

# Facial Recognition Boarding Passes for Airlines



**Weekly Ethicacy**

**10/6/22**

Qianhui Vanessa Zou

Rachel Kaufman

**MacKenzie Chung Fegan** @mackenzief · Apr 17, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

I just boarded an international @JetBlue flight. Instead of scanning my boarding pass or handing over my passport, I looked into a camera before being allowed down the jet bridge. Did facial recognition replace boarding passes, unbeknownst to me? Did I consent to this?

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Tweet your reply

**JetBlue** @JetBlue · Apr 17, 2019  
Replying to @mackenzief  
You're able to opt out of this procedure, MacKenzie. Sorry if this made you feel uncomfortable.

**MacKenzie Chung Fegan** @mackenzief · Apr 17, 2019  
Replying to @JetBlue  
Follow up question. Presumably these facial recognition scanners are matching my image to something in order to verify my identity. How does @JetBlue know what I look like?

**JetBlue** @JetBlue · Apr 17, 2019  
Replying to @mackenzief  
The information is provided by the United States Department of Homeland Security from existing holdings.

**MacKenzie Chung Fegan** @mackenzief · Apr 17, 2019  
Replying to @JetBlue  
So to be clear, the government provided my biometric data to a privately held company? Did I consent to this? How long is my data held by @JetBlue? And even if I opt out at the scanners...you already have my information, correct?

**JetBlue** @JetBlue · Apr 17, 2019  
Replying to @mackenzief  
We should clarify, these photos aren't provided to us, but are securely transmitted to the Customs and Border Protection database. JetBlue does not have direct access to the photos and doesn't store them.

**MacKenzie Chung Fegan** @mackenzief · Apr 17, 2019  
Replying to @JetBlue  
Would love more info about how my image was matched to a name on the flight manifest. I looked at the camera & a few seconds later the gate opened. Was my image, in the space of those seconds, sent to CBP, run through a database, matched to a name, and then sent back to @JetBlue?

**JetBlue** @JetBlue · Apr 17, 2019  
Replying to @mackenzief  
You can learn more about the process here: [bit.ly/2LONph1](https://bit.ly/2LONph1).

**MacKenzie Chung Fegan** @mackenzief · Apr 17, 2019  
Replying to @JetBlue  
"There is no pre-registration required." I'll say! This press release really doesn't tell me anything about how it works. @EFF, can you shed some light on this? How concerned should I be?



**MacKenzie Chung Fegan** ✓ @mackenzief · Apr 18, 2019

...

Replying to @JetBlue and @EFF

"It took her photo, comparing her picture to a preloaded photo database of all the passengers with tickets on this flight." It sounds like opting out isn't really an option. I can not go through the scanner, but my data will have already been accessed and loaded into a database.



58



284



2,046



### Original Tweet:

[https://twitter.com/mackenzief/status/1118509708673998848?s=20&t=NJxWEJ-3ud3\\_q-yK313UQg](https://twitter.com/mackenzief/status/1118509708673998848?s=20&t=NJxWEJ-3ud3_q-yK313UQg)

### Links from JetBlue:

<http://mediaroom.jetblue.com/investor-relations/press-releases/2018/11-15-2018-184045420>

<https://www.wbur.org/news/2017/06/21/jetblue-facial-recognition-pilot>



# HOW IT WORKS

1. CBP obtains the passenger manifest for each flight.
2. CBP scans a number of government databases to assemble photographs for each passenger. Photos can include passport and visa photos as well as photos “captured by CBP during the entry inspection” and “from other DHS encounters.”
3. CBP compares face recognition patterns derived from those database photos to live photographs taken by a camera at the boarding gate.



# POSITIVES

- Streamlines the airport experience for passengers:
  - No need to keep track of passports, licenses, or boarding passes
  - Faster than manually checking documentation
- Aids in national security
  - CBP has a Congressional mandate to collect biometric data
  - More thoroughly tracks visa overstays
  - Photos of international visitors can be checked against FBI and terrorist watch lists
- Citizen photos are held for only 14 days
  - Helps with analyzing system functionality
  - CBP already has biometric photos of all US citizens who travel via passport
- Data is encrypted and held for 24 hours, and airport cannot send it anywhere
- Voluntary system: US citizens have the right to opt out

# NEGATIVES

- Facial recognition is “the most dangerous biometric”
  - Unreliable and biased, particularly for POC
  - Widely and easily subject to scans w/o knowledge or permission
  - Subject to “mission creep” if normalized
  - Helps CBP do their “job,” but the job is flawed and abusive
- Risk of having traveler data hacked and exposed
  - Best security practices are left to privatized security companies subcontracted by each airport; DHS has disclosed that some passenger photos were recently taken in a data breach
  - The government can create a digital identity for you and track you without your consent or knowledge, with NO current regulation
- Unnecessary and expensive
  - Initial reports show it doesn’t reduce traffic at security checkpoints
  - Often ends up relying on confirmation checks by humans anyway
- The current system is opt-out (rather than opt-in) and photos are still part of CBP gallery they created prior to the flight

# SOURCES

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<http://mediaroom.jetblue.com/investor-relations/press-releases/2018/11-15-2018-184045420>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/06/10/your-face-is-now-yourboarding-pass-thats-problem/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/07/travel/biometrics-airports-security.html>

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<https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/airports-facial-recognition/index.html>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/airline-news/2019/08/16/biometric-airport-screening-facial-recognition-everything-you-need-know/1998749001/>

<https://www.aclu.org/news/privacy-technology/whats-wrong-airport-face-recognition>