Board Your Plane with Your Smartphone

Near-field communication will help shorten wait times at the airport, as companies continue to experiment with the capabilities of the technology in mobile devices.

Orange Business Services and the air transport research lab SITA are integrating NFC into SIM cards for mobile devices, which will allow users to check-in, open gates and more easily access airport lounges by placing their phone on an electronic reader.

The technology developed by OBS and SITA does not require an actual NFC chip to function. Instead, the companies' innovation allows boarding pass data to be written directly on an NFC-enabled SIM card, which will likely lead to greater consumer adoption. Customers won't have to purchase an NFC-capable phone to use the technology, and the card will be readable even when devices power off.

NFC-enabled SIM cards will allow users to ditch traditional paper boarding passes so they don't have to worry about misplacing them or accidentally leaving them at home. However, identity checks will still be necessary before users can board their flights.

The new technology will not debut right away, but SITA is a part of the aviation industry, making it likely the SIM cards will be an alternate way to board in the near future. SITA is currently in negotiations with a major European airline to begin a trial run of the technology this summer. If successful, airports across the world will take steps to prepare.

NFC is one of the emerging technologies in today's smartphones, and has typically been associated with its capabilities in the mobile payment arena. Now, as more developers get their hands on NFC-enabled devices, the potential of the technology is widening. NFC may also help track shipments of goods, for example, forming a

valuable part of the growing “Internet of things” in which objects share and transmit information to one another directly.

OBS and SITA’s new SIM cards are still in development, but if the companies have successful pilot run with the technology, users could use their smartphones and NFC technology to board planes in the near future.

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