

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

Aspen Tower
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Aspen, CO 81611

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Letter to Airmen: LTA-ASE-2

Subject: Aspen/Pitkin County Airport VFR Climb/Departure Procedure

Cancellation: 07/18/2019 1200 (UTC)

BACKGROUND: Aspen/Pitkin County Airport (KASE/ASE) possesses a unique air traffic operation with arrivals and departures operating to a single runway (RWY 15/33) landing and departing opposite direction. Due to elevation and terrain concerns, 90% of arriving aircraft land on Runway 15 and 95% of departing aircraft takeoff on Runway 33. To improve efficiency between arrivals and departures and the capacity of ASE, Aspen Airport Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) employed the use of a locally developed procedure called the "Wrap Procedure." To ensure appropriate timing between arriving and departing aircraft, the departing pilot needed to anticipate and execute the initial turn to 343°, followed by the left turn to 273° leaving 9100' mean sea level (MSL) on the LINDZ 8 departure. To ensure separation, controllers, at times, would alter the 273° turn timing to either expedite it when the aircraft climbed above 9100' MSL or delay it until after traffic passed. The use of this procedure was conducted under visual meteorological conditions (VMC) and the use of Tower Applied Visual Separation.

In October of 2016, the FAA began reviewing the "Wrap Procedure" and found issues with the practice. The use of the "Wrap Procedure" in ATC operations was suspended on May 25th, 2017 by the FAA. The FAA is reviewing the procedure and evaluating alternatives to return Aspen to normal operational arrival/departure rates as soon as possible. As a result, the airport's IFR arrival/departure rates were reduced by 40%.

ALTERNATIVE: Pilots may avoid departure delays by requesting VFR Climbs during VMC conditions. Aircrews can expect ASE ATCT to approve such a request when conditions and operations permit. During a VFR climb, aircrews are responsible for terrain and cloud avoidance and expected to fly the ground track of the LINDZ8 SID or as directed by ATC through 13,000' MSL. ATC will not solicit VFR Climb's to aircrews.

ASE VFR Climb Request Procedure:

1. On initial contact with Clearance Delivery, advise the controller of a request for a VFR Climb.
2. Pilots requesting a VFR Climb/Departure are expected to fly the LINDZ8 ground track unless otherwise instructed by ATC. Leaving 13,000 IFR is automatically activated. Continue on the LINDZ8 departure and assigned routing.
3. In the event of Lost Communication (LC) prior to IFR activation, squawk 7600, maintain VFR, and follow the LC in the LINDZ8. Exercise extreme caution crossing runway 15 final approach course due to opposite direction arrival aircraft.

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