselves having to order and pay for in-flight food in advance.***

***"If carriers were making huge amounts of money, I would criticise them," said Mr Sorensen.***

***"But the fact is the airline industry desperately needs this cash and charging for these seats is a perfectly reasonable way of charging for a product which is in limited supply."***