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DELAYED: JFK AIRPORT HAS LONGEST SUMMER CUSTOMS WAIT TIMES

With waits of up to an average of 2 hours during peak travel times, John F. Kennedy International Airport features delays far longer than any of the country's five busiest airports that welcome international visitors.

Of the five busiest U.S. airports that serve as international entry points, JFK has the longest average wait time, longest average maximum wait time and longest wait time during peak hours, a report on summer 2013 wait times released today by the Global Gateway Alliance found (*Analysis below*).

The average delay at JFK during the summer months of June, July and August was 23 minutes. The average maximum delay was 57 minutes and average maximum delay during peak hours in August topped out at a whopping two hours.

"It is unconscionable that visitors and New Yorkers alike can face an average of a two-hour waits when arriving at JFK," said Joseph Sitt, Chairman of GGA. "There needs to be a significant change in the way US and Border Protection (CBP) operates, since this massive influx of passengers shows absolutely no sign of slowing down and we rely so heavily on increasing international tourism and business travel."

The report looked at data from John F. Kennedy International, Miami International, Los Angeles International, Newark Liberty International, and Chicago O'Hare International Airports.

Among GGA's recommendations for improving wait times: installing Automated Passport Control kiosks; creating on-call CBP rapid response teams and eliminating preclearance facilities in unnecessary locations. All of these changes would improve wait times while not sacrificing security.

"We hear constant complaints about the long wait times at airport Customs, which is damaging New York's role as a center of global commerce," said Kathryn Wylde, President and CEO of the Partnership for New York City. "It is inexcusable that we are allowing inefficiency to characterize the gateway experience of travelers who we depend on for maintaining leadership in the global economy."

"Improving Customs wait times at JFK is a small but important step CBP must take for New York to remain competitive with major cities in the US and around the world," said Jennifer Hensley, Executive Director of the Association for a Better New York. "The lost productivity for business travelers and the inconvenience to visitors is hurting our economy. We must act now to improve service to the millions of international travelers that come through JFK each year."

“One way to combat drastic wait times at JFK is to assign more CBP Officers and decrease their administrative duties,” said Steve Sigmund, Executive Director of GGA. “We also need to provide better information to passengers, many of whom are arriving from foreign countries and may be unfamiliar with New York. These are profound yet easy-to-implement changes that will only benefit New York’s reputation as the best city in the world to visit.”

The report was compiled from publicly available data on the CBP web site.

For more information on the GGA and the report, please contact Stefan Friedman, sfriedman@mercuryllc.com or [\(646\) 241-7786](tel:6462417786).

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ABOUT GGA

Global Gateway Alliance (GGA), was established to address the major challenges facing the metropolitan region’s airports and related infrastructure that, if left unaddressed, will serve as a major impediment to the long-term growth of New York City and surrounding areas. By harnessing the expertise of leaders in business, government, academia, labor and other sectors, we seek to tackle these challenges head-on and serve as the leading advocate in an effort to improve our airports and facilitate the continued growth of the region. For more information regarding the Global Gateway Alliance, please visit the [websitewww.globalgatewayalliance.org](http://www.globalgatewayalliance.org), or email info@globalgatewayalliance.org. Follow GGA on Twitter @GGA_NYNJ and ‘Like’ the organization on Facebook at <http://on.fb.me/UsqxGw>.

GGA’s board of directors includes: **Joe Sitt** (Chairman), CEO, Thor Equities, **Kathryn Wylde**, President of the Partnership for New York City; **Joseph Spinnato**, President of the Hotel Association of New York City; **William Rudin**, CEO of Rudin Management Company, Inc. and Chairman of ABNY; **Stuart Appelbaum**, President of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union; **Dan Glickman** former Congressman and U.S. Agriculture Secretary; **Jared Kushner**, Owner of Kushner Properties and the New York Observer; **Alvin S. Trenk**, Chairman and CEO of Air Pegasus Corp; **Mitchell Moss**, Henry Hart Rice Professor of Urban Policy and Planning at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University; **Peter Ward**, President of the Hotel Trades Council on New York, and **David Hopkins**, Director of Aviation at the New York City Economic Development Corporation.



The Issue

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) works hard at airports to balance its security mandate with moving passengers efficiently. However, throughout the United States CBP wait times at airports are interminably long, negatively impacting the US brand and the experience among foreign travelers, and costing US travelers time, efficiency and quality of life.

The New York Issue

New York's two international airports, JFK and Newark, are among the 5 busiest points of entry in the entire United States. JFK continues to have the longest Customs wait times for any airport in the country, and Newark also consistently suffers from longer than average wait times. Both are particularly bad in peak hours, when waits can be as long as 2 hours at JFK.

The airlines serving NYC area airports have clamored for more CBP officers along with other initiatives to help ease the perpetually long wait times. So far, however, these efforts have not amounted to a substantially improved situation.

GGA Analysis

Global Gateway Alliance (GGA) analyzed the 5 busiest airports as points of international entry for their Customs Wait Times during the summer of 2013 (June, July and August) based on publicly accessible data found on the CBP Web site. These included John F. Kennedy International, Miami International, Los Angeles International, Newark Liberty International, and Chicago O'Hare International.

Our analysis was expanded from GGA's work in July, which looked at wait times at specific terminals. Instead, this analysis reviewed and averaged wait times for all international arrivals terminals at each airport.

GGA looked at average wait times, maximum average wait times, and peak wait times for all terminals. In addition, working with airline representatives and other stakeholders, GGA developed a number of recommendations for shortening Customs wait times, with a particular focus on New York area airports.

Findings

	Average Wait Time- Summer 2012	Average Wait Time- Summer 2013
JFK International Airport	26 minutes	23 minutes
Miami International Airport	17 minutes	17 minutes

Los Angeles International Airport	19 minutes	17 minutes
Newark International Airport	15 minutes	16 minutes
Chicago O'Hare	14 minutes	15 minutes

	Average Maximum Wait Time- Summer 2012	Average Maximum Wait Time- Summer 2013
JFK International Airport	57 minutes	57 minutes
Miami International Airport	45 minutes	40 minutes
Los Angeles International Airport	40 minutes	40 minutes
Newark International Airport	38 minutes	42 minutes
Chicago O'Hare	51 minutes	44 minutes

Data Breakdown

While there was a few minute decrease in the wait times summer to summer, JFK still has the worst customs wait times, with averages of well over 20 minutes at any hour of a summer day. In addition, the problem is heavily compounded when looking at maximum wait times.

For example, JFK's average maximum wait times were almost an hour during the summer of 2013. What that means is that in any hour, travelers who experienced the worst lines could expect to wait **an average of an hour**. This average maximum was at least 30% higher than any other airport in the nation.

In addition, the chart below depicts the peak times of arrivals at each airport and corresponding wait times. In August, JFK had an average maximum wait at the peak hour of 4-5 pm of **120 minutes, or 2 hours of waiting in line after a long international flight, just to get through Customs**. Although June and July show slightly lower maximum wait times at this typical peak hour, at other hours of travel, maximum averages still reached wait times above 100 minutes.

More importantly, the chart below demonstrates that all of the other peer international arrival airports have a comparable influx of passengers at their respective peak times, yet each has dramatically lower maximum wait times. Even at Chicago O'Hare, the airport with the next highest maximum, wait times were 60% lower than at JFK. And at each of the other 3 airports, wait times were about half of the maximum at JFK.

JFK

	June 2013	July 2013	August 2013
Peak Time	4-5 pm	4-5 pm	4-5 pm
Avg. Arriving Passengers	2,505	2,486	2,604
Avg. Wait Time	31 minutes	27 minutes	31 minutes
Max Wait Time	82 minutes	72 minutes	120 minutes

MIAMI

	June 2013	July 2013	August 2013
Peak Time	6-7 pm	3-4 pm	6-7 pm
Avg. Arriving Passengers	2,201	2,386	2,353
Avg. Wait Time	17 minutes	23 minutes	22 minutes
Max Wait Time	67 minutes	72 minutes	64 minutes

LOS ANGELES

	June 2013	July 2013	August 2013
Peak Time	4-5 pm	4-5 pm	4-5 pm
Avg. Arriving Passengers	2,201	1,830	1,567
Avg. Wait Time	21 minutes	20 minutes	23 minutes
Max Wait Time	47 minutes	44 minutes	64 minutes

NEWARK

	June 2013	July 2013	August 2013
Peak Time	1-2 pm	1-2 pm	1-2 pm
Avg. Arriving Passengers	1,545	1,407	1,437
Avg. Wait Time	23 minutes	21 minutes	21 minutes
Max Wait Time	62 minutes	62 minutes	58 minutes

CHICAGO- O' HARE

	June 2013	July 2013	August 2013
Peak Time	3-4 pm	2-3 pm	3-4 pm
Avg. Arriving Passengers	2,043	2,161	1,916
Avg. Wait Time	26 minutes	19 minutes	27 minutes
Max Wait Time	70 minutes	66 minutes	74 minutes

JFK, Miami International, LAX, Newark, and O'Hare are the top five U.S. airports for international passenger traffic. By now, CBP should have created initiatives at JFK to deal with this intense influx of passengers, but still waits are atrocious.

Recommendations

Automated Kiosks: Automated Passport Control (APC) for incoming passenger data collection could be key to increasing the efficiency of the CBP process. APC has already been successfully implemented in a pilot program in Chicago and Vancouver and should come to New York area airports next. Officers are wasting time by filling out and processing general customs and declaration information by hand. Not only is the officer's time wasted, but it results in massive build-ups of lines and wait times.

On-call CBP rapid response teams: There should be on-call rapid response teams at busy airports in case any particular customs line becomes too long or overbearing for the passengers or the officers. In particular, the New York area would benefit from crisis response teams that could circulate between the numerous international arrivals terminals at JFK, and between Newark and JFK, and would be able to support JFK officers during those peak hours where its wait times so far exceed those of its peer airports.

No preclearance facilities in unnecessary locations: The preclearance facility in Abu Dhabi is not helpful in the grand scheme of American tourism or international travel. With less than 600 travelers a day entering the US from Abu Dhabi, preclearance there won't make an impact on CBP lines. Funds should be used to update, modernize, and improve the customs experience at US airports and facilities first. If further preclearance facilities are considered in the future, they should be in places that promote a great deal of American tourism, provide an economic benefit, and decrease waiting times by processing meaningful numbers of travelers before they arrive in the United States.

CBP Data transparency: CBP data should be more transparent for consumers. All CBP data, particularly about wait times, should be real-time, comprehensive, and readily accessible to travelers.

More CBP officers in NYC: JFK is the largest global gateway for international airline travelers in the country, and Newark is #4. The New York region should quite simply have more officers assigned and more booths staffed to keep up with growing demand.

CBP administrative duties not assigned to officers: Passenger numbers are rising, but staffing of booths is going down or staying flat. For example, from 2010-2012 at JFK, it was found that in each terminal, only an average of 53-66% of booths were manned during PM hours. In order to help reallocate resources where needed, administrative personnel should be added to the peak shifts to handle duties other than processing travelers, so officers can man booths and move passengers more efficiently.

Better Information and Entertainment: In order to make the wait at customs a little more bearable and in many cases understandable for the foreign visitors, there need to be sources of better information and entertainment, either when leaving the plane or getting into the line. This can be accomplished by having better videos whether they welcome visitors to the NYC area, or provide information on the customs process. There might also be initiatives like live music playing in the corridor, fun activities for children, videogame consoles, or even lounges or retail areas for people to wait so that lines are better distributed and disbursed.

Conclusion

By 2030, NYC airports are expected to see 130 million annual passengers pass through their doors, up from 109 million last year. Many of those will be foreign visitors which contribute greatly to our economy or US citizens returning from a trip abroad, and they deserve an efficient and seamless entry to our country. Our customs process must evolve, adapt and expand to meet the growing need with new programs rolling out and revisiting old procedures to develop a robust entry program that works for travelers and officers alike.

