

Austin-Bergstrom International Airport Virtual Ramp Control Program



Fact Sheet

THE AUS RAMP

The Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS) is owned by the City of Austin and operated by the Department of Aviation. A key piece of airfield infrastructure at every airport is the apron, often referred to as the ramp, which is the area of an airport where aircraft are parked, loaded or unloaded, refueled, boarded, or maintained.

The apron, or ramp, is a busy and complex area with a lot of traffic and a variety of activities taking place, which is why there are a number of regulations in place to govern ramp operations. The airfield ramp is classified by the Federal Aviation Administration as a non-movement area, which means there is no air traffic control (ATC) tower or other agency that has direct control over aircraft movements. This means that aircraft are responsible for their own safety when moving around the ramp.

As AUS's passenger volume and airline activity grow from a medium-sized airport to a large one, the Department of Aviation has been taking proactive steps to develop a virtual Ramp Control Program.

Airport Ramp Safety

- All vehicles on the apron must be equipped with working headlights, taillights, and brake lights.
- All personnel on the apron must wear high-visibility clothing.
- All aircraft must be parked in designated areas.
- All fueling operations must be conducted by trained personnel.
- All loading and unloading operations must be conducted safely and efficiently.
- Ramp safety is a shared responsibility between the airport, the airlines, and the ground handling companies.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What is an airport ramp? What is a Ramp Control Program?

- The ramp is the area of an airport where aircraft are parked, loaded or unloaded, refueled, boarded, or maintained.
- A Ramp Control Program directs aircraft movement around the terminal to control traffic flow in and out of the gates.
- This program only directs aircraft and does not direct cars, ground service equipment or trucks on the ramp. On the ramp, aircraft always have the right-of-way over other motorized vehicles or equipment.
- The program does not create communication channels between the City of Austin and pilots while aircraft are mid-air, in the process of landing or in the process of taking off. That is an exclusive function between the Federal Aviation Administration and pilots.
- Ramp Control Programs at other airports are usually managed by airlines or third party vendors.

What does it mean that the AUS ramp is currently not managed?

- It means there is no entity that has direct control over aircraft movements on the ramp. This is because the ramp is considered a non-movement area, which is defined as any area of an airport that is not used for taxiing, takeoff, or landing of aircraft.

Why is the AUS ramp not currently managed?

- The AUS ramp has been classified as a non-movement area since it opened in 1999. This is because the airport was designed to be a regional airport that would not experience the same level of traffic as larger airports. However, in recent years, AUS has experienced significant growth in passenger traffic and airline activity. This growth has led to an increase in aircraft movements on the ramp, which has prompted the Department of Aviation to create a virtual Ramp Control Program that will modernize ramp operations and further enhance ramp safety.
- Larger airports, like Hartsfield-Jackson in Atlanta, Dallas Fort Worth and Intercontinental in Houston, have their ramp programs managed by an airline. This works well for airports that are hubs to airlines. AUS is not a hub airport and will not pursue an airline-managed ramp program.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS CONTINUED

How is AUS proactively seeking solutions to safely and effectively manage ramp operations?

- AUS is currently in the process of developing and implementing a virtual Ramp Control Program. This program will use a combination of technology and human oversight to manage aircraft movements on the ramp. The goal of the program is to enhance safety and can potentially reduce taxi-time delays.
- Airport leadership decided to fast-track ramp management efforts by launching an interim program. The Department of Aviation has been developing ramp control operating procedures, implementing operational and monitoring systems and recruiting, hiring and training staff to establish an interim Ramp Control Program before the permanent program launches.
- Staff are currently collaborating with the Federal Aviation Air Traffic Control Tower to define operational practices and communication protocols – this will formalize exactly when and where Air Traffic Control concludes their role in communicating with pilots during taxi, take-off and landing and when the Department of Aviation begins communications as aircraft enter the ramp.

What is a virtual Ramp Control Program?

- A virtual ramp control tower provides an enhanced view of the airport's gates and aprons using technology, like cameras, aircraft tracking, and air-to-ground radios, without the use of a physical tower. A virtual ramp control tower could be set up in a room anywhere on the airport.

When will the virtual Ramp Control Program start?

- The Program's solicitation for contracting opportunities for firms to provide hardware and operational support will launch in early 2024. Once a vendor is selected, it will take approximately a year to a year and a half to design a solution, build out the equipment, and become operational.
- The Department of Aviation has hired staff and has developed the first AUS Ramp Control Manual to launch an interim program as soon as possible. The Department expects to launch the interim program by a late 2023 - early 2024 timeline.

Is there a requirement from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) the airport's regulator, to change?

- No, there is no requirement from the FAA for AUS to implement a Ramp Control Program. With support from the FAA, Department of Aviation staff are proactively developing this program to further increase ramp safety and modernize ramp operations as airline activity continues to increase.

Does the lack of a Ramp Control Program lead to delays in aircraft connecting to gates?

- Significant gate delays are usually due to bad weather outside that halts ground operations; an airline overbooking their gate; or when an airline does not have available ground crews to staff the gate. Under the virtual Ramp Control Program, these factors will not change.
- The Program aims to achieve reduced congestion on the ramp and coordinated aircraft entrance and exits from the gates, so travelers could experience some reduction in gate delays.

FLYAUSTIN.COM