



SUBJ: General Standard Operating Procedures

This order prescribes the organization, functions, procedures, and policies of the VATUSA Air Traffic Control System Command Center. Controllers performing Command Center functions are required to be familiar with the provisions of this order that pertain to their operational responsibilities and to exercise their best judgment if they encounter situations not covered by it.

The order consists of the following parts:

- a. Part 1 contains information regarding the organization and functions of the Command Center.
- b. Parts 2 and 3 contain information regarding the procedures and policies of the Command Center.

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Date: October 31, 2020

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Part 1. BASIC

Chapter 1. General

Section 1. Introduction

1-1-1. PURPOSE OF THIS ORDER

This order provides instructions, standards, and guidance for the operation of the Virtual Air Traffic Control System Command Center.

- a. Part 1 contains general information regarding the Command Center.
- b. Part 2 contains information regarding the organization and functions of the Command Center.
- c. Part 3 contains information regarding the procedures and policies of the Command Center.

1-1-2. AUDIENCE

This order applies to all VATUSA controllers performing traffic management duties under the direction of the Command Center.

1-1-3. WHERE TO FIND THIS ORDER

This order can be found on the VATUSA website at <https://vatusa.net>.

1-1-4. WHAT THIS ORDER CANCELS

This order is a new order.

1-1-5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROCEDURAL CHANGES

The responsibility associated with processing and coordinating revisions to this order is delegated to the National Operations Manager.

- a. Controllers should submit recommended changes in procedures to facility management.
- b. Proposed changes must be submitted to vatusa9@vatusa.net and vatusa14@vatusa.net. The submission should include a description of the recommended change, and the proposed language to be used in the order.

1-1-6. DISTRIBUTION

This order is distributed to all VATUSA facilities and controllers.

Section 2. Policy Use

1-2-1. POLICY

This order prescribes information necessary to effectively operate and administer traffic management services to VATUSA air traffic control facilities. When conflicts arise between its provisions and those individual air traffic control facilities, the appropriate Regional Manager must be contacted to provide guidance. In the event that the RM is unavailable, the Command Center instruction must be abided by.

1-2-2. WORD MEANINGS

As used in this order:

- a. "Shall" or "must" means a procedure is mandatory.
- b. "Should" means a procedure is recommended.
- c. "May" and "need not" mean a procedure is optional.
- d. "Will" indicates futurity, not a requirement for application of a procedure.
- e. "Shall not" or "must not" means a procedure is prohibited.
- f. Singular words include the plural, and plural words include the singular.

Part 2. TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Chapter 2. Traffic Management National, Center, and Terminal

Section 1. Organization Missions

2-1-1. TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEM MISSION

The Traffic Management System mission is to balance air traffic demand with system capacity to ensure the maximum efficient utilization of the National Airspace System (NAS). A safe, orderly, and expeditious flow of traffic while minimizing delays, is fostered through continued analysis, coordination, and dynamic utilization of TM initiatives and programs.

2-1-2. VIRTUAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL SYSTEM COMMAND CENTER

The Command Center monitors and manages the flow of air traffic throughout the NAS, producing a safe, orderly, and expeditious flow of traffic while minimizing delays.

2-1-3. TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT UNIT (TMU) MISSION

TMUs monitor and balance traffic flows within their areas of responsibility in accordance with traffic management directives.

Section 2. Organizational Responsibilities

2-2-1. COMMAND CENTER

The Command Center has been delegated the authority to direct the operation of the traffic management system. All TMUs must assist the Command Center, as directed, to ensure system efficiency and effectiveness without compromising safety. The Command Center must, in conjunction with local TMUs, users, and weather information, as appropriate:

- a. Implement national traffic management programs (i.e., NRP, HAR, etc.).
- b. Monitor and analyze system components and weather patterns for potential system impact.
- c. Be the focal point for regulating the daily traffic management functions.
- d. Determine when NAS capacity is or will likely be reduced to the extent that the implementation of a traffic management initiative is required.
- e. Recommend and approve traffic management alternatives when national initiatives are not appropriate.
- f. Be the final approving authority regarding all interfacility traffic management initiatives.

NOTE-

Traffic Management Units continue to retain the latitude and authority to tactically adjust the flow of traffic within their own facilities. These local actions include sector to sector mile-in-trail restrictions, local airport fix balancing, and other such adjustments required to balance flows within their area of responsibility.

- g. Evaluate proposed traffic management initiatives to ensure appropriateness.
- h. Ensure air traffic facilities are appropriately staffed for the potential system impact. The Command Center has the authority to utilize members of the VATUSA ACE Team to supplement coverage when necessary.

2-2-2. FIELD FACILITIES

All actions initiated by the TMU must be in accordance with standard operating procedures, applicable directives, and approved traffic management position descriptions. The TMU is delegated the authority to direct traffic flows and implement approved traffic management initiatives in conjunction with, or as directed by the Command Center.

Air traffic facilities must ensure that:

- a. A TMU is established at ARTCCs. Terminal TMUs may be established as needed.
- b. Delays are reported as specified in VATUSA 7210.35A 2-4-4.

- c. The Command Center is provided with all formal agreements and directives that relate to interfacility traffic management programs, initiatives, and procedures.
- d. Actively coordinate and communicate traffic management actions with adjacent TMUs through the Command Center to optimize traffic flows throughout the NAS.
- e. In conjunction with ATCSs and the Command Center, develop, implement, monitor, and analyze traffic management programs, procedures, and initiatives that are specific to the facility's area of responsibility.
- f. Develop arrival strategies and deliver arrival aircraft to achieve the Airport Arrival Rate (AAR). Airport Arrival Rate is defined as a dynamic parameter specifying the number of arrival aircraft that an airport, in conjunction with terminal airspace, can accept under specific conditions throughout any consecutive sixty (60) minute period.
- g. Periodically analyze and review procedures to ensure effectiveness and adherence to programs/initiatives, and, when necessary, make adjustments. Cancel traffic management initiatives promptly when no longer needed.
- h. Oversee departure fix balancing to ensure sector efficiency into the next facility's airspace.
- i. Ensure optimum airspace/runway configurations.

AAR for most major airports can be found on fly.faa.gov/ois.

Section 3. Line of Authority

2-3-1. COMMAND CENTER

- a. The Command Center is directed by the Command Center Manager (USA9). USA9 is responsible for overseeing general Command Center operations and ensuring Division expectations are being met.
- b. The National Operations Manager (NOM) (USA14) is under the general supervision of the Command Center Manager (USA9). The NOM is responsible for managing the Command Center at the operational level.
- c. Each national traffic management officer (NTMO) is under the general supervision of the NOM. NTMOs are delegated regions of responsibility to which they manage the traffic flows in conjunction with local TMUs.
- d. In the absence of the NTMO, the Command Center will be designated the appropriate traffic management authority.

2-3-2. NTMO AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

- a. The Command Center will manage the traffic management system at a national and regional level. Five (5) areas are delegated to a NTMO to provide a higher level of service to the affected area. The regions are broken down into the following:
 1. West (USA94):
 - (a) ZLC, ZSE, ZOA, ZLA, PCF
 2. South Central (USA95):
 - (a) ZME, ZFW, ZHU, ZAB
 3. Midwest (USA96):
 - (a) ZAU, ZMP, ZDV, ZKC
 4. Northeast (USA97):
 - (a) ZBW, ZNY, ZOB, ZDC
 5. Southeast (USA98):
 - (a) ZID, ZTL, ZJX, ZMA
- b. Each region is delegated with an official VATUSA call sign to be used while performing NTMO duties.

NOTE-

The usage of the VATUSA staff call sign does not infer a VATUSA staff position. These callsigns operate under the authority of the Command Center, and are delegated for use during Command Center events only.

Section 4. Coordination

2-4-1. COORDINATION

Coordinate pertinent information through verbal and automated methods. At times, it may be required to utilize both methods to ensure complete communication and situational awareness. When time permits, utilize communication techniques that emphasize collaboration and consensus decision-making. Use tools that provide for common situational awareness to the extent possible.

2-4-2. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. All facilities must:

1. Communicate and coordinate events that may have an impact on the NAS.
2. Use the National Traffic Management Log (NTML) to document events and traffic management initiatives.

b. The Command Center must:

1. Communicate directly with facility representatives for a critique of operations and future plans for traffic management.
2. Coordinate directly with facility representatives on plans, procedures, and operations that affect interfacility traffic flows.

3. Utilize weather information forecasts to determine if any significant impact on the NAS will occur.
4. Coordinate with the TMUs in the day-to-day operations of the NAS and resolve operational traffic management disagreements between facilities.
5. Initiate telecons and Hotlines with users and facilities, as necessary, to obtain input and to provide operational information, as well as other significant events affecting the NAS.

c. ARTCC TMUs and terminals must:

1. Advise the Command Center of situations and conditions that may require implementation of TMs.
2. Present unresolved conflicts between adjacent TMUs to the Command Center for resolution.
3. Notify the Command Center if a significant change in capacity is expected or has occurred.

2-4-3. COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS

- a. The Command Center Discord server (located [here](#)) is designated as the primary traffic management coordination location for events. Facilities are expected to have at least two (2) representatives available to answer questions and provide feedback in the planning process.
- b. During the timeframe of an event where the Command Center is active, the VATUSA Teamspeak Server is designated as the primary voice coordination location. Facilities are expected to have at least one (1) representative available to answer questions and provide real time information about impacts to their respective airspaces.
- c. Each of these platforms is designed for operational use only. Discussions unrelated to traffic management shall not take place on these platforms.

2-4-4. NATIONAL TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT LOG (NTML) REPORTING

- a. The National Traffic Management Log (NTML) is a timestamped record of all traffic management initiatives and events that have taken place. The log automatically closes and reopens each day. Records are kept for quality assurance and future data needs.

- b. Facilities are required to report to the Command Center when IFR arrival, departure, or holding aircraft are delayed by fifteen (15) minutes or more.
 - 1. These delays do not include aircraft that are part of a Ground Delay Program (GDP), Airborne Flow Program (AFP), or Ground Stop (GS).
- c. Facilities are required to report to the Command Center when miles-in-trail (MIT) restrictions exceed 25 MIT or minutes-in-trail (MINIT) restrictions exceed 7 MINIT.
- d. Facilities are required to report to the Command Center if a Ground Stop (GS) is initiated. This includes internal Ground Stops within the affected facility.
- e. Reporting delays can be accomplished either verbally or through electronic means on the appropriate communication platform.
- f. The reporting of these delays should be done as soon as feasible, but should not take the TMU away from more pertinent duties.
- g. The Command Center will make the appropriate notation into the NTML for record keeping.

Section 5. Operating Levels

2-5-1. DEFINITION

- a. The Command Center will identify VATUSA-sponsored events for which Command Center staffing and services will be provided. Additionally, facilities may request the activation of the Command Center for events that they feel would benefit from traffic management services.
- b. Four (4) operating levels have been established by the Command Center. The operating level will be determined by the potential impact to the NAS. The levels are as follows:
 - 1. OPLEVEL1 - Steady State
 - 2. OPLEVEL2 - Localized Impact
 - 3. OPLEVEL 3 - Regional Impact
 - 4. OPLEVEL 4 - NAS-wide Impact
- c. The Command Center Manager reserves the right to change the operating level of the Command Center if an event falls outside of the defined requirements for an operating level but may require more or less coordination from the Command Center.

2-5-2. OPLEVEL 1

- a. OPLEVEL1 is characterized by no significant events or impacts to the NAS requiring the use of TMU coordination.
- b. Facilities are not required to perform data-reporting unless asked by the Command Center Manager or National Operations Manager.

2-5-3. OPLEVEL 2

- a. OPLEVEL2 is characterized by an event that features two (2) or fewer facilities (i.e., a crossfire between ZTL and ZJX)
- b. Facilities are required to notify the Command Center when any of the conditions in VATUSA 7210.35A 2-4-4 are met.
- c. The Command Center will provide traffic management staffing at the regional level.

2-5-4. OPLEVEL 3

- a.** OPLEVEL3 is characterized by an event that features or heavily impacts three (3) or more facilities (i.e., Friday Night Operations, significant weekend events).
- b.** Facilities are required to perform the duties specified in OPLEVEL2.
- c.** Facilities should provide a dedicated Supervisory Traffic Management Coordinator (STMC) for their facility. This individual is responsible for:
 - 1.** Overseeing local TMU operations.
 - 2.** Assisting the Command Center with strategic and tactical operations and coordination.
 - 3.** Provide local expertise to determine benefits and downsides to proposed Traffic Management Initiatives (TMIs).
 - 4.** Ensuring the Command Center and local ARTCC personnel are apprised of any relevant information.
 - 5.** Being the main point of contact for the facility.
- d.** The Command Center will provide the following staffing:
 - 1.** National Operations Manager (NOM)
 - 2.** National Traffic Management Officer (NTMO)

2-5-5. OPLEVEL 4

- a.** OPLEVEL4 is characterized by an event that involves a significant amount of facilities, has a significant impact on the NAS, involves high-complexity operations, or is of an extended duration (i.e., Cross the Pond, Worldflight).
- b.** All facilities should provide TMU representatives during the planning and execution phase, including, but not limited to, routes meetings, strategic planning telecons, hotline activation events, and other meetings that relate to the event.
- c.** To the maximum extent possible, all affected facilities and the Command Center will provide the highest level of staffing appropriate.

Chapter 3. Command Center Procedures

Section 1. Traffic Management Initiatives

3-1-1. GENERAL

- a. Traffic Management Initiatives (TMIs) are techniques used to manage demand with capacity in the NAS.
 - 1. Properly coordinated and implemented TMIs are an important tool in the air traffic system. These initiatives contribute to the safe and orderly movement of air traffic.
 - 2. Any TMI creates impact on users. It is imperative to consider this impact and implement only those initiatives necessary to maintain system integrity.
- b. Dynamic TMIs are those imposed on an as needed basis to manage fluctuations in traffic demands.

3-1-2. BACKGROUND

Some TMIs may also be considered “control instructions” or procedures; the difference is determined by the magnitude of the event, the coordination process, and the length of time it is implemented. TMIs may also be referred to as “restrictions”, especially in conjunction with miles-in-trail.

3-1-3. POLICY

To maintain the integrity of the air traffic system, facility traffic management personnel must employ the least restrictive methods available to minimize delays.

3-1-4. TYPES OF TMIs

- a. Altitude.
 - 1. Utilized to segregate different flows of traffic, or to distribute the number of aircraft requesting access to a specified geographic region.
 - 2. Also known as:
 - (a) Tunneling - term to indicate traffic will be descended prior to the normal descent point at the arrival airport to remain clear of an airspace situation (e.g., holding).
 - (b) Capping - term to indicate aircraft will be cleared to an altitude lower than their requested altitude until they are clear of a particular airspace. Capping may apply to the initial segment of the flight or for the entire flight.

- b.** Miles-in-trail (MIT). The number of miles required between aircraft that meet a specific criteria. The criteria may be separation, airport, fix, altitude, sector, or route specific. MIT are used to apportion traffic into manageable flows, as well as provide space for additional traffic (merging or departing) to enter the flow of traffic.
- c.** Minutes-in-trail (MINIT). The number of minutes required between successive aircraft. It is normally used in a non-radar environment, or when transitioning to a non-radar environment, or additional spacing is required due to aircraft deviating around weather.
- d.** Fix balancing. Assign an aircraft a fix other than in the filed flight plan in the arrival or departure phase of flight to equitably distribute demand.
- e.** Sequencing Programs. These programs are designed to achieve a specified interval between aircraft; they may be software generated or determined by TM personnel. Different types of programs accommodate different phases of flight.
 - 1.** Departure Sequencing Program (DSP)– Assigns a departure time to achieve a constant flow of traffic over a common point. Normally, this involves departures from multiple airports.
 - 2.** En route Sequencing Program (ESP)– Assigns a departure time that will facilitate integration in the en route stream.
- 3.** Arrival Sequencing Program (ASP)– Assigns fix crossing times to aircraft destined to the same airport.
- 4.** Time-Based Metering (TBM). The action of personnel providing air traffic services to meet a scheduled time at which airborne aircraft should cross a metering point or arc.
- f.** Reroutes:
 - 1.** Reroutes are ATC routings other than the filed flight plan. They are issued to:
 - (a)** Ensure aircraft operate with the “flow” of traffic.
 - (b)** Avoid congested airspace.
 - (c)** Avoid areas of known weather or where aircraft are deviating or refusing to fly.
- g.** Ground Delay Programs.
- h.** Airspace Flow Programs.
- i.** Ground Stops.

3-1-5. TMI APPROVAL AUTHORITY

- a.** The Command Center is the approval authority for all enroute and designated terminals interfacility TMIs, except as identified in subparagraph (b) below and MIT restrictions of ten (10) miles or less. TMIs that are expected to result in reportable delays must be coordinated through the Command Center.

- b.** The Center/TRACON responsible for the TMI within their area of jurisdiction (underlying terminals) that do not cause reportable delays.

Section 2. Transgression Reporting

3-2-1. FACILITY MISSION

The overall mission of each facility is to provide the best possible service to both users and other facilities. A team effort is needed to have a successful event for all parties.

3-2-2. TRANSGRESSION REPORTING

- a. When transgressions are observed, they should be reported to the Command Center using the [Transgression Reporting Form](#) or by using appropriate communication methods. This form is temporary until built into the VATUSA website.
- b. Transgression reporting can be accomplished by any TMU personnel, but not any controller. Controllers shall forward any transgression occurrences to their TMU to be officially reported.
- c. Generally, transgressions that severely impact event operations should be reported, including, but not limited to,
 - 1. Multiple significant occurrences of requested restrictions (e.g., MIT, MINIT) not being met.
 - 2. Unreasonable and unachievable restrictions requests.
 - 3. Major Letter of Agreement/Standard Operating Procedure violations.
- d. Good judgment shall be applied when considering whether to officially report transgressions to the facility TMU or Command Center.
- e. Facilities should provide all supporting evidence when reporting a transgression report.
- f. To the extent reasonable, internal transgressions should not be elevated and forwarded to the Command Center.
- g. Only authorized Command Center staff and VATUSA staff can view submitted transgressions.

3-2-3. COMMAND CENTER ACTIONS

- a. The Command Center will apply due diligence to all received transgression reports and will be responsible for the protection of the information included in the submissions.
- b. The Command Center will use all available resources when determining if a transgression occurred.
- c. Upon completion of the review, the Command Center shall submit its report to the appropriate Regional Manager, the Air Traffic Managers, and any other applicable staff members.

NOTE-

The Command Center does not determine any action against any controller or facility - rather, the Command Center merely determines the facts and suggests possible solutions.

3-2-4. TRAINING-RELATED TRANSGRESSIONS

- a. When Global Rating Policy (GRP) or other training-related transgressions are identified by the Command Center, the Command Center shall forward relevant information to the VATUSA Training Director (VATUSA3), the appropriate Regional Manager (RM), and the appropriate facility Training Administrators (TA) for review.
- b. Upon receipt of the transgression from the Command Center, VATUSA3 is responsible for any actions taken to resolve the transgression.

Section 3. PERTI

3-3-1. GENERAL

The Command Center revolves around a collaborative decision making (CDM) process called PERTI (Plan, Execute, Review, Train, Improve). Active participation in this program enables the Command Center to constantly evolve to meet the changing demands of VATSIM.

3-3-2. PLAN

- a. The ability of the Command Center to provide traffic management services to facilities is bounded by the extent to which it can predict and strategize to address future impact. Data-driven analysis of traffic data and historical event data is the most rigorous method by which strategic planning is achieved.
- b. The Command Center will utilize all available dataset to construct, implement, and adjust the Strategic Plan. This data includes, but is not limited to, prior event replays, internal reports, and publicly available web pages.
- c. The Command Center will ensure that all participating facilities are included in the planning process and informed of the determined goals. Goals should be specific and verifiable - arbitrary goals are not measures of performance.
- d. The Strategic Plan should be constructed and coordinated as far out in the future of the event as necessary, and should be re-evaluated as necessary.
- e. The strategic plan should be finalized no later than twenty-four (24) hours prior to the start of the event. Within 24 hours of the event, the Strategic Plan becomes the Operational Plan.

3-3-3. EXECUTE

- a.** The strategic planning portion lays the groundwork for a baseline strategy to execute the operational plan. The operational (day-of) goals must be periodically re-evaluated and tactical (real-time) adjustments should be made due to changes in constraints.
- b.** The Command Center is responsible for operationalizing the strategic plan with the participating facilities. Facilities should communicate their concerns and help provide tactical adjustment to recommendations.

3-3-4. REVIEW

- a.** Self-assessment is undertaken by the Command Center upon completion of the event. This process includes assessing the operational goals, analyzing data, measuring the extent to which anticipated goals and constraints were verified, and consolidating the data into an understandable and actionable format.

- b.** A Traffic Management Review (TMR) will be publicly provided by the Command Center for all events requiring an operating level of 3 or 4. TMRs may be requested by facility staff for any other events. TMRs consist of:

- 1.** A general overview of the event.
- 2.** The Strategic Plan, the Operational Plan, and factors influencing those goals.
- 3.** A data-informed analysis of the implementation, impact, effectiveness, and other characteristics of traffic management initiatives used.
- 4.** A summary of identified achievements and vulnerabilities.

3-3-5. TRAIN AND IMPROVE

The Command Center will use the available information to provide knowledge for the further advancement of controller ability within VATUSA. Traffic Management training will utilize data taken from previous events in order to continually evolve and improve.

Section 4. ACE Team Usage

3-4-1. GENERAL

The primary usage of ACE team members is during events where staffing is not sufficient or unanticipated shortages occur. By utilizing these members, facilities can fill gaps and provide a better level of service for both users and other controllers. The Command Center will be actively involved in the decision making process used when determining whether ACE team members are needed.

3-4-2. UTILIZATION OF ACE TEAM

- a. The Command Center Manager (USA9) is responsible for the ACE team.
- b. When a facility determines that ACE team coverage is needed, or the Command Center identifies an area of concern to which air traffic control coverage should be filled, they shall submit their request to VATUSA9, who will then solicit volunteers for the event.
- c. If an unanticipated shortage of controllers occurs within twenty-four (24) hours of the event, the Command Center must be notified. The Command Center will send out a formal ACE team member request.