Back to the Radio: Gander Goes Voice-Only Pre-Oceanic

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- **Since the removal of Oceanic Clearances in December 2024, Gander had been issuing pre-Oceanic route amendments via CPDLC. But crew confusion over these messages has led to increased VHF workload for controllers.**
- **To help fix this, from 5 May to 31 December 2025, Gander will issue all route amendments before the Oceanic Entry Point by VHF voice only, even if the aircraft is logged on to CPDLC. All other OCR procedures remain unchanged.**

More info can be found in Canada AIP SUP 46/25. The same update has been announced via Notam too:

CZQX H1579/25 - EASTBOUND FLT IN GANDER DOMESTIC, ENROUTE TO GANDER OCEANIC, WILL BE ISSUED OCEANIC ROUTE AMENDMENTS VIA VHF VOICE IN LIEU OF CPDLC LOADABLE
ROUTE CLEARANCES. ALL OTHER OCEANIC CLEARANCE REMOVAL (OCR) PROC REMAIN UNCHANGED.
REFER TO AIP CANADA SUP 046/2025.
05 MAY 00:00 2025 UNTIL 04 AUG 16:00 2025. CREATED: 01 MAY 12:36 2025

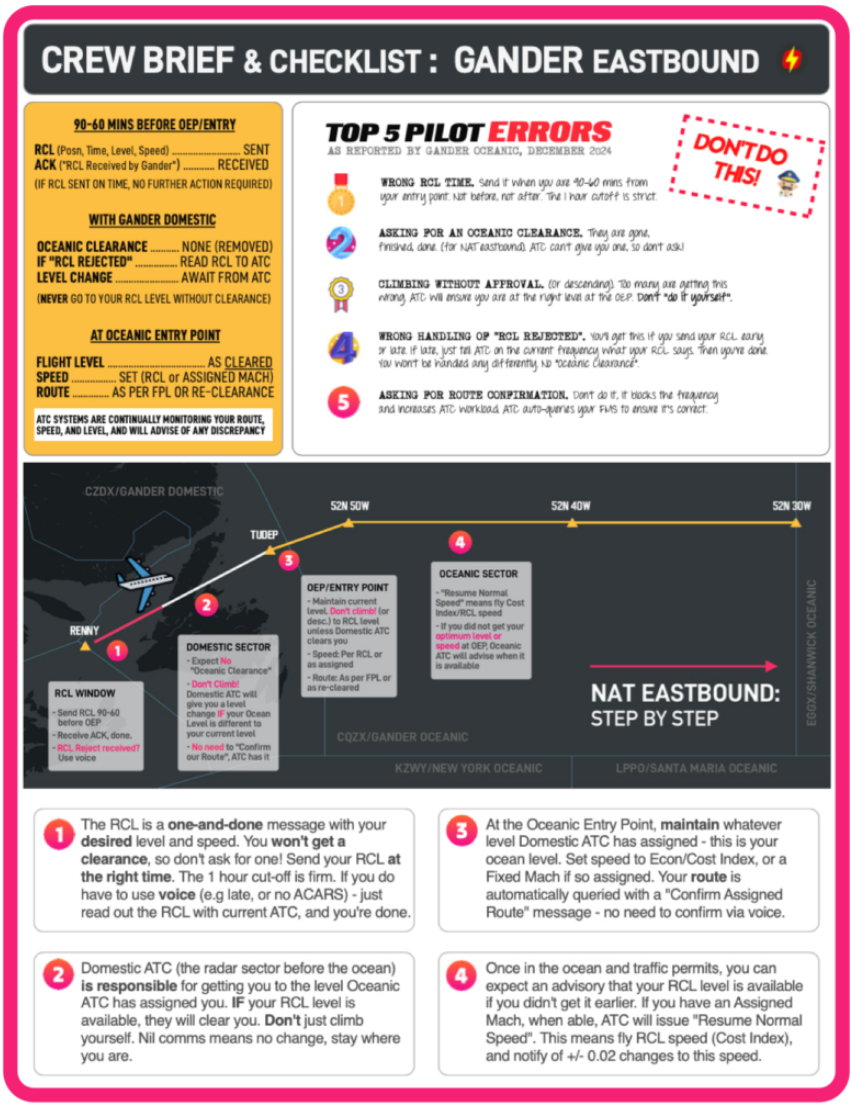
We've written before about **crew confusion and errors on the NAT following the introduction of the new "No Oceanic Clearance" procedure.**

Since 4 Dec 2024, Oceanic Clearances are no longer being issued by Gander for eastbound flights, and a new procedure is in place using the same ACARS 623 RCL message process enabling you to send your desired time, level and speed at the Oceanic Entry Point (OEP) so ATC can develop an optimal Oceanic profile for your flight.

But there have been plenty of cases of flight crew getting it wrong, the top 5 being:

1. Sending the RCL at the wrong time
2. Asking for an Oceanic Clearance
3. “DIY” level changes
4. Wrong handling of RCL Rejected messages
5. Repeated voice requests for “route confirmation” blocking active ATC frequencies due to CPDLC UM79 route clearance confusion.

We previously published this **Crew Brief and Checklist**, which you can download below:



Download the **Gander RCL Crew Brief and Checklist** (PDF, 1Mb)

⬆ All the info in the Checklist is still accurate, except for this new change from May 5: **Gander will issue all route amendments before the Oceanic Entry Point by VHF voice only, even if the aircraft is logged on to CPDLC.** Note that Moncton and Montreal will continue to issue CPDLC UM79 route amendments.

Getting it wrong

Since Canada removed Oceanic Clearances in Dec 2024, things haven’t exactly gone smoothly. Crews are confused. Controllers are overloaded. Frequencies are clogged.

The ICAO North Atlantic Implementation Management Group published this report in April 2025, which gives a bit more info about what's been going wrong. Here's a summary:

1. **Misinterpretation of "RCL RECEIVED".** Crews wrongly believe this means their requested level and speed are approved.
2. **Expectation of Verbal Clearance.** Crews continue to ask for Oceanic Clearance or confirmation, despite RCL automation.
3. **Confusion Over Clearance Level.** Crews question why the cleared level differs from what was requested in the RCL.
4. **Timing Errors.** RCLs sent too early or too late are rejected, leading to further confusion.
5. **Old Habits Die Hard.** Habits from the previous Oceanic Clearance system persist among crews.
6. **Interpretation Problems with UM79.** Some crews are reading the UM79 and thinking "direct to the Clearance limit," which is wrong.
7. **Incomplete Route Displays.** Missing route chunks – Depending on the avionics, not all of the routing shows up properly, or crews miss them.
8. **FMS Issues and Fuel Warnings.** The FMS throws up alerts. Crews wonder if something's off with the routing.
9. **Reluctance to Load Routes.** Crews hesitate to load the Clearance into the FMS without voice confirmation – they'd rather check with ATC first, just to be sure.
10. **General Avionics Variability.** Every aircraft is different – and so is how it shows the message. It's not standard, which means more chances to mess it up.
11. **Incorrect or Partial Route Loading.** Frequent errors like skipping waypoints or only partially loading Clearances – or just loading it wrong altogether!
12. **BizAv-Specific Confusion.** Not sure how true this is, but the doc says that BizAv crews in particular are struggling with strange LL coordinate formatting.
13. **Increased Voice Frequency Use.** Radio overload – all these doubts mean more calls to ATC. VHF is getting slammed.
14. **High ATC Workload.** ATC are super busy with constantly jumping in to prevent route deviations due to misinterpretations.
15. **Prevented Deviations.** A high number of potential lateral or vertical deviations are being caught just in time by ATC.

Phew! Who knew this whole *Removal of Oceanic Clearances* thing was going to be so much work!

Getting it right

In our previous post, we did attempt to draw out some straightforward guidance for crews heading eastbound on the NAT through Gander on how to get it right. But for those of us who prefer cold hard text rather than little pictures and maps, here's some step-by-step guidance:

1. **File your flight plan.** Do this as usual, including your planned route, speed, and flight level(s).

2. **Log on to CPDLC.** The Gander Domestic logon code is CDQX. Gander Oceanic logon is CZQX. No need to add anything else as the transfer of connections should be automatic.

3. **Submit your RCL.** Do this via the ACARS 623 process between 90-60 mins prior to the OEP for Gander. Remember, this RCL is a message you send to ATC telling them your desired route, level, and speed across the NAT. It's not asking for a Clearance – it gives ATC the details needed to build your optimal profile.
   Submit the RCL by voice instead of the ACARS 623 process if any of the following apply:
   – You don't have datalink capability or it's not working.
   – You're departing from an airport less than 45 minutes' flying time from the OEP (send the RCL 10 minutes prior to start-up).
   – You receive an "RCL REJECTED" message for any reason.
   – You don't receive an "RCL RECEIVED" response within 15 minutes.

4. **Expect any Oceanic route amendments from Gander Domestic via VHF voice, not CPDLC.** Between 5 May and 31 December 2025, Gander Domestic controllers will issue any route amendments via VHF voice only, even if you're logged on to CPDLC. This is a temporary change to reduce confusion, controller workload, frequency congestion and hopefully identify mitigations for the UM79 errors. Any route changes after you progress by the OEP will still be issued via CPDLC or HF by Gander Oceanic.

5. **Don't request a clearance!** There is no eastbound Oceanic Clearance anymore, so don't ask ATC to confirm your route!

6. **Don't climb!** Maintain your domestic cleared level. Domestic ATC (the radar sector before the ocean) is responsible for getting you to the level Oceanic ATC has assigned you. If your RCL level is available, they will clear you. Do not climb without a clearance! Nil comms means no change, stay where you are. At the OEP, set speed to Econ/Cost Index, or a Fixed Mach if so assigned. Your FMS routing is automatically checked with a "CONFIRM ASSIGNED ROUTE" message – no need to confirm via voice. If there's a problem, ATC will contact you.

7. **Once in Oceanic airspace…** Any further route or level changes will be issued via CPDLC or HF, as before. Once in the ocean and traffic permits, you can expect an advisory that your RCL level is available if you didn't get it earlier. Continue normal NAT procedures, including position reporting (as required), speed change notifications, and monitoring of appropriate frequencies.

Back to the Radio

For crews, these temporary changes will feel like **stepping back in time to the old school pre-CPDLC era.** After years of progress toward datalink-driven automation, we're now back to copying Oceanic route amendments over VHF – just like the old days. Until the system catches up, have your pens ready and your radios tuned – because Gander is going retro, at least for now.



What about flights heading the other way across the NAT?

Westbound flights are still fully doing things the old-fashioned way, as **Shanwick have still not removed Oceanic Clearances yet!**

They initially planned to drop these in Dec 2024, but identified some system issues at the last minute which would have created major problems in providing a full ATC service.

The latest news from them is that they don't expect to do this before Summer 2025 – and NATS will give at least 2 months' notice before making any changes.

For more on that, Opsgroup members can check this briefing.