

Ryanair keen on credit card toilets

[DUBLIN] Ryanair chief executive Michael O'Leary insisted last week he is serious about making passengers pay for the right to relieve themselves on flights – and is flush with interest in the idea of mounting credit card-operated toilets.

Mr O'Leary, whose Dublin-based airline has pioneered the practice of filling air travel with extra charges, divided opinion recently by suggesting that his next target would be coin-operated toilets.

Aviation analysts and the travelling public alike couldn't tell whether Mr O'Leary was poking fun at his own reputation.

He told a Dublin press conference on Thursday the days of the unlocked potty are indeed numbered. "Eventually it's going to happen. It's just we can't do it at the moment because we don't have a mechanism for charging you," he said.

Mr O'Leary said he has asked engineers at Boeing – which supplies Ryanair's entire fleet of 737-800s – to design toilets with doors that open only if you swipe a valid credit card through the locking mechanism. He conceded that his earlier idea, to make them coin-operated, wouldn't work

in part because Ryanair operates heavily in areas using both the euro and pound.

"We have looked into this before, and the problem is Boeing can't come up with a mechanism on the toilet door to take coins," he said. "We're suggesting they go back and look at a mechanism where you'd swipe the credit card for a quid (British pound) on the toilet door. They've gone off to look at that . . . We are serious."

He didn't seek to soften the impression that Ryanair was happy to make its passengers suffer. "Most people would go to the loo (toilet) before they get on the plane, or they hold it until they land. You would only have to deal with the people who absolutely have to go," he said.

One positive effect, he said, would be to "reduce an awful lot of the unnecessary visits to the toilet that (expletive) so many passengers off". It could also become the next serious money-maker at Ryanair. Mr O'Leary estimates if 20 per cent of passengers pay £1 to use the restroom, this would generate £15 million (\$\$32.8 million) annually – which he characterises as future "fare savings to the travelling public". – AP