
Bulletin: vZDC-B-20250923A

Applicability: All ZDC Controllers

Effective: 25 September 2025

Expiration: 30 April 2026

Reference: vZDC-ZDC-P-01H, paragraph 6-3-2

Contact: vZDC/ATM

Subject: Tower Responsibilities during Traffic Management Initiatives

Bulletin reissued to incorporate IDS updates (9/25/25)

PURPOSE: This bulletin reinforces tower controller responsibilities related to departure release requests and ensures consistent coordination with the Traffic Management Unit (TMU). Proper adherence to this process prevents missed release times, minimizes disruption to enroute traffic flows, and maintains compliance with TMU initiatives.

BACKGROUND: Recent events have highlighted several areas of operations within ZDC that are susceptible to creating traffic saturation scenarios for downline controllers. These issues are predominately focused on Potomac TRACON core airport departures (BWI/DCA/IAD) and their flows integrating into enroute miles-in-trail programs in effect.

APPLICABILITY: This procedure applies to all control positions that are releasing departures to a constrained airport or route where a TMI is in effect.

PROCEDURES:

- 1. Use of IDS.** All departure release requests must be submitted through the Information Display System (IDS). This ensures requests are visible to TMU and reduces the likelihood of missed coordination.
- 2. Requesting Release Times.** Tower controllers shall request a release time when the aircraft pushes back from the gate or starts taxi for departure. Early requests improve TMU's ability to integrate traffic into required spacing programs.
- 3. Adherence to Release Times.** Aircraft must depart within the assigned release window. If a release time cannot be met, tower controllers must coordinate as early as possible with TMU to obtain an amended time.

IDS RELEASE MODULE: The graphics on the following page depict the IDS and the Departure Release module.

1. Access the Departure Release Module.

The screenshot shows the vZDC interface for KDCA. The top section displays flight information: KDCA 231452Z 18009KT 10SM SCT080 SCT140 BKN220 24/18 A3003, RMK AO2 SLP167 T02440178 58001, and ATIS NOT AVAILABLE. The bottom section shows various buttons including 'REL' (circled in red), 'PRD', 'SOP', 'PUB', 'ASX', 'ARP/SET', 'RDR/SET', 'RDR/CONSOL', 'POS', 'EMRG', 'CLR', 'EXIT', and 'VZDC WEBSITE'.

The “REL” button opens the Departure Release Request form

If accessed from a tower it will automatically show the departure airport. If working a approach or enroute position, ensure the correct departure airport is set.

2. Complete the Departure Release Request form.

The screenshot shows the 'Departure Release Request' form. It includes fields for 'RELEASE * CALLSIGN ENTERED HERE', 'TO * DESTINATION ENTERED HERE', 'FROM * KDCA', 'Status: PUSH', 'A/C Type: JET', and 'Free Text (optional)'. A 'SUBMIT' button is at the bottom. A note at the bottom states: '**Text will be auto-capitalized upon submission.'.

Any important notes (i.e. request updated release)

Status defaults to Pushback. Select if other is applicable.

3. Once the request is submitted it will display in yellow in the release window. Aircraft listed in yellow are still pending a release time assignment from TMU.

The screenshot shows the vZDC interface for KDCA. The top section displays flight information: KDCA 251611Z 18011KT 10SM SCT014 OVC130 24/22 A2984 RMK, AO2 DZE03 P0000 T02390222, and ATIS NOT AVAILABLE. The bottom section shows various buttons including 'REL' (circled in red), 'PRD', 'SOP', 'PUB', 'ASX', 'ARP/SET', 'RDR/SET', 'RDR/CONSOL', 'POS', 'EMRG', 'CLR', 'EXIT', and 'VZDC WEBSITE'. The 'RELEASE' button is also highlighted in yellow.

All controllers that view the airports IDS view will see pending releases for that airport.

The controller that submits the release request will see that aircraft in the release window on **all** views (approach, enroute, etc).

Submitted requests will display as light grey.

Clicking the circle/line symbol removes the release request.

4. TMU will assign a release time. Releases will be issued in the following formats:

Release Type	Description	IDS Indications
No Restriction	When there is no competing traffic, TMU will release aircraft without a time window. This is indicated as "ANY" (i.e. released at <i>any</i> time).	⊖ UAL123 ANY
At or Before	Indicates the aircraft must be airborne no later than the assigned time. But anytime <i>prior</i> to the assigned time is acceptable.	⊖ UAL123 AIRBORNE BEFORE 1747z
At or After	Indicates the aircraft must not depart prior to the assigned time. But anytime <i>after</i> the specified window is acceptable.	⊖ UAL123 AIRBORNE AFTER 1733z ⊖ UAL123 AIRBORNE AFTER 1733z
Release Window	When a release time is issued it will display as a 3 minute window (-1/+2 of the assigned time). Aircraft must depart within this prescribed window.	⊖ UAL123 1736z - 39z ⊖ UAL123 1736z - 39z
Expired Release	All releases will turn red once the valid departure time has passed. If a release is expired coordination with TMU is required before the aircraft may depart.	⊖ UAL123 1736z - 39z

5. Once the aircraft has departed, click the circle/line symbol to delete the aircraft from the release list.

6. Basic messaging and notification functionality exists within IDS. Notifications for releases and notifications for TMU messages will chime and present a notification box. Messages sent via IDS from TMU to a position do not persist and are not recallable once they are cleared.

The screenshot displays the IDS interface with a dark theme. At the top, the time is 17:52:26, and the user is Justin McElvaney. A notification box in the top right corner states: "Release time for UAL456 updated to 1752z." Below this, the main display area shows a release for UAL456 at 1751z - 54z. A red box highlights the release time update notification. In the bottom right corner, a notification box titled "Message from TMU" displays the text "Example message from TMU." and a "CLOSE" button. A red arrow points from the notification box to the release time update notification.