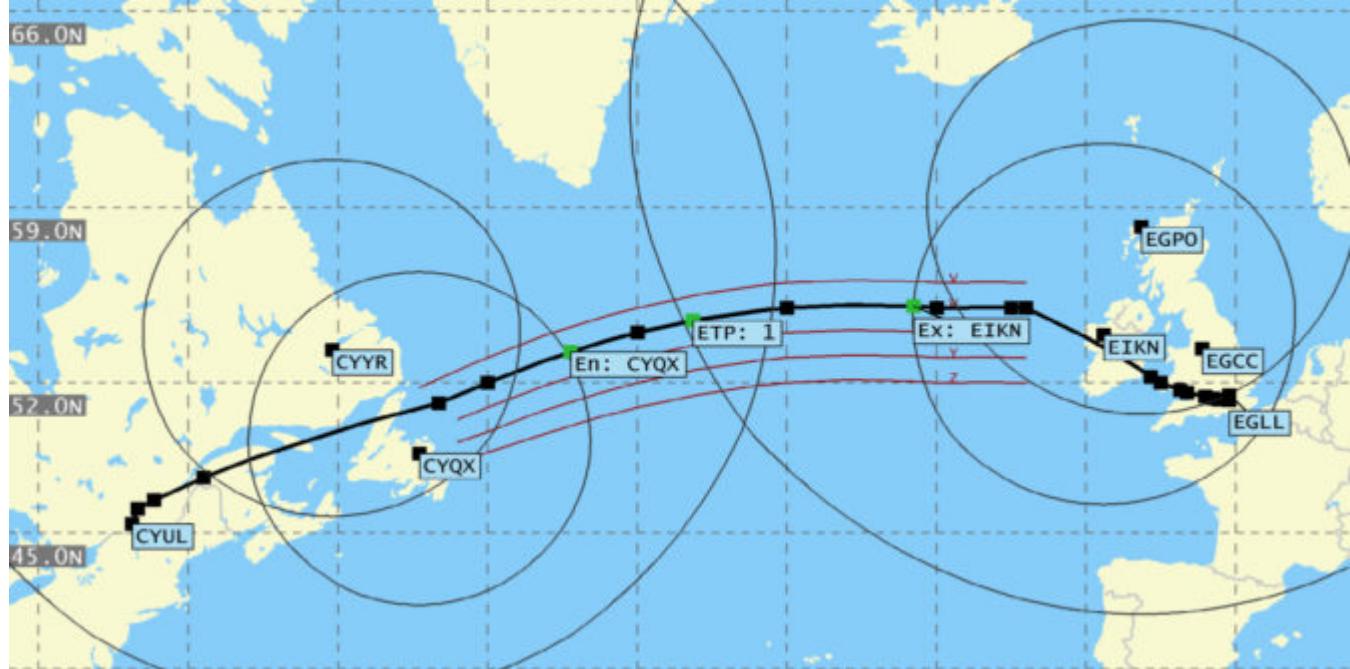


Covid impact on North Atlantic diversion airports

Chris Shieff
9 June, 2020



Planning diversion alternates is always fun – particularly when flying across **vast tracts of open ocean like the North Atlantic**. Check a few Notams, google some airport pics to work out just how scary the runway is, stick a couple of en-route alternates into your flight plan, and away you go...

The reality is it's a bit more complicated than that. For use as a diversion alternate, an aircraft operator must ensure that the airport concerned meets basic criteria to be classified as 'adequate'. In other words, **just a runway is not enough** – if only it were that simple!

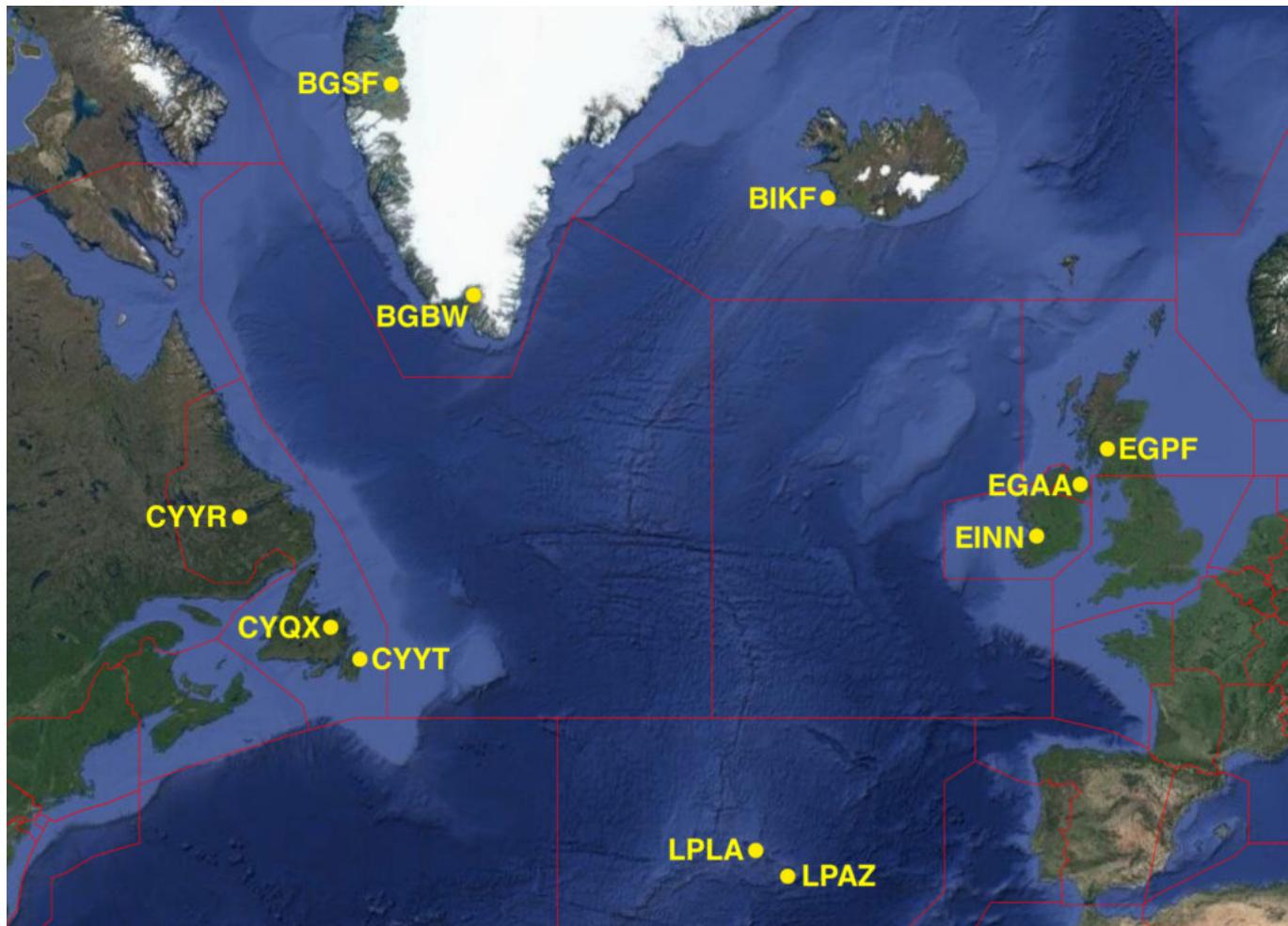
Here are the kinds of things we're interested in:

- Sufficient weather forecasting.
- ATC (or Flight Information Service) hours of operation.
- Runway availability.
- Instrument approach availability.
- Runway Lighting.
- Runway slope guidance (PAPI, VASI, Glideslope or similar).
- RFF (Rescue Fire) operational status.
- Status of facilities: refuelling, handling, parking bays etc.

During the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of airports have used the lull in traffic to undertake work that can affect their operational status. As a result, these changes may create additional **operational issues for pilots and flight planners** seeking diversion alternates that meet their requirements.

Also, due to the general chaos of Covid-19, **many airports have limited staff** which has an effect on how your aircraft, passengers and crew will be handled on the ground if you do need to divert.

Here's a summary of **changes to operational status** of airports commonly used as diversion alternates for aircraft crossing the **North Atlantic**. (Unless stated otherwise, airports listed below are open H24 for emergency diverts).



The Biggies

BGSF Kangerlussuaq Airport, Greenland – Airport is open 1000-1900z Monday to Saturday. Closed on Sundays. If you want them to stay open for you outside their opening times, you have to request it in advance – watch out for hefty fees if doing this, which get charged even if you don't end up actually diverting there. Same applies if you just casually list BGSF as an en-route alternate on your flight plan if operating out of hours. More info on that [here](#).

However, until at least June 10 the airport is classified as 'non-instrumental.' Effectively you can only use it during daylight hours in good conditions (NOTAM A0283/20 refers).

BGBW Narsarsuaq, Greenland – Similar deal to BGSF – airport is only open 1000-1900z Monday to Saturday, and closed on Sundays. And again, extra fees which get charged if filing BGBW as an en-route alternate on flight plans. RFF category 5, but grab a coffee because it requires 3 hour's notice (NOTAM A0098/20 refers). Officially, the current rules for Greenland are that crew and pax will not be allowed to disembark, not even for diverts. Unofficially, the local handler says that if a divert was to happen, they'd "find a solution".

LPLA Lajes, Azores – Several restrictions apply due to Covid. Essentially you can go there if you really need somewhere to land but expect chaos once you do. The airport is currently closed to international

arrivals unless it's an emergency. And even then you cannot disembark without permission and strict quarantine measures apply (NOTAM A1487/20 refers). Unscheduled arrivals of emergency aircraft can expect 'extensive handling delays' (NOTAM A1485/20 refers). All passengers and crew must wear face masks, and once you and your passengers leave the aircraft you will be quarantined in the local air force base (room service is unlikely).

LPAZ Santa Maria, Azores. If you have to divert there, no crew or pax are allowed to disembark. For medical emergencies, they actually recommend you go to LPLA instead!

EINN Shannon, Ireland - Aerodrome is currently only operational from 0500-2100z due to the impact of Covid (NOTAM A1062/20 refers). The airport has confirmed they are not available outside of these hours for emergency diverts - so if you're operating overnight, the nearest available H24 airports are EGAA/Belfast and EIDW/Dublin.

And watch out for these potential 'gotchas'

CYYR Goose Bay, Canada - Until June 29, runway 16/34 is closed. In strong northerly or southerly conditions, cross wind limitations may be reached - so keep an eye on your ETOPs alternate minima (NOTAM E3107/20 refers).

CYQX Gander, Canada - In case of divert, crew/pax all need to fill out a Government Declaration COVID form to stay overnight, and need to have proper PPR (Masks, Gloves and Sanitary Cleaner). RFF category 5 which requires at least 30 minutes notice.

BIKF Keflavik, Iceland - RFF category 8 from 0500-1900z, RFF category 7 from 1900-0500z (NOTAM A0123/20 refers).

EGAA Belfast, Ireland - Until June 13, RFF category 6 overnight between 1800-0600z (NOTAM A1968/20 refers). And until June 11, this is reduced to just RFF cat 4 between the daytime hours of 0600-1800z (NOTAM A1993/20 refers).

EGPF Glasgow, Scotland. Until June 16, available RFF category is 6 for the majority of the day due to staffing issues caused by Covid (NOTAM A1983/20 refers).

In other NAT-related news, the datalink mandate rules have been relaxed until the end of June, due to the fact that there's now significantly less traffic because of all the COVID restrictions. **Non-datalink mandate compliant aircraft may therefore flight plan and operate between FL290-410 until June 30.** ICAO are saying that due to the decrease in traffic, there is a significantly higher chance of flights being cleared as requested, and are encouraging operators to file and request their optimal profiles at all stages of the flight. More info on the NAT Datalink Mandate can be found [here](#).

Goose Bay: "Our runway is broken"

David Mumford
9 June, 2020



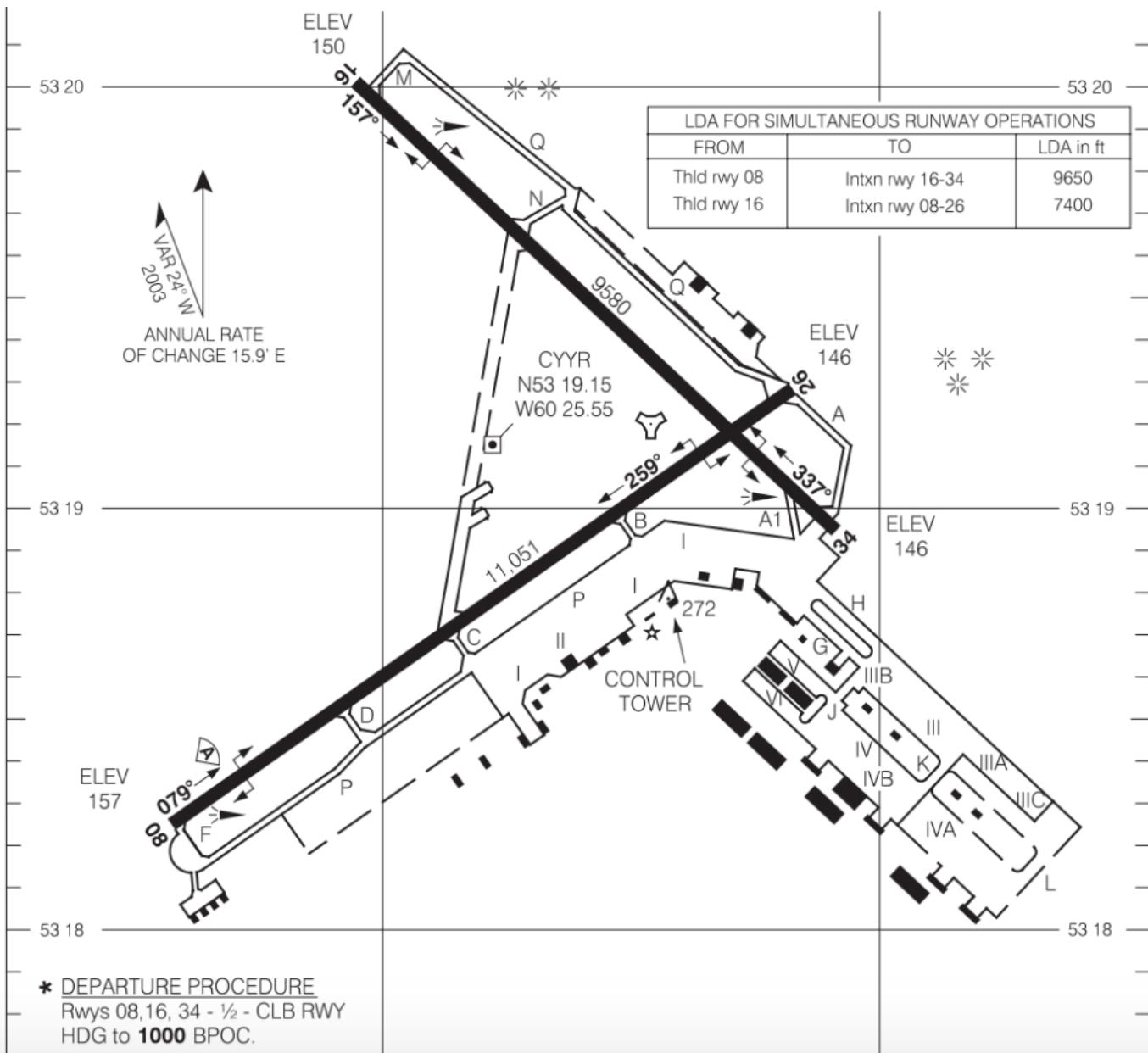
Larger jets will not be allowed to land on three out of four runways at Goose Bay for the next three months, as they've found cracks after the winter thaw.

The airport has settled on a final version of their "Our runway is broken" Notam, and it looks like this:

05/037 - CYYR RWY 08, 26 AND 34 NOT AVBL FOR ACFT WITH TIRE PRESSURE OF 1.0MPA (145 PSI) OR GREATER AND ACFT WITH ACN/PCN OF 40 OR GREATER, EXC MEDEVAC AND AVBL AS EXTENDED RANGE TWIN-ENGINE OPS (ETOPS) ALTERNATE.

21 MAY 14:01 2019 UNTIL 17 AUG 23:59 2019. CREATED: 21 MAY 14:06 2019

So not the most pilot-friendly piece of information! Unless you happen to know your tire pressure off-hand, best head for **RWY 16**, which is the only one that remains fully open and operational to all aircraft (the only reason RWY 34 is restricted is because aircraft using that runway touch-down on the intersection with RWY 08/26 - which is where some of the cracking damage has been found).



The Notam does state that the other three runways at CYYR **can still be used an ETOPS alternate**, meaning that you're allowed to divert there in an emergency regardless of size, weight, tire pressure, or ACN. However, with the deteriorating runway conditions they're also warning of possible aircraft damage due to loose sealant and asphalt:

05/038 (190206) - CYYR RWY 08/26 SFC IS DETERIORATING AND CRACKING AND MAY PRODUCE FOREIGN OBJECT DEBRIS (LOOSE SEALANT AND ASPHALT) ACFT DAMAGE MAY OCCUR. 23 MAY 18:20 2019 UNTIL 23 AUG 23:59 2019. CREATED: 23 MAY 18:24 2019

ACN vs PCN

The mention of "ACN/PCN" in Goose Bay's Notam made us close our eyes and try to imagine a world where Notams just made immediate sense.

Knowing your tire pressure is one thing, but trying to work out your **ACN number** is a much more tricky business, as it has to factor in the aircraft's maximum centre of gravity, maximum ramp weight, wheel spacing, tire pressure, and other factors. Your AFM should have a bunch of pages which tell you this (or you can have a quick look here instead).

Once you know your ACN number (or rather, 'numbers' – as there are different ACN numbers for each aircraft depending on the strength of the runway you'll be landing on), you can then check it against the runway **PCN number** – the number issued for each runway which tells you what kind of surface it is, how strong it is, and what level of stress it is able to withstand.

Ultimately, if your aircraft's ACN is equal to or less than the runway's PCN, you're good to go.

In the AIP, Goose Bay's runway PCN is **076FBXU**. The important bits here:

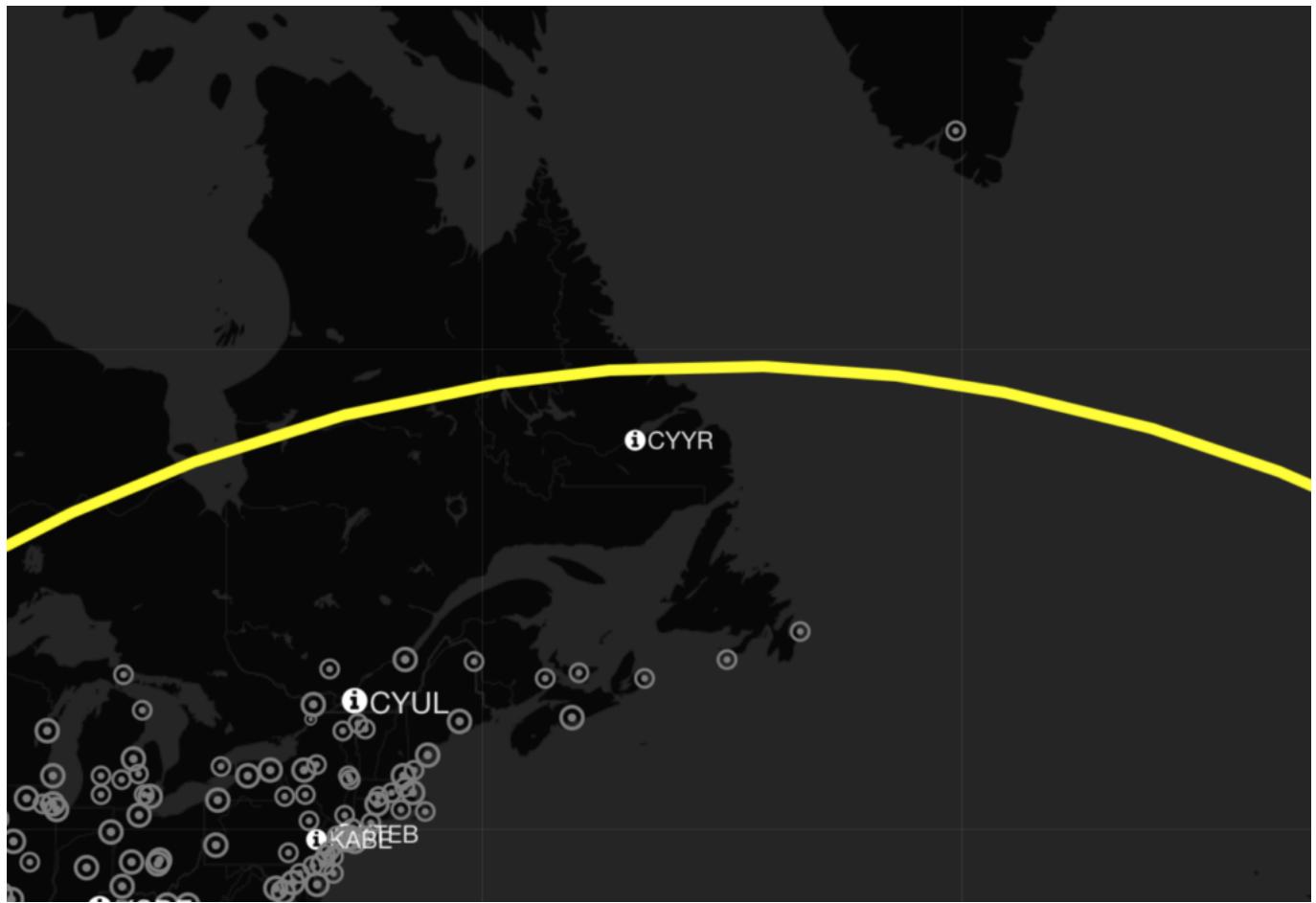
- the PCN number here is **76**
- the **F** means that the runway is 'Flexible' (i.e. made of asphalt rather than concrete)
- the **B** means it is of 'Medium' strength
- the **X** means it has maximum tire pressure of 1.75 MPa.

So, under normal circumstances, CYYR has a runway PCN of **76**, meaning most aircraft would be able to operate here:

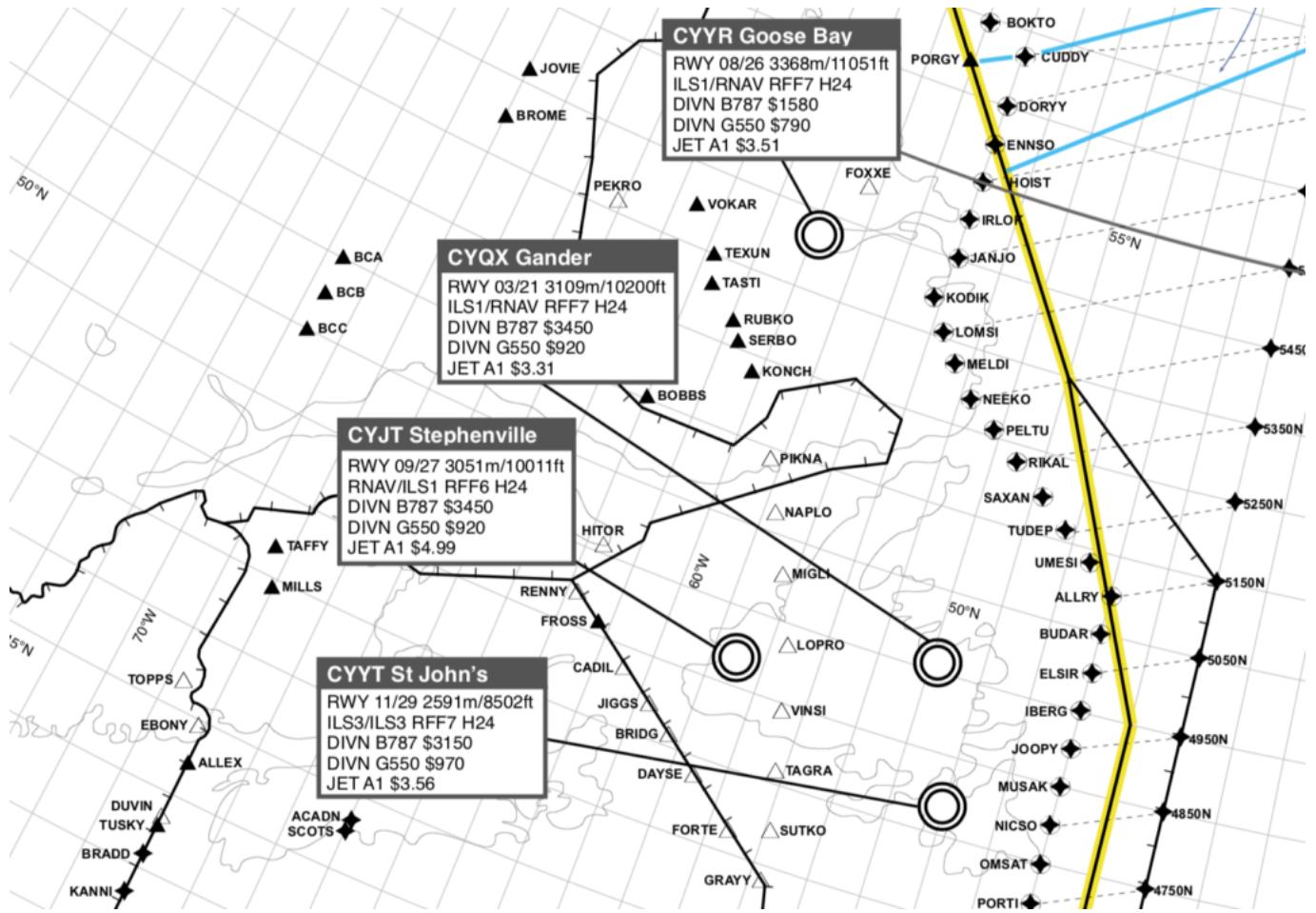
But with all the runway cracking that's been going on, Goose Bay's PCN number is no longer accurate. It's probably safer to assume the **B** is more like a **D** right now – runway strength 'Very low'. And the new CYYR Notam suggests the new PCN number is **40** (as aircraft with an ACN number higher than that are not allowed to go there).

Other NAT alternates?

A quick check on GoCrow shows us there's really nothing available to the north of CYYR:



But there are some decent options to the south:



This isn't the first time Goose Bay has had problems with its runways. In Nov 2017, the airport was closed due to **'sticky' runways** – during snow removal crack sealant was found on vehicles after they were used on the runways.

Further reading:

- United Airlines has downgraded Goose Bay Airport's suitability for diversions, after one of its flights with 250 passengers on board diverted there on 19th Jan 2019, and was then forced to spend 16 hours on the ground as there were not enough customs staff available to process everyone on board to enter Canada. Customs opening hours at the airport are 8am to midnight daily.

CYYR/Goose Bay closed - sticky runways



CYYR/Goose Bay was closed by the Canadian Department of National Defence on Nov 8, following the discovery of a problem with their runways. During snow removal operations over the past few days, crack sealant was found on vehicles after they were used on the runways. Specialists are en-route to Goose Bay to assess the situation.

Runway 08/26 has been completely closed, and Runway 16/34 has closed to all except Medevac flights, with a shortened Landing Distance Available of 7600 feet.

The Airport has said that emergency flights will be considered on a "case by case basis". However, for now, carrying CYYR as an ETOPS alternate does not make sense.