

Airport Security Fast Lane Closes

Service that expedited pre-screened travelers' clearance shuts down

The Clear Registered Traveler lane at Albany International Airport, which offered pre-screened travelers an expedited trip through the security checkpoint, is no longer operating. Clear clients signed up at \$100 or more a year and submitted to background checks, iris scans and fingerprinting. Now they will have to stand in line along with others waiting their turn to be screened.

When Clear, operated by Verified Identity Pass Inc., began operating here in 2007, Albany International was among the first airports in the nation to offer the expedited screening. The service eventually expanded to 18 airports.

Clear posted a brief announcement on its Web site late Monday that said it had ceased operations, adding that Verified "has been unable to negotiate an agreement with its senior creditor to continue."

Clear, under a five-year contract, paid the Albany County Airport Authority a minimum of \$90,000 annually to operate here.

Airport Authority CEO John O'Donnell said Tuesday the airport received no advance notice of the shutdown, but he did get a call late Monday advising him that "there will be no refunds" for Clear travelers, which he called disheartening.

Clear was relatively current on its payments to the airport, owing \$3,700.

"It's a revenue stream we're going to miss," O'Donnell said. And while Clear travelers were disappointed about not getting refunds, he said they were at least as upset about losing the service, which sent them to Transportation Security Administration checkpoint more quickly.

"People spoke very highly of it," O'Donnell said.

One of those was Mathew Tully, who flies at least three times a month. Founding partner at Colonie law firm Tully Rinckey PLLC, he used the registered traveler lanes in at least 15 airports.

"I love the service," he said Tuesday afternoon. "It did save me a little time in Albany but in larger airports like Orlando and Denver it saved me a considerable amount of time.

"The best feature is they had a concierge-type service that would not only allow me to expedite the security line but also helped unpack my bags and speed me through the metal detectors," Tully said.

Media critic and Court TV founder Steven Brill launched Clear in 2003 as the Transportation Security Administration sought ways to speed security checks.

Brill, who left the company in February when a group of investors took control, did not provide any specifics about why it shut down.

"I can only speculate about the causes of the company's demise," he told The Associated Press.

"What I do know for sure, however, is that the need for intelligent risk management hasn't diminished, and that programs like Clear should have a role in our future."