

SEATING ACCESSORY

5 This application claims priority to a provisional application entitled "SEATING ACCESSORY" filed in the United States Patent and Trademark Office on November 21, 2005 and assigned Appl. No. 60/738,618, the contents of which are hereby assigned by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

10 The invention relates to an accessory to make a vehicle seat more comfortable.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

Travel on public transportation, such as planes, trains and buses, is rarely comfortable and can be extremely uncomfortable on long trips. The length of time after which a seat will be considered comfortable varies widely based on the characteristics of the seat and sensitivity of the traveler. Many travelers become extremely uncomfortable after an hour or two on a transportation seat, especially since seats intended for shorter trips generally do not recline or recline only a small amount. On the other hand, intercontinental flights can last in excess of twelve hours and are common for many business people. Most business travelers have little time for recovery at either end of a business trip, and are expected to be alert and functioning for a business meeting shortly after their arrival. Vacation travelers suffer from the same inconveniences as business travelers and are likely to require a considerable recovery time before being able to enjoy the vacation.

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Uncomfortable travel is not limited to airlines. In particular, trips on a train or bus can take longer than an intercontinental airline trip. Travel related discomfort also is not limited to the time spent on the vehicle. More particularly, travelers often spend hours in very uncomfortable seats at an
5 airline, train or bus terminal while they are waiting for a transfer or a delayed departure. Seats at a terminal often are less comfortable than seats on a plane, train or bus. For example, terminal seats often have a large gap between the hip/thigh support and the back support and may be formed from a hard rigid plastic.

10 Most long distance travelers take steps to minimize the discomfort and inconveniences of travel. For example, some long distance travelers adapt a regimen of sleeping, eating and drinking for several days prior to a trip in an effort to make the travel more comfortable. Long distance travelers also may adopt specific regimens during the flight in an effort to minimize discomfort.
15 For example, many travelers utilize sleep-inducing medication either shortly before the start of a trip or partway into the trip. Airline personnel frequently distribute pillows, blankets, slippers and eye shades a short time into the flight.

The seats on planes and surface vehicles intended for long distance
20 travel recline to enhance comfort. Most airlines and trains provide different levels of seating that are offered at different costs. Business class seats generally are wider than coach seats and generally recline more. First class seats may be wider still, and some first class seats recline to a full horizontal position. However, all reclining seats necessary include several movable
25 components that enable the seat to be adjusted between a fully erect

condition and at least a partly reclined condition. FIGS. 1 through 3 show a typical prior art airline seat similar to those used in business class or first class sections of a airplane. The prior art seat is identified generally by the numeral 100 in FIGS 1 through 3 and includes a hip/thigh support 102 disposed between arm rests 104. The hip/thigh support 102 of the prior art seat 100 has a width "w" of between about 18 inches and 27 inches, depending on the airline and the class of service (i.e. coach, business or first class). A back support 106 is hinged to the hip/thigh support 102 and can move between a substantially erect condition, as shown in FIG. 1, and a partly reclined position, as shown in FIG. 2. A fully reclined position, as shown in FIG. 3, is provided for first class seats on some airlines. The typical prior art seat 100 has a length "l" of between about 70 inches and 76 inches. A gap 108 necessarily is provided between these two hinged supports 102 and 106 to accommodate the relative movement. The seat 100 also may have a foot rest 110 that is hinged relative to the hip/thigh support 102, and a similar gap 112 exists between the hip/thigh support 102 and the foot rest 110. Furthermore, other cracks, creases and seams 114, 116, 118 and 120 exist at other locations on the hip/thigh support 102 and the back support 106. Still other structurally uneven areas (e. g. frame members and other structural supports) exist beneath the cover of the seat 100, and contribute to passenger discomfort even though they are not visible. The gaps 108 and 112 and other cracks, creases and seams 114-120 may be barely noticeable on a short trip. However, the gaps 108, 112 and other cracks, creases and seams 114-120 that are wider than about 1 cm and/or deeper than about 1 cm become very bothersome on long trips. In this regard, the gaps 108, 112

and other significant surface discontinuities 114-120 define pinch points into which bodily tissue will be squeezed due to the weight of the body. Pressure on the body at these pinch points may be higher, thereby impeding blood flow and creating discomfort at and near the surface of the skin. Long
5 distance travelers frequently move and shift their bodily weight to reduce discomfort. However, such movement creates pulling and friction as the bodily tissue is extracted from the pinch points and as new areas of bodily tissue are urged into the pinch points. Furthermore, all vehicles vibrate during movement, and the vibration contributes significantly to discomfort
10 generated at the pinch points even when the passenger does not attempt to move voluntarily.

The seat covers on most public transportation seats are designed to be durable and easily cleaned. These requirements often compete with the passenger's desire for comfort. A fabric that will last long and clean easily
15 often is not comfortable for an extended period of time. Many public transportation seats are designed to provide a pronounced and somewhat rigid lumbar support to align with the lower back and a bulging head support near the top end of the back rest. These features often add to comfort when the passenger is sitting in an erect position. However, these same features
20 contribute to discomfort when the passenger reclines the seat for sleep.

Virtually all public transportation seats include arm rests and some include forwardly projecting privacy wing on opposite sides of the back rest. The arm rest and wings are intended to prevent intrusion by an adjacent passenger. These fairly rigid and highly function components can lead to
25 discomfort when the seat is reclined so that the passenger can sleep.

The prior art include many types of formed pillows that are intended to support certain areas of the body. For example, U-shaped pillows are used to support the back of the neck. Other uniquely configured pillows are intended to support the feet, the rear side of the knees or areas between the knees.

Generally rectangular mats are used in many Asian cultures for sleeping or for performing Yoga. These mats tend to be formed from thin relatively inelastic materials that are not suitable for body cushioning. Mats of this type generally have length and width dimensions corresponding approximately to the length and width dimensions of a bed. The mats typically are sufficiently flexible to be folded or rolled for storage between uses.

Viscoelastic materials and memory foam are terms used to define a variety of open cell flexible polyurethane foams, and have been used for mattresses, mattress toppers and pillows for years. More particularly, the lower surface of the viscoelastic foam will be placed on a generally flat horizontal supporting surface, such as a box spring or mattress. The upper surface of the viscoelastic foam will mold closely to the contour of an object or body placed thereon. The viscoelastic foam then will return slowly to an undeformed shape when the object or body is removed or repositioned. In contrast, conventional foamed rubber will compress quickly in response to an applied load and will return quickly upon removal of the load. Furthermore, the compressed conventional foamed rubber will not conform to the shape of the applied load and will not distribute forces of the applied load. Viscoelastics have not been used in public transportation seating,

presumably in view of cost considerations and yield characteristics that are not conducive to requirements for a public transportation seat in the normally erect orientation.

In view of the above, it is object of the subject invention to provide
5 improvements to the comfort for public transit seating, particularly seating intended for long distance travel.

It is a further object of the subject invention to provide a public transportation seating improvement well suited for use and carrying by a traveler.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

10 The invention relates to a seating pad assembly for use with a public transportation seat and to the combination of a seating pad assembly and a public transportation seat. The invention also relates to a method for enhancing the comfort of a public transportation seat. The public transportation seat preferably is an airline seat, but may also be a seat
15 employed on trains, buses and other land vehicles. The seat includes a generally horizontal hip and thigh support and a seat back pivotally mounted to the hip and thigh support. The seat may further include a foot rest. The seat back and/or the foot rest preferably are mounted for pivoting relative to the hip and thigh support. Accordingly, seams, cracks, creases, gaps or
20 spaces exist between the foot rest and the hip/thigh support and between the back rest and the hip/thigh support. Some of these gaps exceed 1 cm in width and/or depth. The seat may further include arm rests spaced from one another by approximately the width of the seat. The spacing between the arm rests, and hence the width of the seat, may vary in accordance with the

mode of transportation and the class of service. The seat may further include safety belts for securing the passenger in the seat.

The seating pad assembly may be generally rectangular and preferably has a width corresponding approximately to the width of the seat.

5 The width of the seating pad assembly preferably is selected in accordance with the class of travel. For example, a seating pad assembly for economy travel preferably is about sixteen inches wide, while a seating pad assembly for business or first class travel preferably is about twenty inches wide. The seating pad assembly also preferably has a length approximately equal to
10 the sum of the length of the hip/thigh support and the length of the back support, particularly for coach class travel. Specifically, the seating pad assembly for economy class travel preferably is at least about 42 inches long and preferably about 47 inches long. Additionally, the seating pad assembly may include a foot rest extension with a length approximately equal to the
15 length of the foot rest on the public transit seat and particularly for business or first class airline seats. Specifically, the seating pad assembly for business or first class travel preferably is about 60 inches long and preferably about 72 inches long. Additionally, the seating pad assembly preferably has a thickness of between 1.0-2.0 inch, and most preferably about 1.00 inch.

20 The seating pad assembly comprises a substantially rectangular cushion that preferably consists of viscoelastic material. The viscoelastic cushion preferably has width, length and thickness dimensions corresponding to the overall width, length and thickness dimensions for the assembly, as set forth above. Additionally, the viscoelastic cushion
25 preferably has a density and hardness or firmness to support a traveler

comfortably across all locations on the seat, including across the seams, gaps and other pinch points between adjacent movable parts of the seat, including those that are at least 1 cm across and at least 1 cm deep. In this regard, the density, firmness, resiliency and thickness of the viscoelastic cushion are selected so that lower areas of the viscoelastic cushion will flow into and conform to the gaps and other pinch points, thereby creating a substantially smooth surface for supporting the traveler. Furthermore, these density, firmness, resiliency and thickness characteristics of the viscoelastic cushion are selected to ensure that the weight of the traveler will be distributed and supported by upper parts of the viscoelastic cushion without a bottoming out that would occur if the viscoelastic cushion was deformed maximally. Thus, the viscoelastic cushion isolates the traveler from the bothersome pinch points. Furthermore, the viscoelastic material is extremely effective at absorbing the vibrations that are inherent in vehicular travel, and hence isolates the traveler from those vibrations. As noted above, vibrations contribute to discomfort, particularly near the pinch points formed in the seat.

The seating pad assembly further includes a cover assembly mounted over the viscoelastic cushion. At least a portion of the cover assembly preferably is removable for laundering or replacement. The cover assembly preferably is stretchable or sufficiently loose to deform easily into gaps or other pinch points defined in the seat. Thus, the cover assembly will not restrict or limit the ability of the viscoelastic material to flow or otherwise conform to the shapes of the seat and the traveler, and the nonrestrictive cover assembly will move easily with the viscoelastic material as the viscoelastic material changes its shape. The cover assembly preferably

includes an inner screen layer preferably formed from a synthetic material, such as nylon that contributes to the protection and support of the viscoelastic cushion. The inner screen layer need not be removable. The cover assembly also preferably includes an inner protective cover that may
5 be fluid resistant, stain resistant, antimicrobial and/or moisture wicking. The inner protective cover prevents permanent damage to the viscoelastic pad. Preferably, the inner cover has a zipper or other closure means to permit the inner cover to be removed from the viscoelastic pad for laundering or replacement. The cover assembly also includes an outer cover that
10 preferably is formed from a material that is fluid resistant, stain resistant antimicrobial and moisture wicking. Additionally, the outer cover is formed from a material, such as cotton or a brushed synthetic fabric that will be comfortable to the passenger. In some instances, the cover may be imprinted or embroidered with indicia to identify an airline or other public
15 transit provider or to identify the owner or source of the seating pad assembly. The outer cover also has a zipper or other closure means to permit the outer cover to be removed for laundering or replacement. The closure for the outer cover may be offset from the closure for the inner cover. The outer cover also may include a strap for releasably securing the seating
20 pad assembly in a rolled condition for easy storage and carrying through an airport or other transit terminal. The strap also can be used to hold the seating pad assembly on a seat.

The seating pad assembly may include means for releasable attachment to the public transportation seat. For example, a snapped
25 attachment can be provided for releasable engagement with snaps provided

on the top of the seat back. In other situations, the seating pad assembly may be provided with notches or apertures for receiving a seat belt.

The seating pad assembly may further include or may be used with a carrying bag. The carrying bag has a selectively closable end. The selectively closable end may have a flap, a draw string or the like. The carrying bag may further include a strap or a loop to carry the bag over the shoulder or to facilitate mounting and transportation of the bag and seating pad assembly on a rolling piece of luggage or to a backpack.

The seating pad assembly can be transported to an airport, train station or the like by a passenger. The passenger need merely remove the seating pad assembly from the bag and position the seating pad assembly on the seat before the person sits down. Thus, the seating pad assembly is not one of the pieces of carry-on luggage that must be stored in an overhead compartment. The passenger then can assume a normal sitting posture to hold the pad in place. Controls on the seat can be utilized to move the seat into a reclined condition at an appropriate time during the trip, if desired and if such controls are available. The seating pad assembly will extend continuously across seams and/or creases between the movable parts of the seat and will conform to the shapes of both the seat and the passenger to maximize comfort. The cover assembly will not restrict the flowing deformation of the viscoelastic material, and hence the cover will not affect the conformal characteristics of both the upper and lower areas of the viscoelastic material. Additionally, the seating pad assembly can be dimensioned to provide lateral support between the passenger and arm rests.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a prior art seat in an erect condition.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the prior art seat in a partly reclined condition.

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of the prior art seat in a fully reclined
5 condition.

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view taken along line 4-4 in FIG. 3.

FIG. 5 is a perspective view, partly in section, of a seating pad assembly in accordance with the invention.

FIG. 6 is a perspective view of an end portion of the seating pad
10 assembly with the outer cover removed.

FIG. 7 is a perspective view of a side portion of the seating pad assembly showing the zipper closure for the outer cover.

FIG. 8 is a top plan view of a corner of the seating pad assembly and showing one of the closure straps in an extended condition.

FIG. 9 is a side elevational view of a corner of the seating pad
15 assembly and showing the extended closure strap.

FIG. 10 is a perspective view of the seating pad assembly in a partly rolled condition.

FIG. 11 is a perspective view of the seating pad assembly in a fully
20 rolled condition for storage.

FIG. 12 is a front elevational view of a carrying bag for use with the rolled seating pad assembly of FIG. 11.

FIG. 13 is a perspective view of the rolled seating pad assembly stored in the carrying bag of FIG. 12.

FIG. 14 is a perspective view of a person carrying the rolled seating pad assembly stored in the carrying bag.

FIG. 15 is a perspective view of the rolled seating pad assembly stored in the carrying bag and secured on a piece of rolling luggage.

5 FIG. 16 is a perspective view of the seating pad assembly of FIGS 5-11 positioned on the fully erect airline seat of FIG. 1.

FIG. 17 is a perspective view of the seating pad assembly of FIGS 5-11 positioned on the partly reclined airline seat of FIG. 2.

10 FIG. 18 is a perspective view of the seating pad assembly of FIGS 5-11 positioned on the fully reclined airline seat of FIG. 3.

FIG. 19 is a cross-sectional view taken along line 19-19 in FIG. 18.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A seating pad assembly in accordance with the subject invention is identified generally by the numeral 10 in FIGS. 5 through 12. The seating pad assembly includes 10 an inner viscoelastic foam cushion 12 formed from
15 and consisting essentially of a viscoelastic material, such as those that are available from several commercial sources, including TEMPUR-PEDIC. The seating pad assembly 10 is generally rectangular and has a length L and a width W as shown in FIG. 4. The length and width dimensions L and W will vary in accordance with the class of service for which the seating pad
20 assembly 10 is being marketed. In particular, first class airline seats often are wider than business class and some seats include footrests that extend longitudinally as the seat is reclined. In a preferred embodiment, the seating pad assembly 10 has a width W of approximately 16 inches for economy class seats and approximately 20 inches for business or first class seats.

These widths enable the seating pad assembly 10 to occupy a major portion of the width "w" of the targeted seat. However, other seating pad assemblies 10 may be slightly narrower or slightly wider. The length L of the seating pad assembly 10 also will vary in accordance with the class of travel service for which the seating pad assembly 10 is purchased and marketed. In a preferred embodiment, the seating pad assembly 10 has a length L of approximately 42 inches for economy class seats, a length L of approximately 47 inches for business class seats and a length L of approximately 60 inches to 72 inches for first class seats. However, seating pad assemblies 10 with a length L as small as about 40 inches will achieve many of the benefits described herein, particularly for short trips where the seat does not recline and with respect to the most objectionable gap 108 between the hip/thigh support 102 and the back support 106 of the prior art seat 100.

The viscoelastic inner cushion 12 of the seating pad assembly 10 has a thickness "T" as shown in FIG. 5. The thickness "T" preferably is in the range of 1.0-1.5 inch, and most preferably is approximately 1.0 inch to facilitate storage and carrying. However, the ability of the inner cushion 12 to be transported easily and to provide the necessary comfort for long distance travel also depends on the density of the viscoelastic foam. A viscoelastic foam with a density of 3 lbs/cubic foot to 8 lbs/per cubic foot and a thickness T of 1.0-1.5 inch has been found to provide comfortable support across the gaps 108 and other surface discontinuities of the prior art airline seat while still being easily transportable. However, a viscoelastic inner cushion 12 with a density of 5 lbs/cubic foot and a thickness T of 1.0 inch has been found to

provide very good levels of comfort and very desirable storage and carrying characteristics, as explained herein. The viscoelastic inner cushion 12 also should have a firmness that permits the viscoelastic inner cushion 12 to conform to the shape of the seat 100 and to the passenger without bottoming out. Thus, the viscoelastic cushion 12 will redistribute the weight and surface pressure of the passenger.

The seating pad assembly 10 further includes a cover assembly 14 that substantially completely encloses the viscoelastic cushion 12. In this regard, the viscoelastic foam material of the cushion 12 is not comfortable for direct long term contact by the traveler. Additionally, the viscoelastic foam of the cushion 12 is not well suited for soil or stain resistance and could become unsightly after several uses. Furthermore, viscoelastic foam cushions are not aesthetically attractive, even when clean. The cover assembly 14, on the other hand, can be made from relatively inexpensive materials that are comfortable for direct long term contact by the traveler.

The cover assembly 14 includes an inner screen layer 15 that completely surrounds the viscoelastic cushion 12. The inner screen layer 15 preferably is a thin gauge mesh formed from synthetic fibers, such as nylon, that will protect the viscoelastic cushion 12 when other parts of the cover assembly 14 are removed for cleaning, maintenance or replacement. Additionally, the inner screen layer 15 is stretchable and/or sufficiently loose to permit substantially unrestricted deformation and/or flow of the viscoelastic cushion 12 into the pinch points on the seat 100.

The cover assembly 14 further includes an inner cover 16 removably mounted over the inner screen layer 15 and the viscoelastic cushion 12. The

inner cover 16 is formed from a fluid resistant, stain resistant material with moisture wicking and antimicrobial characteristics such as a stretchable knitted fabric made from a blend of cotton and synthetic fabric. Additionally, the inner cover 16 includes an inner closure 16z, such as a zipper, that
5 extends across one end edge and adjacent side edges of the inner cover 16. The inner closure 16z enables the inner cover 16 to be separated from the viscoelastic cushion 12 for cleaning, maintenance or replacement.

The cover assembly 14 further includes an outer cover 18 that is removably mounted over the inner cover 16. The outer cover 18 is formed
10 from a fluid resistant, stain resistant material with moisture wicking and antimicrobial characteristics. For example, the outer cover 14 can be formed from a stretchable woven cotton fabric (300-1000 thread count) or a brush knit fabric that is soft to the touch and comfortable even after a long term of contact. More particularly, the outer cover 14 can be formed from materials
15 that are commonly used on bed sheets. Furthermore, the outer cover 14 can be made aesthetically attractive and can be printed with indicia to identify the owner of the cushion or to promote a particular trademark. For example, the indicia can be the name of an airline that sells the pad assembly 10 to frequent travelers. Alternatively, the indicia can be the trademark of the
20 employer of the traveler.

The outer cover 18 includes an outer closure 18z, such as a zipper, that extends along a major part of one side edge of the outer cover 18. The outer closure 18z enables the outer cover 18 to be separated from the viscoelastic cushion 12 and the inner closure 16 for cleaning, maintenance or
25 replacement.

Two straps 20 are secured to portions of the outer cover 17 adjacent one longitudinal end and extend longitudinally beyond the outer cover 18, as shown most clearly in FIGS. 8-10. Portions of each strap 20 sewn or otherwise secured to the outer cover 18 have an array of Velcro loops 22 facing away from the outer cover 18. A mating array of Velcro hooks 24 are provided on the opposite side of each strap 20 at the end of the strap 20 remote from the outer cover 18. The straps 20 enable the seating pad assembly 10 to be secured in the rolled configuration of FIG 11.

The seating pad assembly 10 also can be used with a carrying bag 30, as shown in FIGS. 12-15. The carrying bag 30 has a closed bottom end 32 and an open top end 34. A draw string 36 is incorporated into a hem adjacent the open top end 34. The carrying bag 30 also includes a carrying strap 38. In the collapsed condition shown in FIG. 12, the carrying bag 30 is a generally flat rectangle. However, the carrying bag 30 can be opened to receive the seating pad assembly 10 that has been rolled into the coil shown in FIG. 11. This combination of the seating pad assembly 10 and the carrying bag 30 is illustrated in FIG. 13. The carrying strap 38 can be suspended from the shoulder of the traveler while traveling between flights or destinations, as shown in FIG. 14. Alternatively, the carrying strap 38 can be looped over the handle of a roll-on piece of luggage, as shown in FIG. 15 or can be attached to a backpack. A pocket can be provided in the carrying bag 30 to carry travel documents, identification cards or the like.

The seating pad assembly 10 is used by opening the draw string 28 near the top 26 of the carrying bag 22 and removing the rolled seating pad assembly 10 from the carrying bag 22. The straps 20 then are opened and

the seating pad assembly 10 is unrolled from the FIG. 10 condition to the FIG. 4 condition. The open seating pad assembly 10 then is placed on the seat 100 substantially as shown in FIG. 15-17 before the traveler sits down. Thus, the seating pad assembly 10 is not part of the carry on luggage that must be stowed, and effectively becomes a temporary part of the seat 100. One longitudinal end the seating pad assembly 10 is positioned near the top of the seat back support 106. The remainder of the seating pad assembly 10 extends from the top of the back support 106 across the gap 108 between the hip/thigh support 102 and the back support 106 and towards or to the leg rest 110. The extent of the seating pad assembly 10 to or towards the leg rest 110 will depend upon the overall length L of the pad assembly 10 relative to the length "l" of the seat 100. In preferred embodiments, the seating pad assembly 10 will be sufficiently long to extend completely to the end of the leg rest 110 farthest from the hip/thigh support 102. Some seats 100 have a footrest 114 that telescopes or otherwise extends longitudinally away from the hip/thigh support 102 as the seat 100 is moved into the fully reclined condition. In this situation, one longitudinal end portion of the seating pad assembly 10 may be tucked between the remainder of the seating pad assembly 10 and the leg rest 110 to define a flap 34, as shown in FIGS. 15 and 16. However, the flap 34 can be unfolded as the seat 100 moves into the fully reclined condition shown most clearly in FIG. 17 so that the flap 34 can be disposed on the footrest 114.

As noted above, the width W of the seating pad assembly 10 preferably is in the range of 16-20 inches, and hence will fit conveniently

between the armrests 104 of the seat 100 without creating potentially objectionable bulges or bumps.

The seating pad assembly 10 extends continuously across the objectionable gap 108 between the hip/thigh support 102 and the back support 106. The viscoelastic cushion 12 responds to both ambient temperature (60-75F) and body temperature for conforming to the shape of the passenger for providing three dimensional support for the passenger when the seat is erect, partially reclined and fully reclined. The thickness T of the viscoelastic cushion 12 and the density and firmness of the viscoelastic foam of the cushion 12 enable the traveler to be supported comfortably across rigid structures in the seat 100, as well as across the gap 108 between the hip/thigh support 102 and the back support 106. Thus, the conformal nature of the viscoelastic cushion 12 avoids the objectionable sensations caused by the gap 108 when a traveler is sitting erect or attempting to relax in the reclined condition of the seat 100, as shown in FIGS. 16 and 17. Furthermore, the viscoelastic foam of the cushion 12 is extremely effective at absorbing travel-related vibrations and associated micromovements of the seat 100 and the passenger. These vibration-related micromovements contribute significantly to passenger discomfort and are dampened very effectively by the viscoelastic cushion 12.

The ability of the seating pad assembly 10 to achieve these objectives is dependent partly upon the thickness T and the characteristics of the viscoelastic cushion 12. As explained above, the preferred cushion 12 is formed from a viscoelastic foam with a density in the range of 50-120 kg/m³, with a preferred density of about 85 kg/m³. Additionally, the preferred

viscoelastic material has a hardness or firmness of about 10N. Viscoelastic materials with these specifications and with a thickness T of about 1 inch have proven to provide high levels of comfort with little or no sensory evidence of the gap 108, hard structural supports of the seat 100 or the vibrations of the vehicle regardless of whether the seat 100 is erect, reclined or partly reclined. In this regard, the density, firmness, resiliency and thickness of the viscoelastic cushion 12 enable lower surface 12L of the viscoelastic cushion 12 to flow into and conform to the gap 108 and other pinch points, as shown in FIG. 19, thereby creating a convex lower conformal area 12LC and a substantially smooth uniform upper surface 12U for facing the traveler. The cover assembly is sufficiently stretchable and/or loose to permit the viscoelastic material 12 to flow or conform substantially unimpeded into the potential pinch points and around hard points. Furthermore, the density, hardness, firmness, resiliency and thickness characteristics of the viscoelastic cushion 12 ensure that weight of the traveler will create a concave upper conformal area 12UC that will be spaced above the lower surface 12L, above the supports 102, 106 and above the pinch point defined by the gap 108. Additionally, the weight of the traveler will be distributed and supported by upper parts of the viscoelastic cushion 12 without a bottoming out that would occur if the viscoelastic cushion 12 had a thickness, density, hardness and/or resiliency to be deformed maximally. Thus, deformation of the top and bottom surfaces of the viscoelastic cushion 12 assures optimum support and weight distribution and isolates the traveler from the bothersome pinch points and hard points. Accordingly, the traveler can changed positions without disengaging tissue that would otherwise have

been squeezed into the gaps and other pinch points. Still further, the three dimensional support of the traveler achieved by the viscoelastic cushion 12 helps to dampen travel-related vibrations. Viscoelastic materials with different density and hardness characteristics can be employed, but may require
5 different thicknesses.

The seating pad assembly 10 may be sold at retail stores (kiosks at transportation centers, kiosks at shopping centers, specialty gift stores, major retailers, etc), through catalogs (e. g. in-flight catalogs), via television (shopping networks, infomercials, etc) or via the Internet. The Internet
10 transactions can be through a supplier's own website, other unaffiliated retail web destinations, mobile web destinations, interactive outdoor sales via Bluetooth/Wi-Fi or touch screen installations in public spaces. Additionally, the seating pad assembly 10 may be sold, rented or otherwise offered to passengers in association with the offering of transportation services. For
15 example, the seating pad assembly 10 can be offered and/or delivered to passengers after the passengers have passed through security clearance points at an airport, such as at duty free shops or as part of the check-in or seat selection process. Alternatively, the seating pad assembly 10 can be rented for delivery to the passenger shortly prior to departure and for pick-up
20 from the passenger shortly prior to disembarking. The cover assembly 14 may be removed and cleaned after each such rental. Still further, the offering of the seating pad assembly can be tied to frequent flier programs. Thus, the seating pad assembly 10 can be offered to passengers with a specified level of frequent flier status (e. g. gold, platinum, etc.). Similarly, the seating pad
25 assembly 10 can be purchased or rented with frequent flier points or miles,

and the purchase or rental of the seating pad assembly 10 can be used to trigger certain frequent flier benefits, such as points or related products or services.

While the invention has been described with respect to a preferred embodiment, it is apparent that various changes can be made without departing from the scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims. In this regard, different length, width and thickness dimension can be provided in accordance with the preferences of the traveler and the dimensions of the seat.

A rectangular seating pad assembly 10 offers several cost efficiencies and carrying efficiencies. However, nonrectangular pads can be provided. For example, notches can be provided at areas where seat belts extend from the seat. Additionally, areas that will be adjacent the knees and lower legs can be narrower than areas adjacent the hips or shoulders.

Still further, the extreme lower portion of the seating pad assembly 10 can be configured to articulate more easily. Thus, a well defined hinge line may be defined substantially adjacent the flap 34 near the bottom end of the seating pad assembly 10. The flap 34 can be formed by an entirely separate piece of viscoelastic foam material that may be inserted into an entirely separate pocket of the outer cover 18 of the cover assembly 14.

Straps 20 with a VELCRO attachment were illustrated in the preferred embodiment. However, other forms of straps can be provided for holding the pad assembly 10 in a rolled condition. For example, straps configured to be tied in a knot may be provided or straps with a simple buckle can be provided.

The pad assembly 10 may further be provided with structure for releasably affixing the pad assembly 10 to upper portions of the back support 106 of the seat 100. These attachments features can be straps, snaps or the like.

- 5 These variations and others will be apparent to persons skilled in this art after having read this disclosure.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A seating pad assembly for a public transportation seat, the seat having a hip/thigh support and a back support hingedly connected to the hip/thigh support so that the back support can move from a fully erect condition relative to the hip/thigh support to a position at least partly reclined relative to the hip/thigh support, at least one recess being defined between
5 the hip/thigh support and the back support, the seating pad assembly comprising a viscoelastic foam cushion having a width substantially corresponding to a width defined by the seat and a length sufficient to extend substantially from an end of the back support remote from the hip/thigh
10 support to an end of the hip/thigh support remote from the back support, so that said seating pad assembly extends continuously across the recess between the hip/thigh support and the back support, the seating pad assembly having opposite top and bottom surfaces defining a thickness selected so that portions of the seating pad assembly adjacent the bottom
15 surface will flow into and substantially fill the recess, while defining a substantially uniformly smooth top surface for supporting a traveler without bottoming out against portions of the seat adjacent the recess.

2. The seating pad assembly of claim 1, wherein the seat further includes a leg rest hingedly connected at a location in proximity to an edge of
20 the hip/thigh support remote from the back support so that a gap is defined between the leg rest and the hip/thigh support during at least certain ranges of movement therebetween, the pad assembly having a length sufficient to extend across the gap between the hip/thigh support and the leg rest and at least partly onto the leg rest.

3. The seating pad assembly of claim 2, wherein the seat further includes a footrest selectively extendable from the leg rest, the seating pad assembly including a flap selectively foldable relative to remaining portions of the seating pad assembly for selective placement on the footrest.

5 4. The seating pad assembly of claim 1, further comprising a cover assembly surrounding the viscoelastic foam cushion, the cover assembly being sufficiently stretchable or loose to permit deformation of the viscoelastic foam cushion into the at least one recess of the seat.

10 5. The seating pad assembly of claim 4, wherein the cover assembly comprises an inner screen layer substantially permanently disposed in surrounding relationship to the viscoelastic foam cushion.

15 6. The seating pad assembly of claim 5, wherein the cover assembly further comprises an inner cover removably disposed in surrounding relationship to the viscoelastic cushion and the inner screen layer.

7. The seating pad assembly of claim 6, wherein the cover assembly further comprises an outer cover removably disposed in surrounding relationship to the inner cover.

20 8. The seating pad assembly of claim 7, wherein the cover assembly further comprises a plurality of straps extending from one end of the outer cover and having closure means for securing the seating pad assembly in a rolled condition.

25 9. The pad assembly of claim 8, further comprising a carrying bag dimensioned for receiving the viscoelastic foam and the cover in the rolled condition, the carrying bag having a carrying strap.

10. The seating pad assembly of claim 1, wherein the viscoelastic foam cushion has a thickness of at least one inch.

11. The seating pad assembly of claim 10, wherein the viscoelastic foam cushion has a density and a hardness selected to support a traveler
5 across the recess between the hip/thigh support and the back support.

12. The seating pad assembly of claim 11, wherein the viscoelastic foam cushion has a density in the range of about 3-8 lb/ft³.

13. The seating pad assembly of claim 12, wherein the viscoelastic foam material has a density of approximately 5 lb/ft³.

10 14. The seating pad assembly of claim 10, wherein the viscoelastic foam cushion has a hardness of about 10N.

15. The seating pad assembly of claim 1, having a width of between approximately 16-20 inches, a length of between approximately 42-60 inches and a thickness of at least approximately 1 inch.

16. An airline seat assembly, comprising:

a seat having a hip/thigh support secured rigidly to a supporting surface on an airplane, a back support hingedly connected to the hip/thigh support and movable from a fully erect condition to a condition reclined relative to the hip/thigh support, at least one recess being defined between the hip/thigh support and the back support to accommodate hinged movement therebetween; and

a seating pad assembly removably positionable on the seat, the seating pad assembly including a unitary viscoelastic foam cushion having a width slightly less than a width defined by the airline seat and a length at least equal to a length of the hip/thigh support and the back support measured in directions substantially perpendicular to the hinged connection therebetween, the viscoelastic foam of the pad having a density and hardness sufficient to substantially support a traveler across the recess between the hip/thigh support and the back support, the seating pad assembly further comprising a cover assembly substantially surrounding the viscoelastic foam and being sufficiently stretchable or loose to permit substantially unimpeded deformation of the viscoelastic foam into the recess of the seat.

17. The seat assembly of claim 16, wherein the viscoelastic foam material has a density in a range of approximately 3-8 lb/ft³.

18. The seat assembly of claim 17, wherein the seat assembly includes a leg rest articulated in proximity to the hip/thigh support with a gap defined therebetween, the seating pad assembly having a length sufficient to extend continuously across the gap and onto the leg rest.

5 19. A method for improving comfort of an airline seat, the seat having a hip/thigh support and back support hinged to the hip/thigh support and movable from a fully erect condition to a condition at least partly reclined relative to the hip/thigh support, a recess being defined between the hip/thigh support and the back support, the method comprising;

10 providing a seating pad assembly having a viscoelastic foam cushion, the seating pad assembly having sufficient dimensions to extend substantially from an end of the back support remote from the hip/thigh support to an end of the hip/thigh support remote from the back support;

positioning the seating pad assembly on the seat so that the seating
15 pad assembly extends substantially continuously along the back support and the hip/thigh support and across the recess therebetween; and

reclining the back support relative to the hip/thigh support so that the seating pad assembly provides a substantially continuous cushion across the recess.

20 20. The method of claim 19, further comprising selling or renting the seating pad assembly to a traveler at an airport.

21. The method of claim 20, further comprising delivering the seating pad assembly to the traveler after the traveler has passed through security at the airport.

22. The method of claim 21, further comprising reclaiming the seating pad assembly from the passenger at a point of disembarkation.