

# Visual Departure

## General

Most of the IFR flights depart by using an SID. However, this is not the only option. One alternative is a so called **visual departure**. During this procedure, the pilot is maintaining visual reference to the terrain up to a certain altitude.

A visual departure is despite its name an IFR procedure. Therefore, the tower controller remains responsible for separation according to the airspace class.

There are several reasons why visual departures might be conducted instead of using a SID:

- The procedure is often shorter than a SID - therefore it saves time and fuel
- It may increase departure efficiency for the tower controller
- During significant weather (thunderstorms) in the departure area
- In case of an unexpected outage of a navigational aid for the respective SID
- In case of an unexpected non-availability of all SIDs from the respective runway

## Requirements and restrictions

### When to apply?

A visual departure may only be permitted if all of the following conditions are met:

- The pilot requests the procedure or accepts the procedure after initiation by ATC
- The weather allows visual reference to the terrain until passing the MVA
  - On VATSIM, we assume that this is the case as long as the ceiling is at least as high as the MVA
- The procedure is only allowed during daytime
- The pilot remains responsible for the obstacle clearance until the specified altitude
- ATC remains responsible for separation to all other aircraft according to the airspace class

Unless otherwise stated in the SOPs, visual departures have to be coordinated in advance between Delivery / Tower and the departure controller.

### Where to apply?

According to the [AIP ENR 1.5](#), visual departures are allowed at all German airports with IFR procedures.

At certain airports, visual departures may however be restricted due to local regulations (e.g. noise abatement). The restrictions can be found in the SOPs of the respective airport.

However, the local restrictions never apply:

- during significant weather (thunderstorms) in the departure area
- in case of an unexpected outage of a navigational aid for the respective SID
- in case of an unexpected non-availability of all SIDs from the respective runway

## Phraseology Examples

The clearance for a visual departure can either be given during the enroute clearance or before the takeoff clearance (this is done e.g. when there is a thunderstorm not allowing to depart on the originally cleared SID).

Example 1: Due to the shorter routing, ATC offers the pilot a visual departure:

“ ATC: "AZD111, advise able to accept visual departure runway 25L?"  
Pilot: "AZD111, able"  
ATC: "AZD111, after departure proceed direct SOBRA, climb to 5000 ft, maintain visual reference to the terrain until passing 2500 ft"  
Pilot: (readback)

Example 2: The pilot reports on the runway that he needs a heading when airborne due to CBs (that is nothing other than a visual departure):

“ Pilot: "DLH1312, due to weather request heading 210 when airborne for 15 miles"  
ATC: "DLH1312, after departure fly heading 210, maintain visual reference to the terrain until passing 2000 ft"  
Pilot: (readback)  
ATC: (normal takeoff clearance)