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

David Mumford
2 May, 2025

- **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.
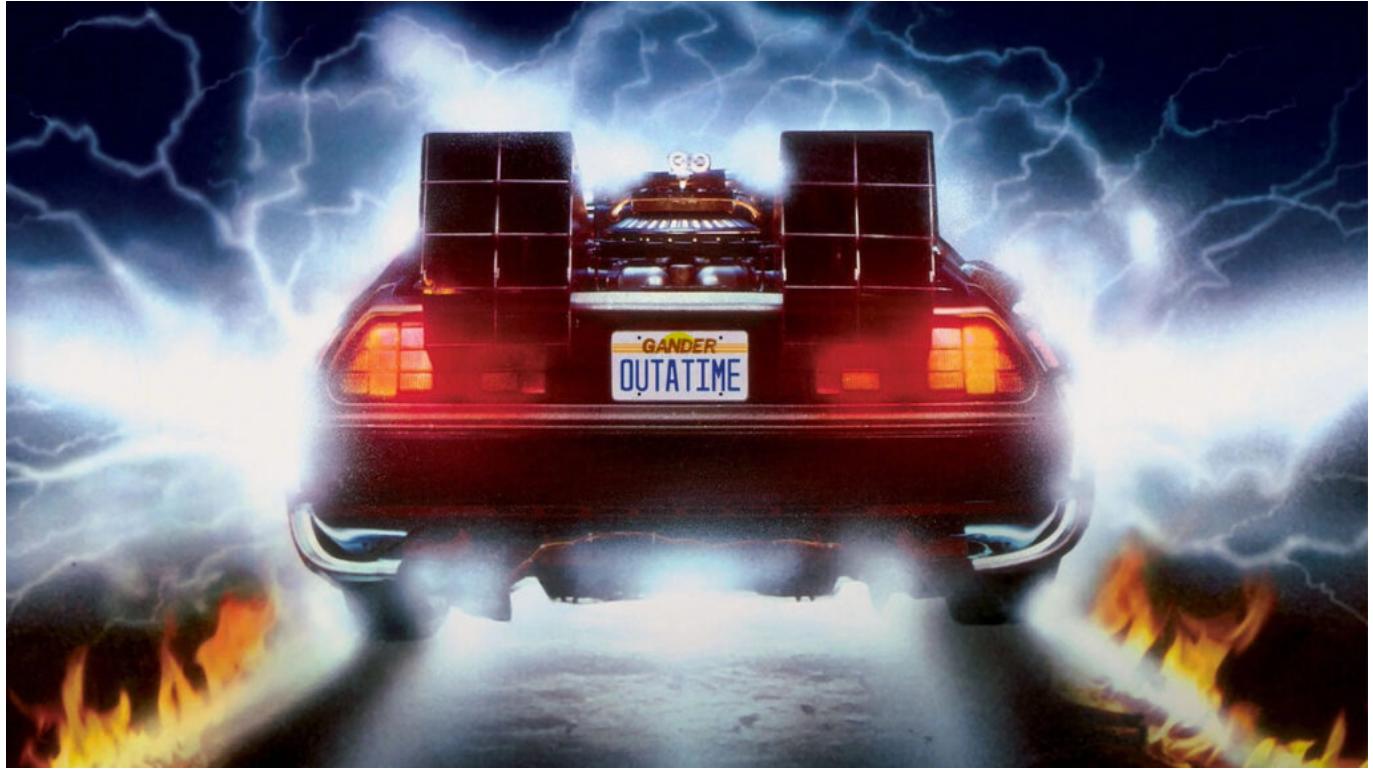
What about flights heading the other way across the NAT?

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.

Clearing the way for no more NAT Clearances

OPSGROUP Team
2 May, 2025

ICAO have released a *Concept of Operations* paper discussing the plan for the **removal of Oceanic Clearances in the North Atlantic Region**. Here's what it says…

The "Executive Summary" bit

There have been **big improvements in safety and monitoring capabilities** in the NAT region. Things like ADS-C, CPDLC, ADS-B, NATS and NAVCANADA using a common Flight Data Processor Platform (something to do with aligned procedures) etc have really improved everything.

Because of all this, the big wigs in the POG (real acronym – stands for NAT Procedures and Operations Group) have started to think about **discontinuing the Oceanic Clearance in NAT airspace.**

How does it work at the moment?

Right now, to enter NAT controlled airspace at or above FL60, you need an oceanic clearance. This clearance contains your **Route, Level and Speed**.

These three elements are important because they are what enables the management of the **lateral, vertical and longitudinal separation.**

So, when you are zooming along towards your **Oceanic Entry Point**, and despite having a flight plan filed, you still need to actually be cleared – meaning ATC have to confirm (and then you sort of reconfirm back at them) what Route, Level and Speed you'll be flying through the region at.

So you send your **RCL (Request for Clearance)** to the ATC who manages the first OCA you'll be entering and **they send you the clearance.**

Simple, until stuff goes wrong.

Why change it?

Like we said, it's all straightforward, until it isn't.

Each OCA has its own published "when to send the RCL" rules. There often isn't a huge amount of time between receiving a clearance and reaching the OEP, and during this time you have to check the clearance, possibly reprogram bits, and from experience on long haul flights, it always seems to happen

around the time the augmenting crew are returning from the bunks. **So the risk of errors creeps up.**

Then you have things like Radio Comms failures, loss of HF etc. and all the "what to do if" procedures related to what to do if you do have clearance, don't have clearance, are in the region or aren't in the region…

The general rule is **if you're already in the NAT HLA then stick with your clearance.** If you aren't in yet but have a clearance then enter and stick with it, and if you don't have a clearance then follow what is in your flight plan.

But all this does cause confusion. *Can I enter? Should I not enter? Where do I send the RCL to? When do I send it? What if I haven't heard back?*

So removing the need to request a clearance prior to entry would **align the NAT region with normal global procedures** and would mean less training and simplified procedures for crew, and everyone like simple.

It isn't actually an entirely new concept either – **New York Oceanic removed oceanic clearances** some time ago and it was a fairly simply procedural change for ATC and flight crew, so it does work.

So what will change?

Simply put – **Oceanic Clearances to operate in oceanic airspace will no longer be issued to flight crew prior to reaching the OEP**. Instead, crew would send an RCL and would get back some common message along the lines of:

"RCL RECEIVED. FLY CURRENT FLIGHT PLAN OR AS AMENDED BY ATC"

Any changes will be sent via CPDLC or advised by voice comms.

Will it work?

Well, making stuff more simple usually means less mess-ups.

In this case crew will have their clearances already – they will know what to fly and potentially have **more time to check and crosscheck.**

When changes do occur it will be clearer that there is a re-clearance and this could minimise the risk of missing a change to the clearance, or mis-entering it and flying the wrong thing.

Procedures for what to do if you cannot make contact prior to entry will also, hopefully, be simplified, so the stress of "what if I don't hear from ATC before the OEP" will be reduced.

But when is it going to happen?

Well, that's the less exciting bit. If they decide that it is something worthy of implementation then i**t will probably only go ahead by 2030.**

Details of planned **implementation dates will be published in common NAT Ops Bulletins** and in State AICs/AIPs so keep a look out.

Can I read the CONOPS paper?

Yes you can. It is right here.

Not sure about the current clearance process?

We wrote a little brief on it a while back which you can read here.

We have Clearance, Clarence

OPSGROUP Team
2 May, 2025

You carefully type it up, have the other pilot check it, then hit send... and wait... your airplane is creeping closer and closer to the Oceanic Entry Point and still no reply, and then *DISASTER! Clearance Request Rejected*! Or worse still, you just never get a response...

Here are some **hints, tips (and actual procedures)** related to **getting your Oceanic Clearance for the NAT HLA.** And what to do if you don't...

How to get your clearance.

There is a datalink mandate across the vast majority of the NAT HLA which means everything has headed towards "messages" rather than voice. Why? Because it's easier and **there is a lot less risk of mess-ups and mix ups.** So, most likely, you are going to be requesting your clearances via "message" as well. The system it goes through is generally the **Arinc 623** – the same you use for things like your D-ATS. Contrary to CPDLC, A623 exchanges don't require previous notification. But enough of that technical schtuff.

If you ttake a look through the North Atlantic section of *whichever manual* you are using and somewhere under COM and ATC Communications you will find a section on **'Oceanic Clearance Request via Data Link'.** Each OCA has its own thing to say in terms of times to send it and reverting to voice, but in general the message you want to send when requesting your clearance is the same for them all.

You need to include **Entry Point, ETA for Entry Point, Requested Mach Number, Requested Flight Level** and add **a remark (RMK/)** indicating preferred alternative (another NAT Track) and MAX FL. You

only have 80 characters available to you so don't go adding extra comments in, it will probably just get rejected.

After sending your clearance request you should receive an advisory message which says something like this –

"IF NO CLEARANCE RECEIVED WITHIN 30 MINUTES OF OCEANIC ENTRY PONT REVERT TO VOICE PROCEDURES END OF MESSAGE"

If you don't receive this within about **5 minutes** of sending the question, something has possibly gone wrong. Try sending again if you can still meet the minimum time to boundary for a request, or revert to voice.

The times you want to think about sending your RCL through at vary from OCA to OCA, as do the logon addresses, so here is a rundown of each one...
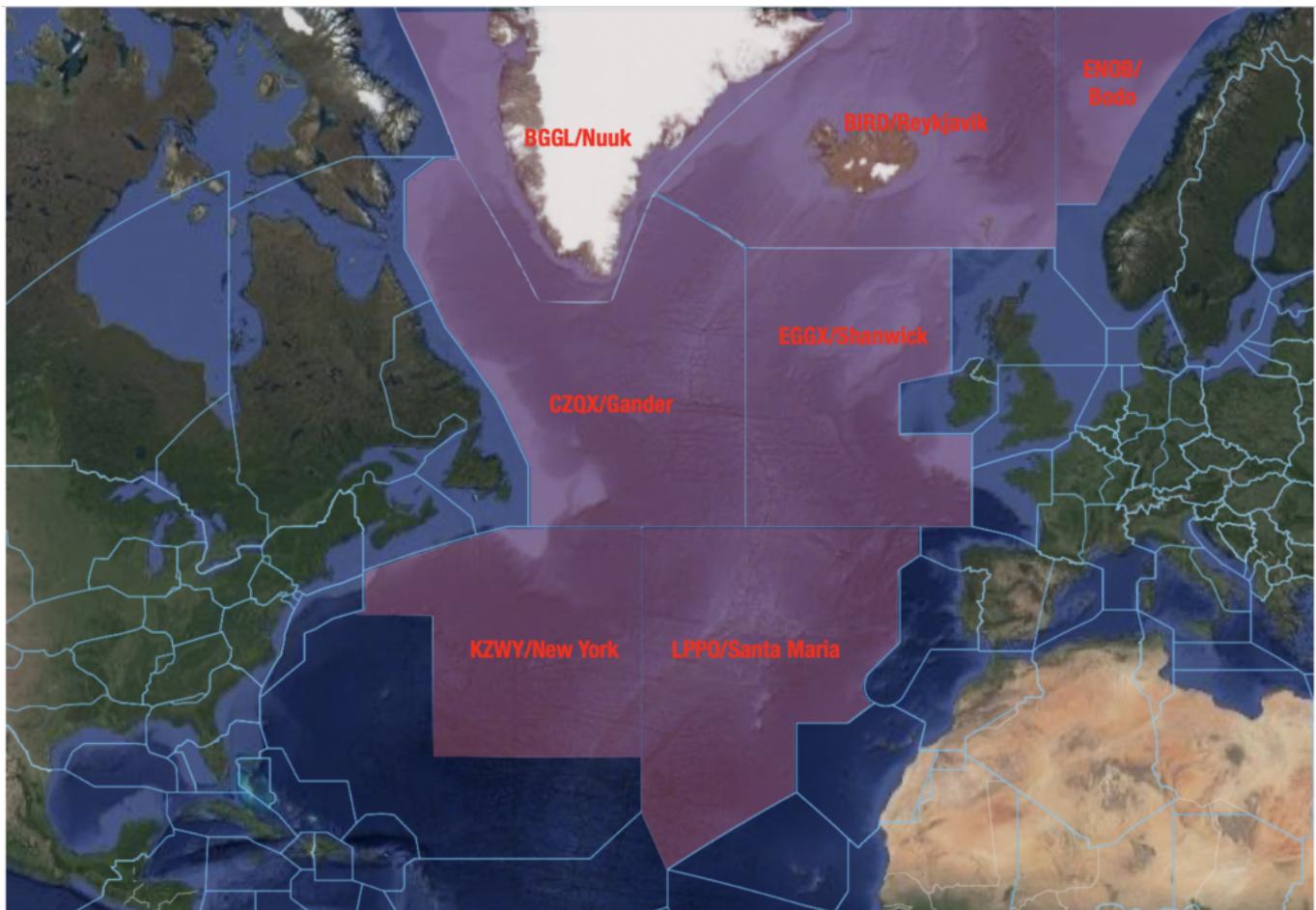
Shanwick

- The logon is **EGGX.**

- Shanwick want your request sent no later than **30 minutes** before the OCA boundary, but no earlier than **90 minutes** or they'll reject it.

- If you **haven't received your clearance** and are within 15 minutes of the OCA boundary then revert to voice. If you are East of 020W then try Shanwick Radio on 127.9 to help reduce chatter on HF. Only give HF a go if you are within 40 minutes of the boundary and having issues getting VHF signal.

- For Shanwick Oceanic you have two frequencies – 123.950 is for aircraft registered in States West of 030W. 127.650 is for aircraft registered in States East of 030W.

Gander

- The logon is **CZQX**

- The request should be sent just after the aircraft gets **within 90 minutes** of the OEP. If you don't receive the advisory message within 5 minutes, or if you haven't received a clearance and are within 30 minutes of the OEP then revert to voice.

- **Gander is a little tricky with working out which frequency to use.** It comes down to where you are routing via:

  - Natashquan 135.460

  - Allan's Island 128.450

  - Churchill Falls 128.7

  - Stephenville 135.050

  - Sydney 119.425

  - Brevvoort 132.025

  - Kuujjuaq 134.2

Reykjavik

- The logon is **BIRD.**

- How far in advance you need to request your RCL depends on where you are entering from (which CTA). The time is the minimum time from the BIRD CTA Entry Point that they should receive your RCL by and the general rule is **20-25 minutes.**

  - Stavanger (ENOR) 25 mins

  - Scottish (EGPX) 25 mins

  - Edmonton (CZEG) 45 mins

  - Murmansk (ULMM) 30 mins

- If you have Inmarsat datalink then you probably won't be able to get your clearance while **north of 82°N.** If you're on an Iridium or HF datalink system then you're in luck.

- If you have to get your clearance via voice then you can **try Iceland Radio** on VHF Primary 127.850 or Secondary 129.625. They are also on the HF B, C and D families but you're having a bad day if it's reaching that level.

Bodø

- The logon is **ENOB.**

- Request your clearance at least **30 minutes** before the NAT region boundary. Revert to voice

if you're within the 20 minutes mark on 127.725.

Santa Maria

- The logon is **LPPO.**
- Send your request **40 minutes** before the OEP. If you need to request clearance by voice then talk to Santa Maria Radio on 127.9 or 132.075.

New York

- The logon is **KZWY.**
- This works a little differently if you are routing from the US because your clearance is going to be included in your departure clearance (since you're basically in the area anyway). You can logon **30-45 minutes** before.

What to do if you don't get a clearance?

Shanwick is really the main one to worry about – having a clearance (being in contact with ATC) is pretty darned important there because it is such a big area and extremely busy.

Always give yourself time. If a clearance isn't received, try by voice. If you can't get through then try other frequencies and ATCs. If you reach a boundary without a clearance then chances are it's because you have some sort of comms loss in which case this is now your bigger concern.

In theory, you could enter the NAT HLA (aside from via Shanwick) without a clearance (with loss of comms) and fly as per your flight plan route (Mach and Levels) but it really, *really* isn't advisable.

What to do when you do get your clearance.

It goes without saying that first up you need to **acknowledge it with ATC**. After that you'll want to check it, and get the other pilot to as well. Printing it out is a good way to do this if you have that option. "Checking it" means **checking what you've been cleared to do is what you're asking the aircraft to do** via its nav computer.

Finally, make sure you really are flying it by monitoring it and doing your plotting (or equivalent) checks. You can read about that here if you're not sure how.

A helpful summary.

We created a little ***Opsicle – a refreshing bit of ops info, just for members.*** Which means if you are an OPSGROUP member you can click on the pic to get yours. This one summarises all the logon info we wrote about above!

Where is the official info?

The info is contained in AIPs, and some of it within **ICAO NAT Doc 007**.

We might have missed some things, or made a mistake so if you spot one let us know!