

Air Traffic Procedures Bulletin

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A Communication from the
Director of Air Traffic Procedures, Mission Support Services

In this Issue: *Braking Action Reports and FICON NOTAMs, Precision Approach Critical Areas, Visual Approaches*

Braking Action Reports and FICON NOTAMs

**TER/F* Terminal Standards and Procedures (AJV-82) recently received a question from the field concerning the validity of time limits associated with Braking Action reports and Runway Conditions Codes (RwyCC) contained in Field Condition (FICON) NOTAMs. The scenario involves an aircraft that lands at an airport prior to the runway being cleared of snow, and subsequently reports the braking action as “medium.” Snowplows clear the runway, the airport operator issues a FICON NOTAM that includes RwyCC’s of “5-5-5,” and snowfall continues. The next aircraft does not arrive until 90 minutes later. The question is: Is the “5-5-5” FICON NOTAM still valid? What is considered a reasonable amount of time to state “No Braking Action received” to arrivals?

FAA Order JO 7110.65, paragraph 3-3-4, Braking Action, and paragraph 3-3-5, Braking Action Advisories, do not specify a time period that braking action reports remain valid; therefore, once a braking action report is received, it remains valid until a subsequent report replaces it. Additionally, in accordance with paragraph 3-3-5, use of the term “medium” indicates that braking action conditions may be deteriorating; therefore, controllers should place the statement “Braking Action Advisories in Effect” on the ATIS. To further summarize, paragraph 3-3-5b1 requires controllers to issue the latest braking action report for the runway in use to each arriving and departing aircraft early enough to be of benefit to the pilot. Lastly, controllers must only issue the statement “*No Braking Action Reports Received for Runway (XX)*” when there is no braking action report available. Whether the report is 90 minutes old or from the previous day, the latest report received is still valid. Regardless of when a braking action report was received, controllers must use good judgment in determining if the report is applicable.

With respect to FICON NOTAMs, FAA Order JO 7930.2 paragraph 5-1-4b9, Start of Activity/End of Validity, states: “FICON NOTAMs are considered temporary, therefore the End of Validity time for FICON NOTAMs must not exceed 24 hours from the Start of Activity time.” Times used in the NOTAM system are Coordinated Universal Time (UTC/Zulu) unless otherwise stated, and must be stated in 10 digits for the year, month, day, hour, and minute

(YYMMDDHHMM). A FICON NOTAM cancels at the End of Validity time, or when the Airport Operator/Flight Service Specialist enters a new NOTAM into the system that replaces the old one.

Precision Approach Critical Areas

**TRE* The Air Traffic Safety Action Program (ATSAP) has received pilot and ATC reports indicating precision approach critical areas are not consistently being protected unless the official weather is reporting a ceiling of less than 800 feet or visibility less than 2 miles, even though PIREPs may report lower conditions. Failure to protect the critical area has resulted in aircraft receiving deflections on the glideslope and descending in error. Low altitude alerts and missed approaches can be caused by unprotected precision approach critical areas when aircraft may be encountering instrument meteorological conditions (IMC).

Change 2 to FAA Order JO 7110.65W, effective November 10, 2016, revised paragraph 3-7-5, Precision Approach Critical Area. The term “official weather” was incorporated into the paragraph and a note was added about requirements to disseminate weather from all available sources (METARs/SPECI/PIREPs/ATC observations). The change was:

3-7-5. PRECISION APPROACH CRITICAL AREA

a. ILS critical area dimensions are described in FAA Order 6750.16, Siting Criteria for Instrument Landing Systems. Aircraft and vehicle access to the ILS critical area must be controlled to ensure the integrity of ILS course signals whenever the **official weather observation** is a ceiling of less than 800 feet or visibility less than 2 miles. Do not authorize vehicles/aircraft to operate in or over the critical area, except as specified in subparagraph a1, whenever an arriving aircraft is inside the ILS outer marker (OM) or the fix used in lieu of the OM unless the arriving aircraft has reported the runway in sight or is circling to land on another runway.

PHRASEOLOGY–

HOLD SHORT OF (runway) ILS CRITICAL AREA.

NOTE–

All available weather sources METARs /SPECI/PIREPS/Controller observations are reported ceilings and/or visibilities and must be disseminated as described in 7110.65 and 7210.3

REFERENCE–

FAAO JO 7110.65, Para 2–6–2, PIREP Solicitation and Dissemination

FAAO JO 7210.3, Para 2–9–2, Receipt and Dissemination of Weather Observations

FAAO JO 7210.3, Para 10–3–1, SIGMENT and PIREP Handling

FAAO JO 7900.5, Para 6.4d, Equipment for Sky Condition

This means an airport will have “official weather” that is recorded and disseminated on the ATIS and sometimes by ATC on frequency. ATC disseminates other reports of weather conditions as prescribed in FAA Orders JO 7210.3 and FAA Order JO 7110.65.

The events reported through ATSAP demonstrate a need to consider when the operation should protect the critical area even though the official weather does not mandate the requirement. You can always be more restrictive than the 7110.65 mandates but never less restrictive. Aircraft that receive glide slope deflections in IMC can be a serious safety issue and must be considered. When a facility receives PIREPs on final that indicate a lower cloud layer or visibility than the official weather ceiling or visibility, ATC must consider proactively protecting the precision approach critical area. Facilities must take into account all pertinent weather factors and adjust the operation to ensure maximum safety.

Visual Approaches

**TER* If an aircraft conducting a Visual Approach conducts a go-around, what is its status? Is it IFR or VFR? When does a Visual Approach end? What separation standards apply?

The Pilot/Controller Glossary (PCG) definition of a Visual Approach is an approach conducted on an instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plan which authorizes the pilot to proceed visually and clear of clouds to the airport. The pilot must, at all times, have either the airport or the preceding aircraft in sight. The pilot is responsible for their own terrain and obstruction clearance throughout the visual approach. This approach must be authorized and under the control of the appropriate air traffic control facility. The weather conditions at the airport must be VFR or the pilot is informed that weather is not available for the destination airport. A Visual Approach is an IFR procedure that must receive ATC approval. When an IFR flight arrives at non-towered airports, its IFR status is *only* terminated when the flight has been completed and the pilot has notified ATC of its IFR cancellation. CFR 91.169 IFR (d) Cancellation states “*When a flight plan has been activated, the pilot in command, upon canceling or completing the flight under the flight plan, shall notify an FAA Flight Service Station or ATC facility*”.

At an airport *without* an operating control tower, the Visual Approach ends when the aircraft has landed and the pilot cancels their IFR flight plan, or ATC has issued alternate instructions. Remember that a Visual Approach is not a standard instrument approach and therefore has no published missed approach segment. Pilots are expected to remain clear of clouds and complete a landing as soon as possible. If a landing cannot be accomplished, the aircraft is expected to contact ATC as soon as possible for further clearance. In the event of a go-around, the visual approach has not ended as the pilot has neither cancelled IFR nor completed the flight. This means that the aircraft retains its IFR status and ATC must continue to provide IFR separation from other known IFR aircraft.

If for any reason a go-around is necessary when operating at an airport *with* an operating control tower, aircraft will be issued an appropriate advisory, clearance, or instruction by the tower. If authorized, ATC may instruct the aircraft to remain in the closed traffic pattern and return for landing. A visual approach procedure concludes when the aircraft lands or the pilot cancels IFR, or ATC issues an alternate instruction that includes an altitude assignment. In this case, the aircraft has still retained its IFR status. ATC must maintain appropriate IFR separation even if the aircraft remains in the traffic pattern.

Can pilot applied visual separation be used for conducting successive visual approaches to an airport without an operating control tower? This scenario has recently been the subject of a clarification. The answer is no, for the following reasons:

- The visual approach clearance to an airport without an operating control tower is to the airport, not the runway, therefore there is no guarantee the aircraft will utilize the same runway or even the same landing direction.

- In accordance with (IAW) FAA Order JO 7110.65, paragraph 7-2-1, Visual Separation, visual separation may be applied when other approved separation is ensured before and after the application of visual separation. In this situation ATC cannot ensure approved separation after the application of pilot to pilot visual.
- Since the involved aircraft will be transferred to the common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF) for the airport, ATC cannot comply with the provisions of paragraph 7-2-1b1 requiring that direct communication is maintained with one of the aircraft involved and there is the ability to communicate with the other.
- As stated above, an aircraft executing a go-around off of a visual approach is still operating under an IFR flight plan and must be afforded IFR separation services. In this situation, if the lead aircraft goes around there is no way of ensuring IFR separation between that aircraft and the trailing aircraft maintaining visual separation.

There is a change to paragraph 7-4-1, Visual Approach, contained in Change 3 to FAA Order JO 7110.65W effective April 27, 2017. This change adds specific language that an aircraft conducting a visual approach that executes a go-around is still IFR and must be separated from other IFR aircraft. The added language has been put into the subparagraphs that speak to towered and non-towered airports.

The Air Traffic Procedures Bulletin (ATPB) is a means for headquarters to remind field facilities of proper application of procedures and other instructions. It is published and distributed on an as needed basis.

Articles must be submitted electronically in Microsoft® Word by the offices of primary responsibility with approval at the group level or above. Articles may be submitted throughout the year.

*In this publication, the option(s) for which a briefing is required is indicated by an asterisk followed by one or more letter designators, i. e., * T – Tower, *E – ARTCC, *R – TRACON, or *F – FSS.*

(Reference FAA Order JO 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration, paragraph 2-2-9)

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