

Guide to Recording a Professional ATIS

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Voice ATIS is one of the most useful tools that VRC gives us as controllers. ATIS in the real world is usually computer generated however some smaller controlled airfields utilize a manually recorded ATIS similar to what we use. The major difference between real world ATIS and our ATIS recordings at vZID is the procedures followed by real world tower controllers and phraseology. This article is by no means inclusive but will hopefully pass along some of the things that I have noticed in real world ATIS recordings, as well as information from other ARTCCs in VATSIM. If you have never listened to a real world ATIS you should give it a try. Many ATIS recordings are available via telephone. While I could find no airfields in our airspace which have telephone ATIS, O'Hare (KORD) has it available at (773)601-8921.

The first step in recording an ATIS broadcast is to understand what exactly is in it. ATIS broadcasts consist of 10 sections:

1. Location
2. Observation Time
3. Wind Direction and Speed
4. Visibility
5. Sky Conditions
6. Temperature and Dew Point
7. Altimeter Setting
8. Instrument Approaches
9. Landing and Departing Runways
10. Notices to Airmen

Next we need some weather in the form of a METAR

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KCVG 120352Z 30017G22KT 7SM -RA FEW10 BKN016 OVC022 10/08  
A2961 RMK AO2 SLP023 P0003 T01000083
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We'll use this METAR to create an ATIS broadcast for KCVG.

Location

Every ATIS broadcast begins with the official facility name for the airport that it covers and the current information code. In this case it is KCVG or Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International airport. If you are unsure what the official name of the airport is look it up on www.airnav.com. The official name will be written next to the ICAO identifier and above the city and state location of the airport at the top of the page. The correct location section for this ATIS broadcast is:

Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International information Delta.

*Note that the word airport was left out, this is a given and does not need to be included.

Observation Time

Observation time is the time at which the observation was recorded. It is not necessary to include the first two digits of the time stamp on the METAR as this is the date of the recording. Real world METARS are regularly updated at xx52 ZULU. If the update is at a different time then it is a special observation which needs to be noted in the broadcast by adding the word “special” after the time. The correct observation time for this ATIS broadcast is:

0352 ZULU. If the time stamp was “0330Z” it would read 0330 ZULU Special.

Wind Direction and Speed

Wind is reported at the time of the observation to give pilots a general idea of what the winds are at the airport. Winds are always reported in knots so the word knots does not need to be included. Gusts are reported immediately after the winds. The correct wind for this ATIS broadcast is:

Wind 300 at 17 Gusts 22.

Visibility

Visibility is reported in statute miles (SM) so the inclusion of statute miles in the report is unnecessary. If the visibility is reported to a fraction of a mile then it is to be read “one half” or “one and one quarter”. If the visibility is reported less than 7 statute miles a reason for the reduced visibility is must be included. If visibility is at or greater than 7 the reason for reduced visibility is optional. For example “visibility 4, fog”. The correct visibility report for this ATIS broadcast is:

Visibility 7. or Visibility 7, light rain.

Sky Conditions

Sky conditions are always read as individual numbers (11 is read “one one”) and are only reported for 12,000ft and below because the reporting equipment is only considered accurate up to 12,000ft. If there is a cloud layer slightly above 12,000ft then it may be optionally reported if it is the only cloud layer. A report of few clouds should be read before the height such as “few clouds 7 thousand”, where scattered, broken and overcast layers are reported after. The lowest layer of broken or overcast clouds constitute a ceiling and must be reported as such by adding the word ceiling before the cloud layer is reported. If there is no cloud

layer below 12,000ft then it is to be read as “clear below one two thousand”. The correct sky condition report for this ATIS broadcast is:

Few clouds one thousand Ceiling one thousand six hundred broken, two thousand two hundred overcast.

Temperature and Dew Point

Temperature and dew point are always reported as individual numbers. Any number with the letter “M” in front of them are negative and are pronounced as “minus”. The correct temperature and dew point report for this broadcast is:

Temperature one zero, dew point zero eight.

Altimeter Setting

Altimeter settings are always read as individual numbers and the decimal point is left out. The correct altimeter setting report for this ATIS broadcast is:

Altimeter two niner six one.

Instrument Approaches

The approaches which inbound IFR aircraft should expect are reported next. For most airports served by ATIS broadcasts this will be either visual approaches or ILS approaches, however any approach that you are currently automatically issuing on initial contact should be reported here. The correct instrument approaches report for this ATIS broadcast is one of the following:

Expect ILS Approach runway 36R.

Simultaneous ILS Approaches in use runways 36L, 36C, and 36R.

Simultaneous Visual and Localizer Approaches in use runways 36C, and 36R.

Expect RNAV approach Runway 36R

Runways in Use

The landing and departing runways in use are reported here. The correct runways in use report for this ATIS broadcast is:

Landing runways 36C and 36R, departing runway 27.

Notices to Airmen

Notices to airmen are also reported in ATIS broadcasts. This is where you can report runway/taxiway closures, frequency combinations, contact instructions, and other information pertinent to the airfield that you are controlling. Note that

when combining frequencies in the real world this is only done with tower and below. It sounds kind of weird to say “Approach, Tower, Ground, and Delivery on 119.500. This section always starts with “Notices to Airmen” and for this broadcast would sound like this:

Notices to Airmen. Runway 36L Closed, Runway 27 Closed to Arrivals. Taxiway Sierra closed between Taxiway Sierra 4 and Mike. Tower, Ground and Clearance Delivery combined on 118.3.

Note: real world NOTAM information is available at <https://www.notams.jcs.mil/dinsQueryWeb/>

This section will also include information about read back instructions and reporting procedures such as:

Read back all hold short instructions and runway assignments. VFR Aircraft state direction of flight. Advise on initial contact you have information Delta.

Full Broadcast

A full ATIS broadcast may sound something like this:

Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International information Delta. 0352 ZULU. Wind 300 at 17 Gusts 22. Visibility 7, light rain. Few clouds one thousand Ceiling one thousand six hundred broken, two thousand two hundred overcast. Temperature one zero, dew point zero eight. Altimeter two niner six one. Simultaneous ILS Approaches in use runways 36C, and 36R. Landing runways 36C and 36R, departing runway 27. Notices to Airmen. Runway 36L Closed, Runway 27 Closed to Arrivals. Taxiway Sierra closed between Taxiway Sierra 4 and Mike. Tower, Ground and Clearance Delivery combined on 118.3. VFR Aircraft state direction of flight. Read back all hold short instructions and runway assignments. Advise on initial contact you have information Delta.

Other ATIS Notes

- VATSIM requires that Voice ATIS broadcasts be 1 minute or less.
- Some airports due to their vicinity to other airports divide the phonetic alphabet between the two airports. The only airports in our airspace that I am aware practice this are KCMH and KOSU. KCMH uses Alpha-November, and KOSU uses Oscar-Zulu.

Special thanks for articles from vZLA's Andrew Doubleday, and vZOB's Matthew Magera for their idea to post articles similar to this and for various pieces of information included in their articles.

