

NOTICE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

N 8400.78

3/23/05

Cancellation
Date: 3/23/06

SUBJ: USE OF VISUAL APPROACH RNAV REFERENCE POINTS

1. PURPOSE. This notice provides guidance to principal operations inspectors (POI) in authorizing air carriers to develop and use Visual Approach RNAV (area navigation) Reference Points (VARRP). These VARRP are intended to provide flightcrews an approach profile cross-check reference for aircraft lateral position, altitude, and airspeed, along a desired flightpath during visual approaches.

2. DISTRIBUTION. This notice is distributed to the division level in the Flight Standards Service in Washington headquarters; to the branch level in the regional Flight Standards divisions; to the Flight Standards District Offices, and to the Regulatory Standards Division at the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center. This notice is also distributed electronically to the division level in the Flight Standards Service in Washington headquarters and to all regional Flight Standards divisions and district offices. This information is also available on the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Web site at:
<http://www.faa.gov/avr/afs/notices/8400/N8400-78.doc>.

3. BACKGROUND.

a. Flight Operational Quality Assurance data and Aviation Safety Action Program reports have indicated instances of exceeding aircraft speed limitations, excessive rates of descent, and unstabilized approaches. A large percentage of these reports have come from flightcrews conducting visual approaches to runways that do not have underlying instrument approach procedures (IAP) that provide vertical and horizontal reference, such as an instrument landing system or nonprecision approaches with vertical guidance. Many of the aircraft being operated during these occurrences have flight management system (FMS) navigation equipment that is capable of being programmed to provide lateral, vertical, and airspeed guidance.

b. In discussions with several certificate holders and FAA personnel, a common misconception was identified. Some certificate holders and FAA inspectors were under the impression that air carriers and/or flightcrews were prohibited from entering company or self-designed reference points into the navigation system or the navigation systems database, as applicable, for reference during visual approaches.

4. DISCUSSION.

a. The FAA does not discourage operators from developing policies and procedures for flightcrews to augment visual approaches with VARRP for those approaches without underlying approach facilities. Air carriers, currently using or proposing the use of VARRP, should establish procedures incorporating a system safety approach for the development of VARRP and the associated flightpath and configuration references. The air carrier is fully responsible for the obstacle and terrain clearance of VARRP. The FAA will not approve, accept, or review VARRP.

b. The certificate holder should establish flightcrew procedures incorporating a system safety approach for the use of VARRP. VARRP may be used to provide lateral and vertical positional awareness along a desired flightpath. In addition, the certificate holder may opt to provide specific aircraft configuration and airspeed recommendations at specific VARRP along the flightpath. It is preferred that VARRP be recalled directly from the FMS database by procedure name that is associated with a specific visual approach to a specific runway. The VARRP may be entered into the FMS by the flightcrew from a chart or descriptive narrative provided by the air carrier for the visual approach.

NOTE: The manual entering of FMS waypoints is not authorized with regard to published instrument procedures such as Standard Instrument Departures, Standard Terminal Arrivals, and IAPs.

c. VARRP may be used only when the flight has been cleared for a visual approach by the appropriate air traffic control (ATC) facility and requires that the aircraft be in, and maintain, visual meteorological conditions. As in any visual approach, the flightcrew must maintain all normal visual approach terrain and obstacle clearance by use of visual surface reference and comply with any specific ATC instructions (e.g., “cleared for visual approach runway 28, turn your base over the shoreline”). In addition, the flightcrew must maintain normal air traffic spacing and sequencing specified for visual approaches by use of visual reference to the airport or other air traffic. VARRP will be developed by each individual air carrier and may be different from air carrier to air carrier for use with the same visual approach and runway combination. ATC will not be aware of the air carrier’s VARRP and, therefore, will not clear an aircraft for their use, nor should flightcrews request clearances for the use of VARRP. The flightcrew must notify ATC anytime the ability to navigate, provide positive terrain or obstacle clearance, and/or maintain air traffic sequencing/separation by visual reference is lost or the approach becomes unstable requiring a go-around to be executed.

5. ACTION. Operations inspectors should familiarize themselves with the contents of this notice and, when applicable, support their assigned carriers in the development of policies and procedures regarding VARRP. POIs should provide a copy of this notice to their assigned air carriers.

6. TRACKING. Document the conveyance of the information contained in this notice for each air carrier affected:

a. Use Program Tracking and Reporting Subsystem (PTRS) code 1030, Convey Non-Reg. Info.

b. Enter "N840078" in the "National Use" field (without the quotes).

c. Once the above information has been provided to the air carrier, close out the PTRS.

7. DISPOSITION. This notice will not be incorporated into Order 8400.10, Air Transportation Operations Inspector's Handbook. Questions concerning this notice should be directed to the Air Carrier Operations Branch, AFS-220, at (202) 267-3518.

/s/ Carol E. Giles (for)
James J. Ballough
Director, Flight Standards Service