

August 18, 2009

CIAA RESPONSE TO QUERIES RAISED BY COMPASS REPORTER CLIODHNA MCGOWAN REGARDING LENGTHY WAIT TIMES AT SECURITY CHECKPOINT AT OWEN ROBERTS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT ON SATURDAY, 8TH AUGUST, 2009

1. Apparently it took people 1.5 hours to pass through to the departure lounge last Saturday afternoon and passengers had to be moved to the exterior of the building to make more room inside – were these people sheltered from the sun in some way and provided with updates for how long they would have to wait?

CIAA Response: The Cayman Islands Airports Authority (CIAA) is working in conjunction with the relevant airport partners – Immigration, Security, the Ministry and Department of Tourism as well as airline representatives – in an effort to address these concerns and to seek an early resolution.

2. One lady said this problem seemed to occur because there was only three Immigration staff in place and this seemed to be causing the delay. Is there anything CIAA can do about Immigration or the security people putting more staff on during such a busy period?

CIAA Response: When the CIAA learned earlier this year that Immigration would be reducing the number of officers who would be on duty at the airport as a result of budgetary restraints, it addressed the issue of passenger comfort and dissatisfaction that would inevitably occur with that agency. This concern was also highlighted to Immigration by the Department of Tourism and airline representatives. Immigration officials advised that they would be exploring alternate methods to enhance efficiency and reduce passenger wait times. The CIAA will continue to have dialogue with Immigration officials in order to help identify and implement measures to prevent the congestion which impacts the ability for the Security Checkpoint to process passengers at a faster rate. The area between the two agencies cannot accommodate the volume of passengers as they wait to be processed by Immigration, thereby resulting in passenger lines extending outside the Security Hall.

3. Also, it seems there are about 11 international flights and one Brac flight departing between 11.30 and 3.30 Saturday which results in this overcrowding. Is there anything that the CIAA can do about all these flights going out at the one time?

CIAA Response: The CIAA has fielded other passenger complaints for the lengthy wait times that can be experienced during busy days, especially on weekends, when a significant number of flights are scheduled back to back, and often times airlines are schedule to depart within minutes of each other. The Airport Operators Committee, chaired by Mr. Marcus Cumber of Island Air, has given an undertaking that airlines will again be asked to review their flight schedules in an effort to prevent the obvious impact they are having on airport operations which is seriously inhibited by the physical limitations of the terminal building and its capacity to accommodate the significant numbers of passengers that ultimately have to be processed for these flights.

4. Is there a plan in place to deal with any of these problems, which have been ongoing now for quite a while?

CIAA Response: The Airports Authority will continue to work with the Airport Operators Committee and other airport partners to improve the current situation especially as it relates to flight scheduling. The Authority recognises that the current Terminal facilities are severely congested and uncomfortable and does not facilitate a good experience for passengers or for airport personnel, many of whom also work under cramped and inefficient conditions. A significant overhaul of the facility is essential in order facilitate the modernisation of the terminal which will greatly enhance operational safety, security and efficiency. When the Terminal building was opened in 1984 it was capable of handling up to 500,000 passengers and 25 years later the building has not expanded to accommodate the current passenger movements which are in excess of 900,000.

5. Are you concerned about the negative impression this gives tourists leaving the Cayman Islands?

CIAA Response: The CIAA is most certainly concerned about the lasting negative impression that the lengthy wait times are having on departing tourists as this also results in bad press for the Cayman Islands and its valuable tourism product. However, the Authority will continue to work with airport partners in an effort to implement whatever initiatives or modifications are required in order to enhance the level of service it provides to incoming and outgoing passengers as the Airport is the first and last impression that they will have of the Cayman Islands.

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