

**WORKING DRAFT**

**Town Hall Meeting  
Patriot Express**

(25 March 2010)

A USFK J4 hosted "Town Hall Meeting" on Patriot Express was held at the Army Community Services Center, USAG-Yongsan Korea on 25 March 2010 from 1800-2015 hours. The meeting was attended by 46 personnel representing the Services, Spouses, family members, and DOD civilians.

The meeting was facilitated by COL Bruce Ferri and Major Clint Cash, USFK J4 Transportation Division. SMEs in attendance included:

Col Kevin Lamberth	USTRANSCOM LNO
Col J.C. Penny	Cdr, 731 <sup>st</sup> AMS
COL Ashton Hayes	USFK, PMO
COL Bruce Ferri	USFK, J4 Trans Div
COL Thomas Honadel	Cdr, 106 <sup>th</sup> Med (VS)
COL Dave Hall	Cdr, USAG-Y
Lt Col Thomas Battles	EUSA, G1 Manpower
Maj Ken Mercier	USFK, J1 Policy/Programs
Mr. Vincent Bailey	IMCOM, CTO

Major Cash provided general information and background on the Patriot Express in order to set the scene for discussion.

Previously, the PATRIOT EXPRESS provided service to Korea for many years. Due to DoD budget cutbacks, the service was terminated in Korea on 1 Oct 2005. PE service remained in Japan in a reduced capacity. Europe maintained a reduced capacity with the closing of bases reducing the passenger flow.

With the Tour Normalization and Transformation initiatives undertaken by USFK, more command sponsored service members and families will be stationed in Korea for longer periods of time. Additionally, the eventual drawdown and return of current operating locations will consolidate Areas 1 and 2 populations into Area 3. This relocation from Seoul drives the requirement to have a transportation system that minimizes force protection concerns associated with using Incheon International Airport for large numbers of personnel and the increased travel time to and from Camp Humphreys.

It is the USFK Commander's intent is to improve quality of life for Service Members, Civilians and families in Korea; increase Space Available opportunities; and provide additional options for official travel.

**What is Patriot Express?**

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The *Patriot Express* (formerly known as *Cat B* or "*Freedom Bird*") is a USTRANSCOM contracted commercial charter mission that provides support for duty travelers and their family members.

PE flights are international charter flights on a regular basis to and from commercial airports (AMC commercial locations) and/or military terminals.

These flights offer an array of in-flight amenities and operate the same as scheduled commercial airlines. The *Patriot Express* is also an excellent provider of troop morale by providing "Space A" Travel opportunities to and from the United States.

**What kind of aircraft does Patriot Express fly?**

Patriot Express flies modern 767 and 757 commercial aircraft with commercial crews, music, movies, and the normal amenities associated with Business Class service. The legroom is comparable to United Airlines "Economy Plus" seating.

**What amenities are available on Patriot Express?**

Patriot Express provides many amenities. Meals are comparable to business class meals and special meals such as kosher, children's, diabetic, and vegetarian can be ordered with 24 hours notice. Hot towel service is provided prior to meal service. Children receive a fun kit with games, puzzles, coloring/drawing material, and pilot/cabin attendant wings. The latest box office movies are shown and headsets are provided free of charge. A variety of up-to-date magazines are also offered for reading pleasure.

**What is the flight schedule and aircraft route?**

The first weekly mission to Osan will be on Mondays and Tuesdays. This flight will be on a 767 aircraft.

The second weekly mission to both Osan and Kunsan will operate a 757 aircraft until the end of September. Starting in October, this mission will become a 767 as well, and eliminate the fuel stop in Alaska.

Current routing is:

Mon/Tue Route: (767) Seattle – Misawa - Osan - Misawa – Seattle

Wed/Thur Route (757) Seattle – (Anchorage for fuel) - Yokota - Osan - Kunsan - Osan - Yokota - (Anchorage for fuel) - Seattle

**What are the baggage limitations?**

Each passenger is authorized two pieces of baggage not to exceed 70 pounds each and 62 linear inches (sum of length/height/width). Bags larger than 62

linear inches and/or heavier than 70 pounds will be counted as two pieces and checked baggage exceeding the free weight criteria will be counted as an extra piece for each increment of 70 pounds.

Items exceeding 100 pounds and/or 80 linear inches will not be accepted, and must be moved as freight. Piece rate prices can vary depending on your destination but will not exceed \$103.

Carry-on baggage must fit under the seat or stowed in the overhead bin. Approximate dimensions are 9" x 14" x 22" for a total of 45 linear inches. Items that appear to be large or irregularly shaped, will not be accepted for main cabin storage and will be tagged and placed in the belly of the aircraft.

### **What happens if I exceed the Patriot Express baggage limitation?**

You will be charged for excess baggage on Patriot Express by the carrier. For the first three or four months, you will have to pay any charges in cash – the terminal at Osan is currently not able to process credit card transactions. If you expect to have additional baggage, ensure that you have this annotated in your travel orders. This is a reimbursable expense IF in your travel orders. Passengers flying Space A are not authorized excess baggage.

### **What happens when I arrive in the United States and the airline on my connecting flight has a lower baggage limitation?**

Most airlines will work with you if you are on orders and there is an excess baggage charge. Additional baggage authorization must be in your orders. If charged, you will be reimbursed for this expense on official travel.

### **What happens if I miss my connecting flight?**

For delays within the control of the carrier, (maintenance or late arrivals) that extend over a meal period, manifested passengers will receive a meal voucher for a hot meal and transportation to/from the meal area. If the delay requires an overnight stay, the carrier will provide meals, transportation, and billeting (hotel vouchers).

If you miss your flight because of a carrier delay, North American Airlines will provide unaccompanied passengers the opportunity to stay in a separate room. If passengers miss their connecting flight because the mission was delayed at any point and arrived at the passenger's manifested destination two hours or more after scheduled arrival or the passenger receives their baggage late, the contractor will reimburse passengers for any penalty fees imposed on them by the commercial airlines in which they have onward transportation. Contact the airline for reimbursement. You will need a copy of your AMC boarding pass and documentation from the airline charging you this fee.

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If delays are caused by anything that is not within the control of the carrier, (weather or Air Traffic Control), the Government assumes responsibility for all manifested passengers during these delays. If this type of delay requires an overnight stay, then lodging, to include transportation to/from, is provided. Meals are the responsibility of the traveler. Meals and incidental expenses are reimbursable through official travel per diem.

**For delays can we contact the connecting airline to relay that we will be late?**

There is an on-call North American airlines rep at SEATAC and they will work connecting flights for duty passengers.

**Is it mandatory to use Patriot Express for PCS and TDY travel?**

Yes; DOD Guidance, the Defense Travel Regulation, mandates the CTO must book the PE as the **First Option** for official travel from overseas locations when available. It also outlines the order of precedence for booking if the PE does not meet the needs or has negative mission impact.

**If I buy my own tickets, will I be reimbursed for official travel?**

No. Unless it is authorized in your PCS orders. In accordance with the Defense Travel Regulation and the Joint Federal Travel Regulation, the Commercial Travel Office must be used for all official travel. If government procured transportation (Patriot Express) is directed, no reimbursement is authorized.

**If I get a cheaper ticket price will Gov reimburse me?**

No. The Government has already paid for the Patriot Express. Example: If there are 130 seats available, the first 130 people going to CTO (without an exception to policy) will be booked on Patriot Express. The flight you are given will depend on mission needs and your DEROS.

**How many people do you expect to serve each week?**

Less than 400, for two flights a week. Keep in mind that there are also Japan passengers as well. What TRANSCOM has done is take the current Japan legs and expanded it. If in the future, if we can demonstrate that we have the passenger load, we may be able to get a direct Osan to Seattle routing upon annual validation w/ USPACOM and USTRANSCOM. We will constantly be evaluating. The Alaska stop will disappear when we get the 767s for that second flight-more fuel efficient aircraft.

**Can I still take leave en route?**

Yes, leave en route is authorized in your PCS travel orders. The only difference is that any cost beyond the official (space-required) routing will be paid for by the traveler.

Those wanting to take leave while returning to the States you can still do this, but will be responsible for additional cost over routing to next duty location.

**What if I want to stop in Hawaii en route for leave?**

You can still do this if you are authorized leave enroute or booked on commercial travel because of an exception to policy. The CTO will book you on a commercial flight, and you will be required to pay any cost beyond the original routing.

**How much of a window do I have in selecting a travel date on a PCS move?**

DoD policy allows for a 10 day window. The Commercial Travel Office (CTO) will work with you to get flights within your window.

**Can I ship my pet via Patriot Express flights?**

Not currently. The US-ROK SOFA Joint Subcommittee is currently working the issues to allow pets (Cats/Dogs) on Patriot Express, but until this is approved, personnel with pets will have the option of shipping the animal back or flying commercial with the animal. At this time, you can only bring pets into Korea via ROK International Airports (i.e. Incheon).

**What costs are associated with flying Space Available?**

There is a minimal fee for using Space Available travel. The current fees are roughly \$27 from Korea to Seattle. From the US to Korea is only about \$15. These fees are customs/immigrations and arrival fees charged by US airports and normally covered in the price of an airline ticket.

**What are the Space Available check-in times?**

Duty Passengers must present themselves 6 hrs prior to departure with all travelling in the party and have their travel documentation with them. Duty Passengers are offered 'Early Bird' Check-in up to 24 hours prior to departure, and Space-A roll call will be 3 hours prior to departure.

**What is "Early Bird" check-in?**

'Early Bird' check-in is a program offered at Osan's AMC terminal that allows booked (duty) passengers to check their bags and obtain boarding passes/seat selection early.

The Osan Terminal will be open 24 hrs prior to mission departure. The entire party does not need to be present at this point; but must have all required travel documentation. The traveler is issued seat selection, boarding pass, and baggage tags. The day of the flight, all travelers must report with travel documentation and present themselves to the Passenger Service personnel.

### **What are the benefits of ‘Early Bird’ Check-in?**

Those passengers taking advantage of “Early Bird” check-in will have a later show time day of flight, they will be able to check their bags early – no need to lug bags. They will enjoy a much better seat selection, with a better chance to get preferred seats, and will experience reduced waiting times to check in.

### **If I am leaving Korea in the next month or so, is it certain that I will be booked on Patriot Express?**

Outbound projections show that the bulk of passengers leaving over the next 30 weeks are non-command sponsored. CTO will let you know whether you are going to be booked on PE or commercial. The booking process at CTO starts 60 days before flight, so there is a little catching up for the system to do. In any event, CTO will book you all the way through to your PCS destination.

### **Will there be a 1RC reception desk at Osan?**

There will be at the new Pax Terminal. In the meantime there will be an Army representative there to ensure you are met on your arrival at Osan. EUSA is currently working transportation plan – specific details forthcoming.

### **How will you handle 240 people with one customs agent?**

Customs will be smooth – the Korean customs will surge as required and they have experience with 2005 operations. The schedule is now one aircraft in on one day, one out on the next – this should not overwhelm customs.

### **There are no baggage carts from my taxi to the gate?**

We have 11 now and are shopping for more. The distance between the taxi drop and the inside of the terminal is very short. The new terminal will have carts.

The 731<sup>st</sup> Air Mobility Squadron Commander, Col J.C. Penny, presented a detailed briefing on Space-A travel. Following his briefing, the following Space-A related questions were fielded.

### **Is Space-A travel for military only?**

The Space A benefit is available to our DoD civilians and DoDDs teachers, so this is not just limited to military passengers.

**Can the AMC Terminal at Osan and Kunsan show what is available up and down the west and east coasts for Space-A?**

We will work with other military terminals to make this information available. Our passenger representatives have contact information for all of the other MAC terminals. A Patriot Express link will be available on USFK and Area webpages. We will work with PAO and AFN to ensure the Space-A schedule is publicized.

**If I buy my own tickets to JFK, will the government reimburse me for travel from JFK to my new duty station?**

The government will reimburse you the cost to fly from Seattle to your new station. You will need Circuitous travel authorized on your orders, and be sure that leave authorized is in your orders.

**Will teachers be above DoD in Space-A categories?**

Only if going back for training.

**Can we sign up for Space-A early – I want to go in June, can I sign up now?**

You may sign up for Space-A only after you are in a leave status. You will be completing with all others who have signed up for Space A for that day. Signing up by email is best – bring a copy of the email because it is date stamped, and if you have any problems it is a good reference document.

**Can I register for my return trip at the time I register for Space-A?**

Yes, and at the terminal we will give you the Space-A email address for other locations. Ensure you have a Command Sponsored letter if your children are traveling without you.

**What is the limit on Environmental Leave Travel (EML) travel?**

For EML you can travel 2 times within each 12 months.

**Are there guaranteed seats on Space A?**

There is no space blocking for Space-A.

**Can I get on at Osan, fly down to Kunsan, and then retain my Space-A seat back to Osan?**

You will have to re-compete for your seat in Kunsan to get back to Osan. Also be advised that all passengers require a seat.

**I plan to go to the States with my 3 children in the month of Jul. How do those months look for Space A travel generally?**

Jun, Jul and Aug are the busiest months.

**Can I take my non-command sponsored children Space-A from Korea?**

No. Children must be command sponsored to travel Space-A. Non Command Sponsored Family members are authorized space available travel with the sponsor at the sponsors eligibility category. Unaccompanied (Non Command Sponsored) family is authorized 1 round trip, not to exceed 30 days, to the sponsor's duty location.

**Where do you land if you travel Space A to the PI?**

There are not routinely scheduled flights into the PI.

**There are not many transportation means between 11:00 and 06:00. Will there be any assistance travelling from Yongsan to Osan to get on the Space-A list at 0600?**

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army is looking at this now. Be sure to take a letter with you from your commander stating you have authorization to move around during curfew hours.

COL Ferri brought the meeting to a close with a summary of the "Way Ahead."

We go live with this mission on 5 April. However, we realize we still have some work to do to be completely prepared and USTRANSCOM does not "expect" us to fill all the seats initially. We are working the publicity piece with Public Affairs to reach all areas – there is AFN spot being aired tonight. We are fully engaged with the components to ensure the reception goes as smoothly as it does when flying into Incheon. We expect there will be a great deal of space available for the next few months to many of those leaving in that time frame will already be booked via commercial means. We will also be performing annual revalidations. The more ridership we have, the better able we are to hopefully receive direct flights versus having to stop in Japan. We also continue to work the pet issue.

I would like to thank each of the panel members and the community members who took the time to participate tonight. The minutes from tonight's meeting will be posted on USFK page, Facebook, the USAG-Y page and others, for those members who were not able to attend in person. We will continue to work hard to resolve those unsettled issues, and will continue to work to improve Patriot Express service to our community.