Greenland NAT Alternates: July 2025 Update

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July 2025 Update

Radar services at **BGSF/Sondrestrom** will be ending around Nov 1, 2025. From that point, only procedural (non-radar) separation will be available. Iceland's ADS-B offers some situational awareness over Greenland but can't be used for control.

This follows the planned downgrade from tower to AFIS at the airport between Aug-Oct, driven by reduced traffic as BGGH/Nuuk expands. All controlled airspace will become Class G, with a radio mandatory zone within 20 NM below 7000ft, and FISCOM available via Nuuk FIC after hours.

RWY 27 is typically used for departures and RWY 09 for arrivals – be especially careful of opposite direction traffic. AIC 01/25 has more info.

June 2025 Update

The extensively expanded **BGGH/Nuuk** is now open, and receiving regular jet traffic.

With an operating length of 7218′ (2200m) and ILS approaches available for both runway ends, it is now a solid choice for NAT enroute alternates (and ETOPS/EDTO if that's your thing). The Greenland AIP has been updated, and you can find the current airport chart here. Both runway and apron PCNs are **67/F/A/W/T** .

The revitalised Nuuk is a whole new ball game for NAT crossings.

The airport has an **AFIS** on watch Monday to Saturday, 09:00 – 18:00 LT (11:00 – 20:00z) with RFF Category 5.

For handling, contact **Greenland Airports**: nuuk@mit.gl

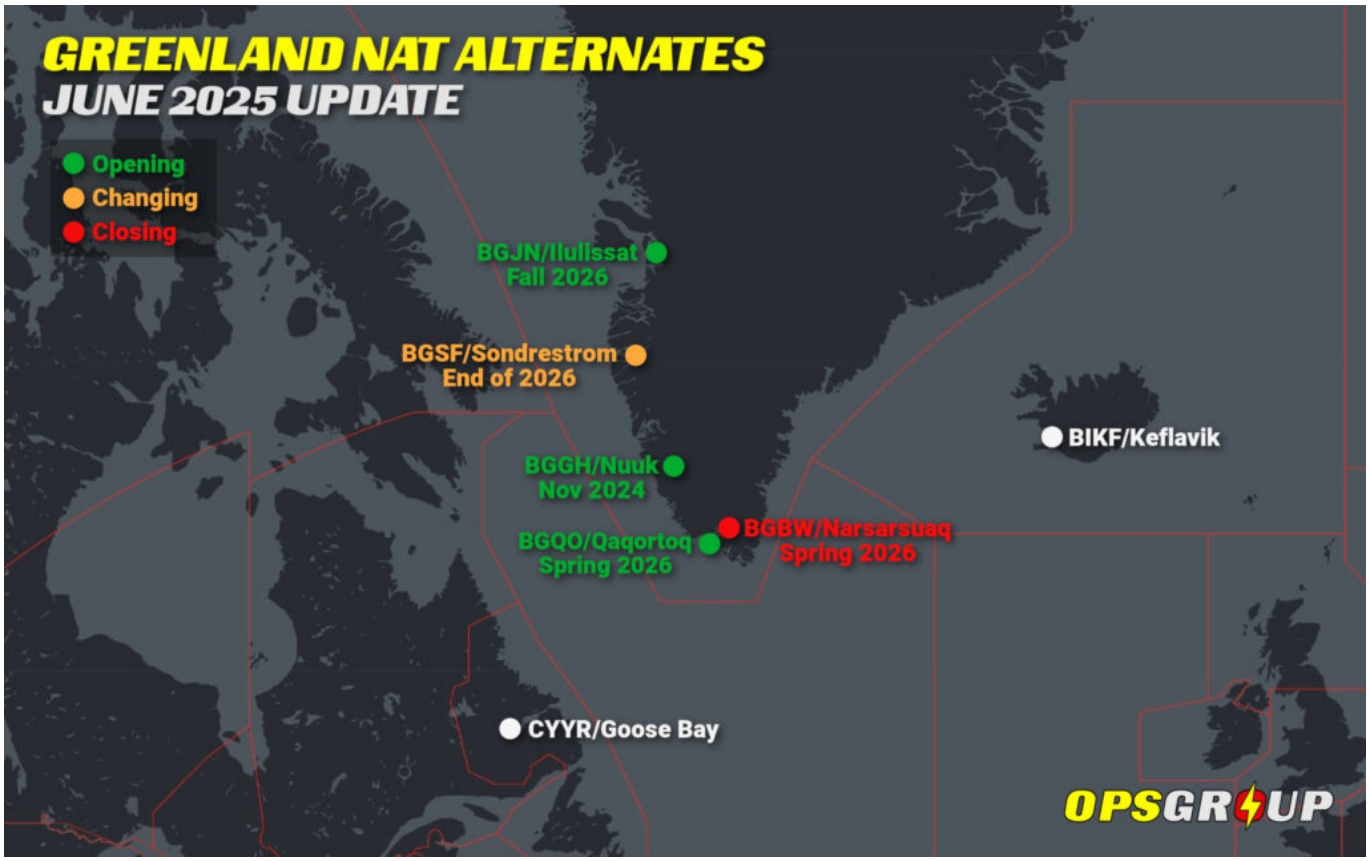
Original Article

Each day thousands of aircraft routinely cross the NAT and use airports in Greenland as enroute/ETOPS alternates – mainly **BGSF/Sondrestrom and BGBW/Narsarsuaq.**

It's big business for Greenland's major airports, but over the next few years **major changes are coming** that will directly impact on the operational use of these airports as NAT alternates.

Here's the lowdown on what's changing:

- **Opening:** BGGH/Nuuk (Nov 2024), BGQO/Qaqortoq (Spring 2026), BGJN/Ilulissat (Fall 2026).
- **Changing:** BGSF/Sondrestrom downgrading ATC to AFIS (Aug – Oct 2025).
- **Closing:** BGBW/Narsarsuaq (likely Spring 2026).



ETOPS Airports…

Before we get stuck into the finer points of what's changing at each airport, a big question many will have is: **"What airports can I use as enroute/ETOPS alternates?"**

Answering that is tricky, because it will depend on a number of factors that will be different for each operator – if the airport has a long enough runway for your particular aircraft / the necessary facilities and services / the minimum approach procedure / fire cover / weather minima etc.

But here's a quick reference table showing what's changing, and when, which *might* be helpful:

Airport	What's Happening?	When?	Rwy Length	OK for ETOPS?
BGGH/Nuuk	New runway being built	Nov 2024	2200m	Probably fine
BGSF/Sondrestrom	Possibly downgrading ATC to AFIS	End of 2025	2800m	Probably fine
BGBW/Narsarsuaq	Scheduled to close	Spring 2026	1800m	Not if it's closed!
BGQO/Qaqortoq	New runway being built	Spring 2026	1500m	Short runway, so probably not
BGJN/Ilulissat	New runway being built	Fall 2026	2200m	Probably fine

BGGH/Nuuk

Nuuk's found on the western edge of Southern Greenland, close to the NAT HLA. It's Greenland's capital city but until now, the airport has not been 'capital-sized'.

Hence why larger aircraft have not considered BGGH/Nuuk as a viable alternate due to its **short runway length (3,050'/930m) in addition to poor weather and the mountainous terrain** that surrounds it.

But things will soon get easier. A major expansion has been underway since 2019 to replace its aging runway and improve the airport infrastructure to accommodate the wide body airliners of the territory's flagship carrier who are relocating their hub there.

28 Nov 2024 has been earmarked as its full re-opening – just weeks away. **A new runway will now measure 7,200'/2200m.** Better yet, ILS approaches will be operating at both ends with much lower minimas. A new terminal building, tower and apron are already in use.



The brand new runway at Nuuk will become operational on Nov 28.

If you have any doubts as to Nuuk's viability as a well-equipped NAT alternate, it may be reassuring to hear that at least one **US legacy carrier** will also commence scheduled services to the improved airport from Newark twice a week from mid-next year.

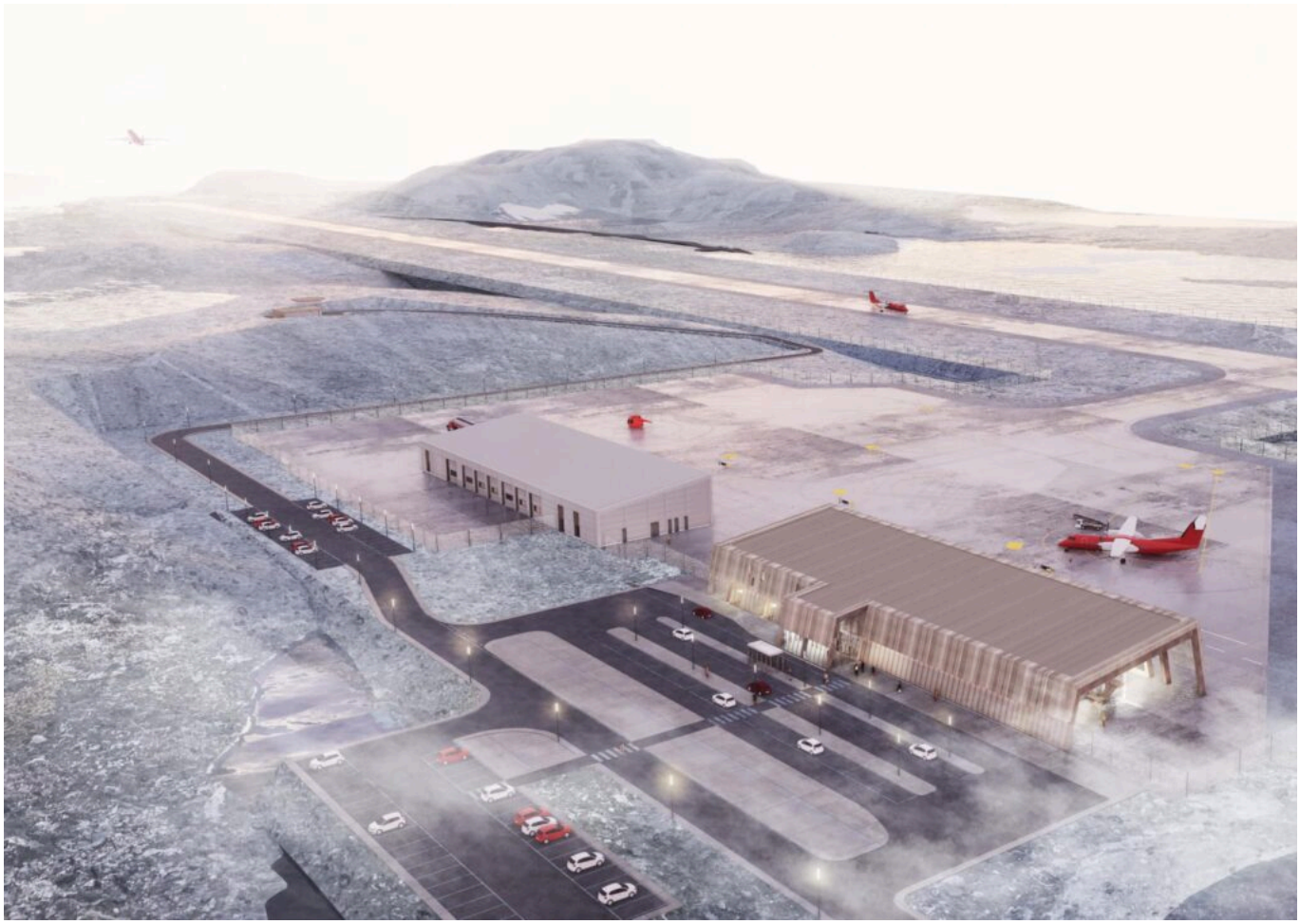
Keep an eye out for an upcoming OPSGROUP briefing on the new and improved Nuuk soon.

BGQO/Qaqortoq

A new airport will be opening in Spring 2026, **35nm away from Narsarsuaq** on Greenland's southern tip.

Right now Qaqortoq is a heliport (operating under a different ICAO code), but will **re-open with a 4,921'/1500m runway** due to a decision by Greenland's government a few years back to convert it for fixed wing traffic.

At that length Qaqortoq will likely only be an option for **small to medium sized jets**, but there is also room for future expansion to 5,905'/1800m – so watch this space in years to come. Word on the street is that it will also be equipped with both LOC and RNP approaches.



A new international airport in Qaqortoq will replace Narsarsuaq in 2026.

BGJN/Ilulissat

A new international airport is under construction which will be equipped with a **7,217'/2200m**

runway. It's scheduled to open in Fall 2026 and will replace the existing domestic airport. By in large, it will be equipped with the same equipment as the upgraded airport in Nuuk.



A new international airport is coming in Ilulissat

Next up, a look at what's happening at the existing airports BGSF/Sondrestrom and BGBW/Narsarsuaq...

BGSF/Sondrestrom

The much-improved airport in Nuuk will undoubtedly take a heavy toll on traffic levels at **Sondrestrom** – in the vicinity of a 90% reduction.

But all is not lost for BGSF as a solid NAT alternate – it will continue to operate, with almost **full services available** with one notable exception – **ATS will be downgraded to an AFIS sometime between Aug – Oct 2025.**

The **runway (9,186'/2800m)** is longer than Nuuk, and the weather much more predictable – it should remain a solid option to consider.

BGBW/Narsarsuaq

The airport is scheduled to **close in 2026!**

Despite its geographical convenience to NAT traffic, it remains a **difficult option**. For some, it is considered only in the case of extreme circumstances (such as fire).

The reason for this is predominantly **weather, and the non-precision approaches** that serve the airport. The runway itself is also short at only **5,905'/1800m.**



Narsarsuaq will remain a challenging option until its closure in 2026.

Reminder – Look out for Surprise Fees

We've written about this before, but worth a reminder.

Be careful – if you file BGBW or BGSF as an alternate after hours (overnight 20-11z or anytime on Sundays) you will be charged the better part of **$3000 USD** for the privilege of keeping standby equipment on watch, and runways clear of snow. Even if you don't actually divert there.

A little insider advice – **advance notice will reduce the cost** as it allows for cheaper planning. If you need one outside of normal operating hours, provide at least 24 hours' notice.

For regular use, operators can also apply directly for a reduction in these rates.



Keeping emergency services on standby outside of normal hours is an expensive business.

Know more about changes to Greenland Ops?

We’d love to hear from you. You can reach us via news@ops.group