Subject: Airport Facility Directory (AFD) Depiction of Traffic Pattern Altitudes

Background/Discussion:
Many years ago, the standard traffic patterns at airports was 800’ AGL. The FAA has published in the Aeronautical Information Manual a recommended traffic pattern of 1000’ AGL This is only referenced in figure 4-3-2:

EXAMPLE-
Key to traffic pattern operations

1. Enter pattern in level flight, abeam the midpoint of the runway, at pattern altitude. (1,000’ AGL is recommended pattern altitude unless established otherwise. . .)

Sometimes traffic pattern altitudes appear in the A/FD, sometimes they do not.

Recommendations:
1. Publish all traffic pattern altitudes or
2. Only publish those traffic pattern altitudes that are non-standard, i.e. different than 1000’ AGL.

* See example on next page.
Comments:

Submitted by: Randy Coller
Organization: Michigan DOT – Airports Division
Phone: 517-335-8521
E-mail: collerr@michigan.gov
Date: March 4, 2013
MEETING 13-01: Valerie Watson, AJV-3B, briefed the topic on behalf of the submitter. Valerie stated that currently the FAA is not consistent in reporting traffic pattern altitudes (TPA) in the AFDs. In the past, the FAA only reported TPAs when they were other than 1000 feet above ground level (AGL). Now, there are a large number of 1000 ft AGL traffic pattern altitudes reported, especially in certain parts of the country. If even the standard is reported, what does this mean for airports without a published TPA? Valerie reported that the AFD data is pulled directly from NASR. If there is a value in the NASR TPA field, it will be published in the AFD. In her view, a decision needs to be made at the data level (NASR) whether ALL TPAs will be databased & published, or if they will only be published by exception to the 1000 ft AGL standard. She asked the group for input.

John Moore commented that the TPA altitude of 1000 ft AGL is only a recommendation, not a specified standard. Valerie restated her question – should the FAA publish all TPAs or only those in exception to the recommended 1000 ft AGL?

Lev Prichard, APA, suggested that only those airports that have TPAs other than that recommended in the AIM be published. Lev emphasized that the FAA AIM guidance on TPAs is what pilots have to refer to in knowing what is considered the standard TPA of 1000 AGL at an airport. There was general agreement to this position.

Curtis Davis, AJV-21, stated he was unaware of current NASR practice, but would research and report back.

It was the general recommendation of the group that NASR only database TPAs that differ from the recommended 1000 ft AGL. Pilots, when no TPA is published, will revert to that recommended.

STATUS: OPEN

ACTION: Curtis Davis, AJV-21, will research to determine if NASR is putting in the recommend TPA of 1000 feet AGL for all airport entries and will report back on the findings at the next ACF.

MEETING ACF 13-02:

Valerie Watson, AJV-3, reviewed the topic. Chris Criswell, AJV-22, provided an update on actions taken since the last ACF. Chris stated that in discussions with the FAA Office of Airports, AAS-100, the FAA Form 5010 is the source for all traffic pattern altitudes. What appears on the 5010 is the responsibility of the Office of the Airports. Chris stated that NASR ingests the 5010 information, databases it and then disseminates the data as submitted. Chris emphasized that NASR will not edit or adjust data submitted and that to truly fix the issue, the 5010 will need to be altered/modified.

Brad Rush, AJV-3, stated that the last time the FAA Order 5010.4 Airport Safety Data Program, was revised was 1981. Brad added that the Order/Forms only require the airport to identify airports that have nonstandard traffic patterns. There is no requirement in the current order to provide 1000' pattern altitude information.
Valerie stated that apparently the Office of Airports is NOT reporting only nonstandard pattern 
alitudes, as there are numerous instances of the recommended 1000’ traffic pattern altitudes in 
NASR and these values presumably came from the 5010 source.

A discussion followed, with one solution being, that since NASR databases some standard 
pattern altitudes, but not all, the Airport Facility Directory team could cull the 1000’ traffic pattern 
alitudes out manually.

Bob Carlson, AJV-322, commented that such an approach would require the AFD team to vet 
all data published in the AFD, thereby losing the production efficiency gains made by the recent 
automation of the publication.

Rich Boll, NBAA, reminded the audience that while GA aircraft generally fly a standard pattern 
alitude of 1000’ above ground level (AGL), that altitude is primarily for single engine, piston 
aircraft. Twin engine and turbine powered aircraft have a standard pattern altitude of 1500’ AGL, 
as referenced in the AIM – Paragraph 4-3-3. Rich inquired as to how those other standard 
alitudes are handled in the 5010. Rich added that if the data is going to be captured that “we” 
(i.e. the General Aviation community) will want to see them as separate attributes in the AFD 
and to not have the information buried within the remarks section of an airport entry.

John Collins, GA Pilot, inquired as why the AFD team couldn’t put something in the AFD that 
states that standard GA recommended altitude is 1000’.

Valerie responded by stating that this type of information is referenced in the AIM and that the 
AFD is not the place where pilots should be looking for such guidance material.

Chris reemphasized that the big issue is the data itself and the need to have the right data 
entered into the system.

The consensus of attendees was that ALL traffic pattern altitudes should be collected by the 
Office of Airports, databased in NASR and published in the AFD. Support for this decision was 
strengthened in light of the fact that the “recommended” or “nonstandard” altitude differs 
depending on aircraft type.

**STATUS: OPEN**

**ACTION:** Chris Criswell, AJV-22, will work with Office of Airports to collect **ALL** traffic pattern 
alitudes. Chris will report at the next ACF.
MEETING 14-01:

Chris Criswell, AJV-22, reported that, per ACF recommendation, all traffic pattern altitudes, standard and non-standard, will be added into NASR for all airports. This will be a day forward implementation beginning in July 2014.

Valerie Watson, AJV-3, stated that this issue will remain open pending implementation.

STATUS: OPEN

ACTION: Chris Criswell, AVJ-22, will report on the progress of populating all traffic pattern altitudes at the next ACF.

MEETING 14-02

Valerie Watson, AJV-344, briefed the previous ACF consensus that ALL traffic pattern altitudes, whether considered “standard” or “recommended”, should be both captured in the NASR database and published in the AFDs. Steve Brisbon, AJV-211, briefed that NFDC has not yet begun the process of populating all traffic pattern altitudes in NASR. Steve will follow up and attempt to expedite the project.

STATUS: OPEN

ACTION: Steve Brisbon, AJV-211, to report back on the progress in populating all Traffic Pattern Altitudes in NASR.

MEETING 15-01

Valerie Watson, AJV-553, reviewed the issue. Mike Wallin, AJV-5331, stated that NFDC is still working this issue. Valerie asked Mike if there is a new policy to collect all Traffic Pattern Altitude (TPA) data, whether standard or not, and populate the information in NASR. Mike was not sure if that policy was in place and committed to looking into the issue further and reporting at the next ACF.

STATUS: OPEN

ACTION: Mike Wallin, AJV-5331, to report on progress in population of all Traffic Pattern Altitudes in NASR.