



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

2800 BERLIN TURNPIKE, P.O. BOX 317546  
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06131-7546



Office of the  
Commissioner

An Equal Opportunity Employer

July 13, 2010

The Honorable M. Jodi Rell  
Governor  
Office of the Governor  
State Capitol  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Governor Rell:

Enclosed for your information is a copy of the Executive Summary Report on  
Virgin Atlantic Flight 1K – Diversion to Bradley International Airport, June 22-23, 2010.

Please feel free to contact me if you should have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey A. Parker".

Jeffrey A. Parker  
Commissioner

Enclosure

## **Report on Virgin Atlantic (VS) flight 1K - Diversion to Bradley International Airport, June 22-23, 2010**

### **Summary**

On the evening of Tuesday, June 22, and continuing into the early morning of Wednesday, June 23, 2010, Virgin Atlantic flight 1K en route from London Heathrow Airport to Newark, New Jersey, diverted to Bradley International Airport (BDL or the Airport) due to severe thunderstorms in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area. The crew notified BDL that it planned to land, take on fuel for the aircraft, and depart from Bradley to continue on to their original destination of Newark once the weather in the New York area had cleared sufficiently. Events transpired to produce a long delay in offloading the more than 300 people on board. Indeed, from the time the plane landed to the time the last passenger deplaned, five hours elapsed. (Drafting of a detailed timeline is in progress.)

By way of background, diversion activity is common at BDL given its proximity to the New York metropolitan airports as well as Boston Logan International Airport. From May 2009, through May 2010, BDL successfully handled 170 diversion airline operations, including 127 domestic and 43 international flights, all without incident.

Processes for handling flight diversions vary slightly depending on whether the flight is a domestic or international flight. Generally, a diverted flight will land and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Air Traffic Controllers will direct it to park at a remote locations identified by BDL Airport Operations for this purpose. The overwhelming majority of diversions are caused by weather issues at other airports and the aircraft need to land to take on additional fuel and then leave to continue on to their original destination. These operations are commonly referred to as "fuel-and-go" operations, as was the case with VS flight 1K. Players involved in handling these diverted flights include BDL Airport Operations personnel, aircraft ground handlers who are engaged by private companies to provide services (such as fueling of aircraft and arranging for buses or hotel rooms, food, water etc. to the airlines' passengers), Aircraft Rescue & Fire Fighting personnel, EMT's, State Police, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S. Customs) personnel and, in some circumstances, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

If the flight involved is an international diversion that cancels the continuing portion of the flight, the passengers must be cleared by U.S. Customs located at Bradley in the Federal Inspection Station (FIS) facility. Since U.S. Customs generally operates only on a daytime schedule at BDL, they need to call in additional personnel to process passengers through the FIS facilities during non-daytime hours. There is one jet bridge at the FIS station, and if the aircraft is able to taxi to the jet bridge, the passengers can walk directly from the airplane into the FIS facility. If the aircraft is unable to taxi to the jet bridge, other means of transportation must be provided by the airline or its contracted ground

handler to get the passengers from the aircraft into the FIS facility. This process is facilitated and coordinated by Airport Operations personnel, using small (15-30 passenger) buses owned by the airport, car rental companies, and/or the parking lot operator. Once the passengers have been cleared by customs, they are taken by bus or other arranged means of transportation from BDL to the original flight destination.

At 2000, when VS first notified its contracted ground handler, Aircraft Service International Group (ASIG), about this diversion, VS indicated that it would be a "fuel-and-go" operation. All parties involved, including the VS Crew, ASIG, State Police, Airport Operations, CBP, FAA's air traffic control tower personnel, and Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting personnel treated the diversion as a fuel-and-go operation and undertook their respective duties. At 2300, the Captain canceled the flight. It was not until this point in time, with the flight status changed to "canceled," that the VS crew asked ASIG and Airport Operations personnel for permission to deplane the passengers. Airport Operations personnel responded that they could not grant permission and that was up to CBP to decide. Allowing passengers to deplane at this point would have violated CBP's policy at BDL of not allowing passengers to deplane (i) into interim, secured locations, or (ii) with only one (1) CBP staff currently on duty, into the FIS facility. (Upon cancellation, CBP began calling in additional staff.) Further, because the aircraft was parked approximately 300 to 350 yards away from the FIS facility, in the dark, with hard rain falling and thunderstorms in the vicinity, it would not have been safe to allow passengers to deplane the aircraft into an unfamiliar environment, in immediate proximity to an active taxiway and runway.

In order to determine whether the Captain could safely taxi to the FIS facility for passengers to deplane, BDL Airport Operations personnel escorted the Captain in an airport vehicle to the jet bridge at the FIS building so that he could determine whether or not it was safe for him to taxi the aircraft to the building so that the passengers could, when CBP approved, walk from the aircraft into the facility. The Captain determined that he could indeed taxi the aircraft safely and Airport Operations personnel returned him to the aircraft to do so. As the aircraft's auxiliary power unit was not functioning, ASIG provided an aircraft air-start unit to start the engine, but it was not powerful enough to start the engine, and a second unit was required. Airport Operations personnel drove ASIG personnel to locate and borrow another air-start unit. While ASIG and Airport operations personnel were returning with the second unit to the VS aircraft, the Captain indicated that he had timed-out and that he no longer would be able to taxi the aircraft to the FIS. Airport Operations personnel, who had previously arranged for small buses to be available and waiting if needed, then quickly facilitated the arrival of the small buses to safely transport the passengers from the aircraft to the CBP FIS facility.

All of the established and appropriate procedures were implemented in receiving this diverted flight. The VS Captain retained sole authority of the A/C its crew and passengers until he cancelled the flight at approximately 2300 hours. It was following this cancellation that the process of clearing the VS passengers through Customs got underway. Efforts to secure accommodations for some and transportation to Newark, New Jersey Airport for others continued.