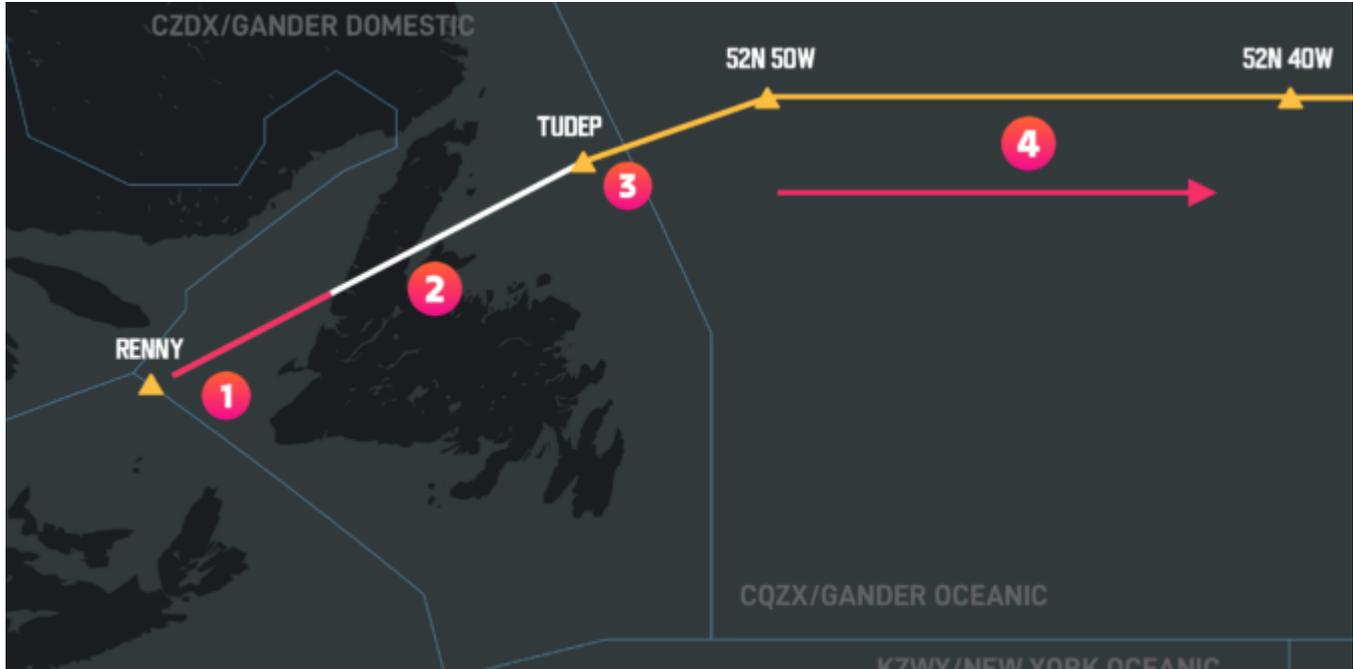


High levels of Pilot Error with NAT RCL: New Briefing and Checklist

OPSGROUP Team
12 December, 2024



The number of **pilot errors** following the introduction of the new “No Oceanic Clearance” procedure is turning out to be far higher than expected. As a result, Gander have had to implement an evening Airspace Flow Program (AFP), restricting eastbound traffic.

Since December 4th, Oceanic Clearances are no longer being issued by Gander for eastbound flights, and a **new procedure** is in place using an RCL message to send your desired time, level and speed at the Oceanic Entry Point (OEP).

However, the **very high level** of non-compliance with this new procedure is surprising and troubling. Errors by flight crew fall into a number of different categories, but can be summed up in a “Top 5”, including sending the RCL at the wrong time, asking for an Oceanic Clearance, “DIY” level changes, wrong handling of RCL Rejected messages, and repeated voice requests for “route confirmation” blocking active ATC frequencies.

A new **Crew Brief and Checklist** has been published today, which you can download below. **Please save a copy, and send to your crew and colleagues!**

CREW BRIEF & CHECKLIST : GANDER EASTBOUND ⚡

90-60 MINS BEFORE DEP/ENTRY

RCL (Posn, Time, Level, Speed) _____ SENT
 ACK ("RCL Received by Gander") _____ RECEIVED
 (IF RCL SENT ON TIME, NO FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED)

WITH GANDER DOMESTIC

OCEANIC CLEARANCE _____ NONE (REMOVED)
 IF "RCL REJECTED" _____ READ RCL TO ATC
 LEVEL CHANGE _____ AWAIT FROM ATC
 (NEVER GO TO YOUR RCL LEVEL WITHOUT CLEARANCE)

AT OCEANIC ENTRY POINT

FLIGHT LEVEL _____ AS CLEARED
 SPEED _____ SET (RCL or ASSIGNED MACH)
 ROUTE _____ AS PER FPL OR RE-CLEARANCE

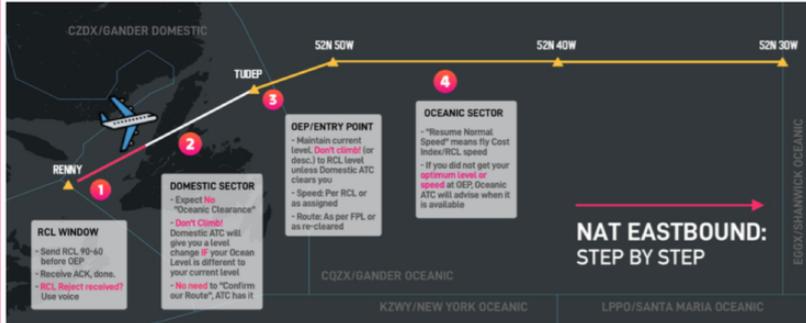
ATC SYSTEMS ARE CONTINUALLY MONITORING YOUR ROUTE, SPEED, AND LEVEL, AND WILL ADVISE OF ANY DISCREPANCY

TOP 5 PILOT ERRORS

AS REPORTED BY GANDER OCEANIC, DECEMBER 2024

DON'T DO THIS!

- 1 **WRONG RCL TIME.** Send it when you are 90-60 mins from your entry point. Not before, not after. The 1 hour cutoff is strict.
- 2 **ASKING FOR AN OCEANIC CLEARANCE.** They are gone, finished, done. (for NAT eastbound). ATC can't give you one, so don't ask!
- 3 **CLIMBING WITHOUT APPROVAL.** (Or descending). Too many are getting this wrong. ATC will ensure you are at the right level at the OEP. **Don't "do it yourself"**.
- 4 **WRONG HANDLING OF "RCL REJECTED".** You'll get this if you send your RCL early or late. If late, just tell ATC on the current frequency what your RCL says. Then you're done. You won't be handled any differently. No "Oceanic Clearance".
- 5 **ASKING FOR ROUTE CONFIRMATION.** Don't do it, it blocks the frequency and increases ATC workload. ATC auto-queries your FMS to ensure it's correct.



NAT EASTBOUND: STEP BY STEP

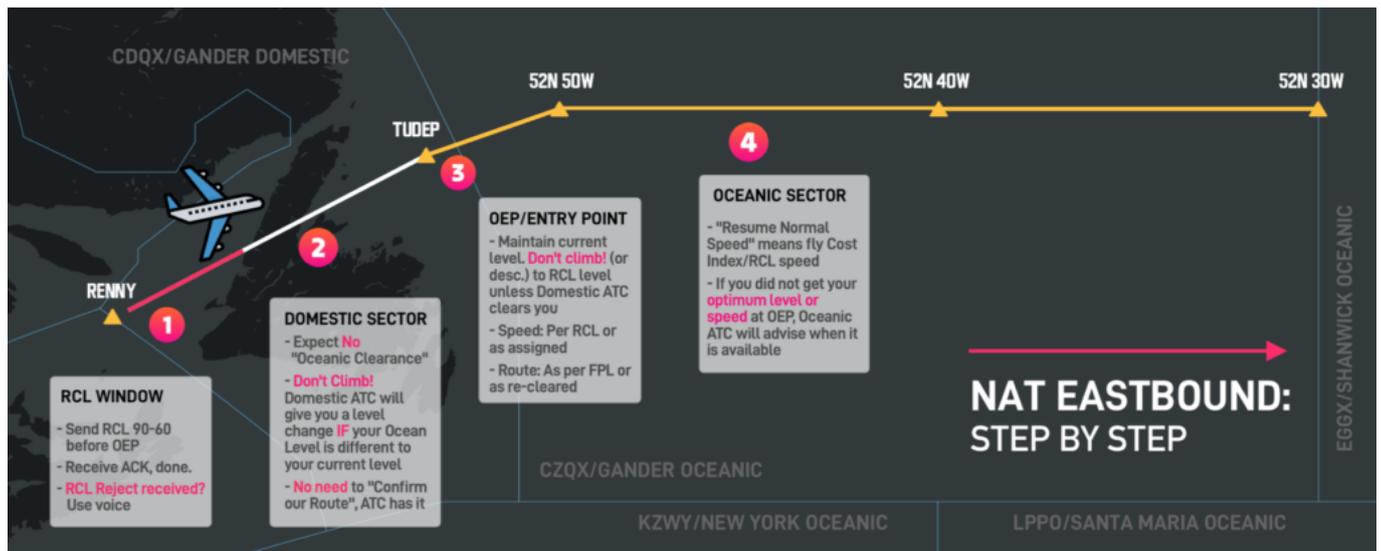
- 1 The RCL is a **one-and-done** message with your desired level and speed. You **won't get a clearance**, so don't ask for one! Send your RCL at the right time. The 1 hour cut-off is firm. If you do have to use voice (e.g. late, or no ACARS) - just read out the RCL with current ATC, and you're done.
- 2 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. **Don't** just climb yourself. Nil comms means no change, stay where you are.
- 3 At the Oceanic Entry Point, **maintain** whatever level Domestic ATC has assigned - this is your ocean level. Set speed to Econ/Cost Index, or a Fixed Mach if so assigned. Your route is automatically queried with a "Confirm Assigned Route" message - no need to confirm via voice.
- 4 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. If you have an Assigned Mach, when able, ATC will issue "Resume Normal Speed". This means fly RCL speed (Cost Index), and notify of +/- 0.02 changes to this speed.

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

Top 5 Pilot Errors

1. **WRONG RCL TIME.** Send it when you are 90-60 mins from your entry point. Not before, not after. The 1 hour cutoff is strict.
2. **ASKING FOR AN OCEANIC CLEARANCE.** They are gone, finished, done. (for NAT eastbound). ATC can't give you one, so don't ask!
3. **CLIMBING WITHOUT APPROVAL.** (Or descending). Too many are getting this wrong. ATC will ensure you are at the right level at the OEP. **Don't "do it yourself"**.
4. **WRONG HANDLING OF "RCL REJECTED".** You'll get this if you send your RCL early or late. If late, just tell ATC on the current frequency what your RCL says. Then you're done. You won't be handled any differently. No "Oceanic Clearance".
5. **ASKING FOR ROUTE CONFIRMATION.** Don't do it, it blocks the frequency and increases ATC workload. ATC auto-queries your FMS to ensure it's correct.

Notes on the RCL process



1. **The RCL is a one-and-done** message with your desired level and speed. You won't get a clearance, so don't ask for one! Send your RCL at the right time. The 1 hour cut-off is firm. If you do have to use voice (e.g late, or no ACARS) – just read out the RCL with current ATC, and you're done.
2. **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. Don't just climb yourself. Nil comms means no change, stay where you are.
3. At the Oceanic Entry Point, **maintain** whatever level Domestic ATC has assigned – this is your ocean level. Set speed to Econ/Cost Index, or a Fixed Mach if so assigned. Your route is automatically queried with a "Confirm Assigned Route" message – no need to confirm via voice.
4. **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. If you have an Assigned Mach, when able, ATC will issue "**Resume Normal Speed**". This means fly RCL speed (Cost Index), and notify of +/- 0.02 changes to this speed.

Worried about getting it wrong?

Of course, it always makes sense to double check any uncertainties, but if you can keep it off the frequency, that's very helpful for ATC. At the moment, there is a **high volume** of extra requests (which makes life hard for the controller). **Remember one key point:** ATC systems are continually monitoring your route, speed, and level, and will advise of any discrepancy. Your route in the FMS is queried by a UM137 message ("CONFIRM ASSIGNED ROUTE"), to ensure both you and ATC have the same understanding of your track, or random route across the Ocean.

If you're not certain about how the procedure works, use the Crew Brief and Checklist (developed specifically for Gander Oceanic), and refer to NAT Ops Bulletin 2023_001 Rev 4, and NAT Doc 007.

Can you share? Please do.

The quicker we can get this information out to all NAT crews, the better. **Please share** with your flight department, fleet, or operation – just **download** the Crew Brief and Checklist and pass it on.

Questions? Can we help?

If you have a question about the new RCL process, just comment below or **send us an email**. We want to help make sure that we are all on the same page!