

You know the airport check-in routine by heart now. You get there two hours early, then go through one or two security lines, show your driver's license and boarding pass, take off your shoes, lift and put everything you own into a plastic box and watch it disappear into the x-ray tunnel.

Then, if the guard lets you go through the electronic gate without poking you with his magic wand, you hustle over to get your stuff again and hop around trying to put on your shoes.

After all that, you wait to see if your flight is on time or caught in a snowstorm over Rhode Island. For all of this, you pay more than twice the price you paid just a couple of years ago to fly cramped into sardine can-like seats. And to make it complete, all of the goodies you had before, such as free meals, have been discontinued.

For a flight from New York to Boston, if you go by jetBlue, the cost will be about \$50 each way. If all goes well, you may be able to travel the 200 miles in about five total in-air and airport-wait hours, not counting the traffic-jammed drive time to get from your home to the way-way-out airport.

If you booked the same New York to Boston trip by BOLTBUS (boltbus.com), it would take about four and a half hours in a big, roomy bus, at a cost of \$15 or \$17.50, depending on departure time. There are some security requirements, but nothing like the ordeal at airports. And more important to most travelers, BOLTBUS goes from downtown to downtown. In Boston, it's the South Station, and NYC it is 34th Street and 8th Avenue in Manhattan.

Just a couple of weeks ago, in good weather, but with alleged mechanical trouble, my flight from Fort Lauderdale to Las Vegas was five hours late. It arrived so far away from the connecting flight gate, it took a ten-minute bus ride and required climbing two flights of stairs (elevator out of service) and a lot of walking to get to the right place.

All of this involved dragging our carry-ons with us. I don't know about you, but I'm getting too old for the lousy service, increasing inconveniences and delays of air travel.

BOLTBUS provides services to Boston, New York City, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. For prices, schedules and additional information on other bus lines that specialize in regional runs, as well as Greyhound and other major cross-country companies, check them out online.