

31 December 2006

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[Sport](#)  
[Travel](#)  
[Weather](#)  
[2012 Olympics](#)  
[London Local](#)  
[Entertainment](#)  
[TV & Radio](#)  
[Message Board](#)  
[Video Nation](#)  
[In Pictures](#)  
[Webcams](#)  
[Features](#)  
[Junior Football](#)  
[Faith](#)  
[Children in Need](#)  
[RaW](#)  
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You are in: [London](#) > [Travel](#) > [Features](#) > Fog travel chaos enters third day

## Fog travel chaos enters third day

### Christmas travellers face a third day of misery as thick fog leads to more flight cancellations and delays.

BA is advising its passengers booked on domestic flights to call 0800 727 800 for more information before travelling to Heathrow.

More than 300 flights have been cancelled at Heathrow, including all British Airways domestic flights, with 40,000 people expected to be affected.

Train firms laid on extra services to cope and the roads were generally flowing smoothly on Friday morning.

And there was a note of optimism as the BBC Weather Centre said visibility would improve at Heathrow on Saturday.

Low visibility had caused air traffic control to place restrictions on flights landing and taking off at Heathrow, where 300 passengers slept at the airport overnight.

One traveller said: "I've been here basically since Wednesday night, and I got rebooked three times and all my flights have been cancelled so far.

"So right now it's Friday morning and I don't know how much longer I'm going to stay here."

The BBC's Lucy Wilkins at Heathrow Airport said queues of people continued to file into the heated marquees set up in Terminal One, hoping to have their cancelled flights rescheduled.

Some were optimistic they may leave soon, while others were resigned to a long wait for news of their onward journey.

BA transported about 3,000 passengers to UK destinations from Heathrow by coach on Thursday.

And the airline was laying on similar services again to Newcastle, Manchester, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh on Friday.

Thomsonfly departures from Coventry Airport have been switched to Birmingham due to fog, which has also caused disruption at Cardiff and Southampton airports.

Other regional airports have suffered knock-on effects from Heathrow.

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Geoff Want, BA's director of ground operations, apologised to customers and said that the airline was "working around the clock" to try to get people to their destinations.

BA announced it would be operating a reduced short-haul schedule because of the fog on Friday, and passengers on long-haul services were warned they may also face delays of several hours.

BMI, Heathrow's second-busiest airline, has cancelled eight flights so far, adding to the 40 scrapped on Thursday.

Chief executive Tim Bye said if necessary the airline would fly on Christmas Day to get people back home.

But Simon Baugh, from airports operator BAA, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that the main problem at Heathrow was one of capacity.

He added: "It's the world's busiest international airport, we only have two runways, if you compare our main competitors in Europe, Frankfurt has three, Paris has four, Amsterdam has five.

"We have fundamental capacity constraints at Heathrow."

With flights cancelled, many travellers have turned to trains to complete their journeys.

Virgin Trains and GNER, which both run services between London and Scotland, have announced they will be offering extra trains.

Network Rail said there were still some seats available on other services and advised passengers to contact National Rail Enquiries.

Edward Funnell, spokesman for the Association of Train Operating Companies, told Today that rail services would cope.

"Many of the long-distance operators lay on extra services and we believe we will be able to cater for air passengers who wish to transfer to the trains, to get people away and home today but also tomorrow and Sunday."

Eurostar said its services to Europe were running as usual, but passengers were also warned to contact the company before travelling to check if seats were available.

last updated: 22/12/06

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