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## Ottawa addresses extra ticket costs

Plan just needs Tory approval, Liberal alleges

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Transport Canada said yesterday "informal consultations" between the federal government, the provinces, and the airline industry have been held for months to try to find an equitable solution that would enable customers to know "up front" how much they will eventually have to pay for an advertised airline ticket.

But a Liberal senator argues that Parliament has already OK'd a solution, which only requires the Tories to enact it.

The issue of extra fees on top of the advertised price of a plane ticket has been pushed to the forefront again after the country's carriers implemented a new fuel surcharge on North American routes this week. It is intended to offset the soaring price of fuel but is not being included in the advertised price of a ticket.

Since the new fee was implemented, both Air Canada and Porter Airlines, who say they won't include the surcharge in their advertised prices, have made unannounced changes to their fees to make them more competitive with those of WestJet Airlines Ltd.

Under federal law, airlines are not obligated to include the fuel surcharges, or any changes to them, in their advertisements, much like they are not obligated to do so with security charges, airport improvement fees, and other charges included in the final price of plane ticket.

However, Parliament passed a series of amendments last summer to the Canadian Transportation Act, which among other things, would force airlines to include "all fees, charges, and taxes" collected by the airlines in the advertised price of a ticket.

The European Commission also served notice to its airlines last week that it too wants to see "the first price advertised being the final price paid" and any limitations on special offers being clearly flagged by May 1, 2009, or it "will have no choice but to intervene."

In Canada, however, when Bill C-11 received royal assent last June, no fixed date was attached to when it must be enacted to allow the federal government, which regulates airline advertising, time to consult with the provinces, which regulate travel agent ads.

Liberal Senator Dennis Dawson, who amended the wording of the bill in the Senate to ensure it was acted upon, said those consultations were recommended, not required. "The government can implement all-in advertising right now," he said in an e-mail yesterday. "Nothing is stopping it."

Joe Volpe, the Liberal transport critic, has called for Transport Minister Lawrence Cannon to appear before the standing committee on transport, infrastructure and communities later today and explain what has been done on the issue. He said if the Minister fails to appear, he will call the airlines in to answer as early as Tuesday.

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