



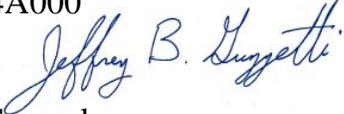
# Memorandum

**U.S. Department of  
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary  
of Transportation  
Office of Inspector General

Subject: **INFORMATION:** Audit Announcement -  
Long, On-Board Flight Delays  
Department of Transportation  
Project No. 13A3004A000

Date: March 13, 2013

From: Jeffrey B. Guzzetti   
Assistant Inspector General  
for Aviation and Special Program Audits

Reply to  
Attn. of: JA-10

To: General Counsel

Airline flight delays and cancellations continue to be a major source of dissatisfaction for travelers. In 2012, deviations from flight schedules were ranked as the most prevalent air traveler complaint to the Department of Transportation (DOT), comprising more than 28 percent of all complaints. While long, on-board flight delays<sup>1</sup> are rare, they cause passengers undue discomfort and inconvenience. For example, in October 2011 more than 100 passengers on a flight from Florida to New Jersey were stranded for more than 7 hours without food, water, or functioning bathrooms when the plane was diverted to an airport in Connecticut due to inclement weather.

In response to our 2007 recommendations to improve customer service for airline passengers,<sup>2</sup> DOT issued rules designed to increase the accountability, enforcement, and protection afforded air travelers during long, on-board flight delays. These rules require airlines to establish contingency plans to provide assurance that the airlines will not permit an aircraft to remain on the tarmac for more than 3 hours without allowing passengers to deplane, subject to safety, security, and air traffic exceptions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Long, on-board flight delays are generally considered to be delays of 3 or more hours.

<sup>2</sup> OIG Report Number AV-2007-077 "Actions Needed To Minimize Long, On-Board Flight Delay," September 25, 2007. OIG reports are available on our Web site at [www.oig.dot.gov](http://www.oig.dot.gov).

<sup>3</sup> Exceptions include (1) the pilot-in-command determines there is a safety- or security-related reason why the aircraft cannot leave its position on the tarmac to deplane passengers or (2) air traffic control advises the pilot-in-command that returning to the gate or another disembarkation point elsewhere in order to deplane passengers would significantly disrupt airport operations.

The FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012<sup>4</sup> also requires that airports establish contingency plans for long, on-board delays. In addition, the Act requires our office to assess the impact of flight delays and cancellations on air travelers, including recommendations for programs that could be implemented to address the impact of flight delays on air travelers. Accordingly, we plan to review DOT's oversight of airlines' and airports' compliance with contingency plan and other requirements relating to long, on-board flight delays. We plan to begin the audit later this month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. If you have any questions, please contact Scott Macey, Program Director, at (415) 744-0434 or Terri Ahuruonye, Project Manager, at (415) 744-0422.

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cc: FAA Chief of Staff  
RITA Deputy Administrator  
DOT Audit Liaison, M-1  
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<sup>4</sup> Public L. No. 112-95 (2012).