

# Aviation: the day the snow didn't come

Air travellers in New York are wondering what all the fuss was about: threatened with a foot or more of snow starting around rush-hour yesterday morning, airlines cancelled flights. But when it eventually fell - much later than expected - there was only an inch or so on the top of telephone booths in Times Square and even by 11:45pm the temperature was only just below freezing with no more snow falling.

Early yesterday morning, Continental announced that in anticipation of extreme bad weather, it would cancel all flights out of Newark, New Jersey; Delta cancelled 65 flights. United had cancelled 70 flights the previous day and was reviewing the situation - there had been no serious weather then, either.

By late evening, the roads around Newark showed little sign of weather-related disruption with the New Jersey Turnpike flowing normally, according to the local authority's traffic cameras and, on Murray Street at the airport junction, rain but little snow.

Weather reports say that there is a 100% chance of snow of between 3 and 5 inches overnight Thursday with more on Friday - but none of it as severe as previous warnings.

Over at JFK, at midnight, the FAA says that there are no delays reported.

With both temperatures and depth of snow easily within operating limits, passengers are wondering why their flights were cancelled.

"There's no snow to speak of," said one traveller whose flight was cancelled. Asked if he would have preferred to have gone to the airport and waited for hours, he said "I guess not."

Which explains the airlines' dilemma.

A foot of snow dropped in a couple of hours, as predicted, would have paralysed the airport with planes needing to be diverted on the way in, or parked unable to take off with thousands of passengers, some checked in, hovering in the airport.