

## Contingency Planning for Unexpected Passenger Delays

**S**afety and reliability are critical issues in the airport industry just as price and location are in retail sales. However, unlike location, airport reliability is consistently under siege from unexpected events such as extreme weather, geological events, power outages, and security threats. Any of these can result in excessive passenger delays and irregular operations (IROPS). Appropriate planning and coordination between the various organizations involved in air transportation can mitigate the severity of irregular operations. IROPS require non-standard actions from a variety of aviation service providers. *ACRP Report 65: Guidebook for Airport Irregular Operations (IROPS) Contingency Planning* (2012) is a resource to assist

airports in the development of irregular operations contingency plans in close collaboration with all service providers. *ACRP Report 65* features numerous resources that can be customized to the user's specific airport. These resources include guidance on the topics to include in a plan, checklists, worksheets, sample agendas, and a sample IROPS plan. As with any successful initiative, the development and usefulness of an IROPS plan require a point person, or IROPS Champion, to facilitate the coordination between all service providers and the creation of an airport's IROPS plan. An IROPS plan is a dynamic plan that should grow and change over time as new situations are encountered and lessons are learned that can improve future actions.

quick response when an event occurs. Additionally, Mr. Rak remarked that "*ACRP Report 65* is scalable to all airports organizing important documented plans of cooperating organizations into one, easy-to-use resource." The IROPS Plan for FWA includes a checklist for diverted aircraft, gate use plans, runway use plans, aircraft specifications, and individual plans for airlines and concessionaires. The FWA IROPS Plan was developed for numerous unexpected events; however, one event type was a regular occurrence – flight diversions – that could benefit from formalized plans. The formal documented plan was seen as an opportunity to provide quality customer service while streamlining communication efforts as the situation develops. Particularly during a diversion event, this plan ensures a high level of service to existing airport customers as well as those on the diverted aircraft. FWA schedules post-event conference calls with stakeholders to review lessons learned during the event that will later be incorporated into a bi-annual review of the plan and an annual IROPS workshop – these activities ensure that the IROPS plan is relevant, current, and state of the art.

Airport staff at Fort Wayne International Airport (FWA) in Indiana have developed and implemented an IROPS plan based on *ACRP Report 65*. Daniel Rak, terminal services supervisor for FWA, noted that the value of *ACRP Report 65* is that it enables diverse airport stakeholders to document their individual plans and develop a cohesive, comprehensive plan for the airport that would allow for a

Buffalo Niagara International Airport (BNIA) has also developed and implemented an IROPS plan based on *ACRP Report 65*. The IROPS Plan for BNIA includes a communication flow chart for information sharing, consolidated tracking of actions during the event, defined support for passengers, and resources. The defined areas of coordinated support for passengers include: (1) support for deplaning passengers, (2) sharing facilities, and (3) providing a sterile area for passengers who have not cleared U.S. Customs and Border Protection.



Right:  
Aircraft diversion to  
Fort Wayne International  
Airport on July 5, 2012.

Photo courtesy of Dan Rak.



**IROPS Contingency Planning**—continued

The passenger support defines roles and activities for airlines, airport staff, the FBO, concessionaires, and the FAA while the passengers are onboard, deplaning, and in the terminal. A resource inventory beyond the initial planned shared use includes a listing of ground equipment, mats, food, water, and fuel that can be requested during an IROPS event.

Tom Dames, airfield superintendent at BNIA, values the role of contingency planning and communication: “Before the plan, many of our associates were not well prepared for irregular operations. The contingency plan has eliminated the fear of having to support an IROP activity alone and with little experience. Now, the amount and frequency of communication across the airport’s departments, the airlines, and supporting resources has increased for each diverted flight. This communication flow has led to several well-supported diverted flights that probably would have

been delayed on the apron for additional minutes under the inefficient practice.”

Understanding an airport’s current response capabilities is an important step in the development of an IROPS plan. *ACRP Report 65* provides detailed checklists and tables to assist with the compilation of existing IROPS event response capabilities. The following topics and related components provide a summary of the type of information that should be included in the capability documentation:

*Availability of Services during an IROPS Event*

- Existing procedures.
- Airport’s goals for service to passengers and other customers.
- Contingency response procedures.
- Coordination with other local service providers.

*Coordination of Services during an IROPS Event*

- Challenges of coordination between two or more service providers.
- Challenges dependent on whether it is a departure or arrival.
- Steps to improve the availability of service.

*Pre-position of Resources Required during an IROPS Event*

- Necessary resources.
- Arrangements/procedures for shared resources.
- Steps to ensure passenger’s needs are met during extended stays in the terminal.

*Sharing Situational Information during an IROPS Event*

- Type of information being shared.
- Mechanism for sharing information.
- Use of the information by each service provider.

Left:

*Irregular Operations Contingency Plan* report covers for Fort Wayne International Airport (top image) and Buffalo Niagara International Airport (bottom image).

**Better Customer Service through Collaboration**

“The purpose of the Buffalo Niagara International Airport IROPS response management process is to identify and document actions requiring coordination between two or more aviation service providers. Joint actions are identified that reflect both current individual contingency plans and areas of recommended communication, collaboration, and coordination between service providers.”

*Buffalo Niagara International Airport Irregular Operations Contingency Plan*

- Additional beneficial shared information.
- Coordination procedures for service providers to assist each other during an extended delay, diversion, or special mobility event.
- Procedure to report the effectiveness of the response to meeting passenger needs during an event by each service provider, individually and collectively, to establish lessons learned and improve response.

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