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MEL Deferral Management: A Dispatch Handoff Checklist

LANDING.AERO is a Montreal software studio that builds custom, AI-assisted software for flight operations: operations tools, data integration, workflow automation and dashboards designed around how an airline, charter operator or flight department actually works.

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In this article

1. Executive Summary
 2. Introduction and Background
 3. Key Changes: From a Defect List to a Controlled Handoff
 4. Implementation Considerations and Process Changes
 5. Exceptions, Reconciliation and the Release Boundary
 6. Build Versus Buy: Evaluate the Existing Path First
 7. Data Analysis and Evidence
 8. Audit Trail and Source-of-Truth Limits
 9. Conclusion
-

Executive Summary

MEL deferral management succeeds when an approved maintenance deferral becomes usable, traceable information in flight planning and operational control. A **minimum equipment list (MEL)** record is only part of that chain. United States (US) rules require an approved MEL and authorization to use it for the applicable aircraft; a software status cannot supply either. (www.ecfr.gov) (www.ecfr.gov) The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) lists **Advisory Circular (AC) 120-125**, issued **November 1, 2023**, as active. Its guidance is not binding law. (www.faa.gov) (www.faa.gov)

Responsibility must follow the operation. Under **Part 121 domestic and flag** rules, the pilot in command (PIC) and dispatcher share preflight planning and dispatch-release responsibility. Supplemental operations have a different allocation involving the director of operations. (www.ecfr.gov) (www.ecfr.gov) (www.ecfr.gov) Under **Part 135**, the certificate holder retains operational control and identifies authorized people in its manual. A generic dispatch approval workflow cannot replace that allocation. (www.ecfr.gov) AC 120-125 describes replanning and a new or amended release when a deferral introduces operational limitations, such as altitude, weight or fuel restrictions. (www.faa.gov)

The practical buying question is whether the existing maintenance and planning products already deliver the necessary handoff. **IFS Maintenix** documents applicability and operational effects, important parts of a packaged maintenance capability. (docs.ifs.com) **Lido Flight 4D** describes MEL and configuration deviation list (CDL) support in planning, while **N-Flight Planning** documents both automated effects and restrictions requiring manual application. These are useful capabilities, not proof that a particular operator's interface is complete. (www.lhsystems.com) (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com)

This report proposes an acceptance checklist linking aircraft identity, approved reference, deferral instance, interval, procedure evidence, restrictions, affected flights and closure to accountable recipients. It recommends testing late changes, aircraft substitutions, interacting items, stale feeds and missing acknowledgments before commissioning a narrow bridge. **Repair categories B, C and D** correspond to **3, 10 and 120 consecutive calendar days**, respectively, excluding discovery day in the circular's descriptions; the operator's approved MEL controls actual use. (www.faa.gov) (www.faa.gov) (www.faa.gov) The evidence does not establish a

universal latency target, an automatic dispatch decision rule or a comparable vendor performance benchmark. The purchase decision should therefore turn on a demonstrated workflow and retained evidence, rather than an integration label.

Introduction and Background

A maintenance-control screen can show a deferred defect while the flight planner still uses an earlier aircraft state. A crew can receive a current defect list while a release references an earlier planning calculation. The useful question is consequently broader than whether a system can store an MEL number: **which approved information reached which person, for which aircraft and flight, before which decision?**

For US operations, **Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR), sections 121.628 and 135.179**, establishes conditions for operation with inoperative equipment, including an approved aircraft MEL and appropriate operations specifications. This report addresses the information handoff inside that framework. It does not establish eligibility to defer a defect or substitute for the operator's approvals, manuals or procedures. (www.ecfr.gov) (www.ecfr.gov)

The circular identifies **D095** as the MEL-use authorization. The operator's actual authorization remains part of the evaluation evidence. (www.faa.gov)

The scope is maintenance-to-operations integration for directors of operations, maintenance control, operations control centers (OCCs), dispatch managers and their information technology (IT) teams. An **electronic technical log**, maintenance platform, flight-planning suite and crew application may each hold a different representation of the same event. Public documentation illustrates why those representations need inspection: Maintenix distinguishes aircraft applicability, and N-Flight Planning associates outstanding maintenance items with a particular airframe. (docs.ifs.com) (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com)

The analysis separates **documented capabilities** from **proposed acceptance criteria**. Vendor examples below identify functions worth demonstrating. The field matrix, reconciliation cases and measurement plan are this report's design recommendations, not FAA-prescribed software fields. A successful demonstration needs the operator's actual MEL, authorization, configuration and procedures, none of which were supplied for an individual aircraft.

Historical interface notes retain their original dates. A public feature page does not establish installed functionality, licensing, enabled configuration or an operator-specific release process.

Key Changes: From a Defect List to a Controlled Handoff

Change the unit of identity

The recommended primary key is a **deferral instance**, linked to the defect record and physical aircraft. An MEL item number alone is insufficient for interface reconciliation when the same reference can recur. N-Flight Planning explicitly distinguishes its internal deferral-instance record, called a **deferred maintenance item (DMI)**, from the MEL reference. (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com)

The proposed contract should preserve separate identifiers for aircraft, defect, deferral, reference revision and affected flight leg. N-Flight Planning's airframe assignment provides an example of an explicit aircraft association. (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com) A planning leg should not inherit a deferral simply because its flight number resembles an earlier leg. ForeFlight's historical API notes distinguish a trip identifier grouping flights or legs, illustrating why trip and leg identifiers need separate mapping. (www.foreflight.com)

- **Aircraft identity:** Reconcile registration, internal fleet key and configuration reference.
- **Deferral identity:** Preserve the source record key throughout updates and closure.
- **Reference identity:** Carry the applicable approved item and controlled revision.
- **Flight identity:** Link each affected leg to its own planning and release state.
- **Event identity:** Distinguish a delivered change from a new maintenance instance.

These are recommended mapping rules. They should be tested against actual source exports and destination fields rather than assumed from screen labels.

Treat the approved reference as controlled data

A live hyperlink to the latest MEL page does not establish which revision informed an earlier decision. The handoff should retain the applicable reference and enough revision evidence to reconstruct the reviewed state. TRAX documents assigning an MEL revision number, and a separate configuration switch controls whether updates must follow a revision process. Installed settings therefore matter. (help.trax.aero) (help.trax.aero)

A demonstration should change the controlled reference, then show how existing deferrals are reviewed under the operator's procedures. The interface should make an unresolved mapping visible. TRAX's documented authorization process provides a source-side state worth inspecting during that test. (help.trax.aero) Silent replacement of historical text would make retrospective review harder even if the current screen appeared complete.

Separate maintenance completion from operational review

Maintenix can require **maintenance operations control (MOC)** authorization before deferral. That authorization should not be relabeled as flight-release approval in a downstream application. (docs.ifs.com) The proposed workflow should distinguish source authorization, delivery, recipient review and the resulting operational action.

IFS also documents a period during which configuration validation remains pending after maintenance activity. This is a concrete reason to inspect intermediate states rather than treating every changed status as a finished operational package. (docs.ifs.com)

- **Source authorization:** Record who approved the maintenance-side action.
- **Procedure evidence:** Retain the applicable maintenance and operations procedure references.
- **Technical delivery:** Record destination acceptance or rejection of the message.
- **Operational review:** Record the accountable recipient's disposition.
- **Decision linkage:** Associate the resulting plan or release with the reviewed state.

The handoff should distinguish **maintenance (M)** and **operations (O)** procedure records and preserve the current controlled manual reference. (www.faa.gov)

The intended result is a chain of evidence. A green interface indicator should have a defined meaning that every participating team can explain. N-Flight Planning's documented restriction-application notification offers one concrete destination behavior to inspect. (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com)

Implementation Considerations and Process Changes

Map responsibility before mapping fields

For domestic and flag operations, Part 121 assigns joint planning and dispatch-release responsibilities to the PIC and dispatcher. Supplemental operations assign the PIC and director of operations joint responsibility for initiation, continuation, diversion and termination, with delegation of functions subject to the rule. The routing configuration should reflect the applicable operation. (www.ecfr.gov) (www.ecfr.gov) (www.ecfr.gov)

Part 135 makes the certificate holder responsible for operational control and requires authorized personnel to be identified in the manual. The integration should preserve that operator-specific allocation; a software release label does not establish a Part 121 dispatch-release requirement. (www.ecfr.gov) Part 121 also distinguishes dispatch-release content for domestic and flag operations from flight-release content for supplemental operations. A database column called “release” should preserve that distinction. (www.ecfr.gov) (www.ecfr.gov)

The following matrix is a **proposed minimum equipment list dispatch checklist for data acceptance**, not a dispatch authorization checklist. “Acknowledgment” means evidence appropriate to that stage; message receipt and operational disposition are separate events.

Table 1 maps recommended handoff fields to ownership, recipients and recovery actions.

Field or record	Source of truth and change event	Recipient and action owner	Acknowledgment and fallback
Aircraft and configuration	Controlled fleet/configuration record; reassignment or configuration change	Maintenance validates applicability; planning reconciles assigned tail	Confirm matching aircraft keys; route unresolved identity to the named coordinator
Defect and deferral instance	Maintenance record; creation, amendment or cancellation	Maintenance control owns source accuracy; OCC identifies affected legs	Retain source key and source version; use the approved manual handoff if unavailable
Approved MEL reference	Controlled operator MEL and applicability mapping; revision or reference change	Maintenance reviewer validates applicability; operations receives relevant implications	Preserve reviewed revision; escalate missing or mismatched reference
Discovery and deferral times	Authorized source timestamps; creation or correction	Maintenance owns clock inputs; operations receives applicable deadline	Confirm timestamp basis; do not substitute interface receipt time
Repair interval or extension	Approved source interval and authorized extension record; deadline change	Maintenance manages repair obligation; planning reviews affected operation	Retain authority and old/new deadline; escalate unsupported extension

Field or record	Source of truth and change event	Recipient and action owner	Acknowledgment and fallback
Maintenance and operations procedures	Controlled procedure references and authorized completion evidence; completion or repeat trigger	Assigned maintenance or operations role performs required action	Record performer, evidence and applicability; show incomplete evidence explicitly
Operational restrictions	Approved source restriction and performance inputs; addition, revision or removal	Planner and authorized operational-control person assess affected flights	Confirm application or manual disposition; preserve unsupported conditions visibly
Flight and release linkage	Planning/release system; new calculation, amendment or aircraft substitution	Applicable authorized operational-control roles and PIC	Associate reviewed source state with resulting version; reconcile displaced legs
Repair and closure	Maintenance repair/closure record; approved correction or closure	Maintenance owns closure; operations reviews remaining applicability	Confirm removal at each destination; preserve the historical decision record

The matrix intentionally assigns different ownership to source accuracy and flight action. It gives IT a testable contract without transferring an operational responsibility to the integration team. Its procedure and restriction rows should be populated from controlled operator material, not generated from general descriptions.

Prove the destination can represent the source

Swiss-AS AMOS describes interfaces with operations-control systems, including flat files and Extensible Markup Language (XML) messaging. **Veryon** describes application programming interfaces (APIs) using Representational State Transfer (REST) as its preferred integration method. Those statements establish integration mechanisms to investigate; neither demonstrates that a reader's destination accepts every required MEL field. (swiss-as.com) (veryon.com)

- **Field coverage:** Compare actual exported records with destination schema and displays.
- **Meaning:** Agree whether null means unknown, inapplicable, omitted or cleared.
- **Time basis:** Preserve the approved interpretation of discovery and deadline fields.
- **Revision:** Show how a correction supersedes earlier data without erasing history.
- **Ownership:** Identify who resolves a rejected field or ambiguous restriction.
- **Fallback:** Demonstrate the operator's approved alternate communication process.

An interface should pass these checks using realistic records before a team concludes that a custom bridge is warranted. Veryon's description of shareable fields is a starting point for requesting the actual payload. (veryon.com)

Exceptions, Reconciliation and the Release Boundary

Test changes against affected flights

A snapshot answers what the maintenance system currently shows. A release-linked record should answer what authorized personnel reviewed for a particular flight. These are different questions, so the proposed design should retain both current state and decision history.

TRAX documents dispatch instructions affected by MEL revisions, while N-Flight Planning documents MEL-related flight-event monitoring. These functions make useful demonstration points: change the source, inspect destination behavior, and establish who receives the resulting exception. (help.trax.aero) (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com)

- **Tail substitution:** Re-evaluate the substituted aircraft and remove inappropriate inherited associations.
- **Late deferral:** Identify already planned or released flights affected by the new condition.
- **Repair closure:** Verify that removal reaches planning and crew-facing views.
- **Corrected record:** Preserve the superseded value and review any affected decision.
- **Duplicate message:** Apply the intended state once while retaining delivery evidence.
- **Out-of-order change:** Prevent an older message from overwriting a newer source state.
- **Stale feed:** Display the last successful reconciliation and escalate under defined procedures.
- **Missing acknowledgment:** Distinguish delivery failure from an unreviewed operational effect.

The operator should define escalation triggers from its procedures and operational exposure. The monitoring period described in N-Flight Planning is configurable, so the installed value belongs in the test record. (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com) This report proposes no universal number of seconds within which a handoff is acceptable.

Review interacting items as a set

The circular identifies interaction between failed components as a concern. (www.faa.gov) Maintenix documents conflicting-reference fields, and TRAX documents a conflict function with configurable behavior, including a soft warning. These features justify inspecting configuration and reviewer response rather than assuming that independent item acceptance proves combined acceptability. (docs.ifs.com) (help.trax.aero)

The acceptance exercise should assemble an operator-selected set of concurrent deferrals. Reviewers should inspect whether the destination receives the full set and whether a changed item prompts appropriate reassessment. No generic bridge should infer approved relief merely because its records contain no configured conflict.

A two-flight sequence (Hypothetical Example)

Consider an aircraft assigned to Flight Alpha and then Flight Bravo. Before Alpha's release, the maintenance record has no relevant open deferral. A later, properly authorized deferral introduces an operational restriction. The bridge delivers the changed record, and the designated recipient reviews Alpha's existing plan and release under the operator's procedures.

The circular addresses amendment procedures for deferrals arising after release issuance. (www.faa.gov) The proposed acceptance test should therefore retain the earlier release alongside the source state used for any revised decision. Delivery of a new defect list alone would not prove that review occurred.

Before Bravo is planned, maintenance records repair closure. Bravo's planning view should receive the closure, while Alpha's historical record should still show the condition reviewed for Alpha. If Bravo receives a substitute aircraft, its state should be rebuilt for that tail. This is a hypothetical data-sequence test, not a determination that either flight may operate.

The useful evidence is a linked series of source versions, deliveries, reviews and resulting plan or release versions. A final “closed” status cannot reconstruct that series on its own.

Build Versus Buy: Evaluate the Existing Path First

The first demonstration should use the maintenance and planning systems already installed. **Lido Flight 4D** describes an MEL/CDL service with optional supporting modules and a restriction interface. The relevant question is which modules and mappings the operator actually has enabled. (www.lhsystems.com)

Table 2 compares implementation paths and public evidence. It is a handoff evaluation, not a product ranking or claim that each product serves the same operational segment.

Path or example	Documented capability	Evidence still required from the proposed deployment
Existing IFS maintenance path	Maintenix represents operational restrictions in deferral references. (docs.ifs.com)	Approved restriction mapping, emitted changes, recipient review and closure propagation
Existing TRAX maintenance path	MEL Master includes instructions for dispatch. (help.trax.aero)	Whether approved revision and deferral-instance identifiers travel to planning and release
Existing AMOS interface	Adaptive Integration Manager supports flat files, database access and XML. (swiss-as.com)	Exact MEL payload, reconciliation, permissions and behavior after rejected updates
Existing Veryon interface	Vendor describes transmit-capable solution fields, including defect-related integration. (veryon.com)	Supported product, field availability, approved procedure evidence and downstream applicability
Existing Ramco configuration path	Vendor describes allowable and actual aircraft configuration tracking. (www.ramco.com)	The MEL-specific event contract and its relationship to the installed planning suite
Existing planning-suite path	N-Flight Planning documents airframe-specific MEL/CDL assignment. (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com)	Automatic versus manual effects, changed-item alerts and linkage to release decisions
Custom bridge, including LANDING.AERO	Custom applications built around an operator's needs; no packaged MEL product or public price is established here. (www.landing.aero)	Scoped fields, source access, review routing, audit evidence, support ownership and acceptance results

A packaged capability is preferable when the demonstrated installation satisfies the contract with manageable configuration and support. A custom bridge becomes a candidate when a clearly identified gap remains between systems. The table does not establish that any listed deployment needs custom work or that a bridge can replace the maintenance or planning product.

Public interface documentation should also be assessed by age and scope. Jeppesen's message overview describes required, optional and conditional interchange data, but labels its material as reference examples. Treat such material as an input to vendor discussions rather than a production assurance. (www.jeppesen.com) (www.jeppesen.com)

ForeFlight provides a useful historical example of why lifecycle testing matters. Its **June 2021** API release notes describe restrictions on updating filed flights. That historical behavior should become a current-version demonstration question, not an unconditional claim about today's endpoint permissions. (www.foreflight.com)

- **Maintenance vendor:** Can the approved reference, instance, changes and closure be exported?
- **Planning vendor:** Which restrictions become calculation inputs and which require manual action?
- **Interface owner:** Who maintains mappings through MEL, fleet and software revisions?
- **Operational owner:** Who receives exceptions and records the required disposition?
- **Commercial owner:** Which modules, API access and support obligations are included?
- **Acceptance owner:** What retained evidence proves the agreed workflow passed?

AvioBook documents integration with flight-planning systems. Such downstream distribution deserves its own test even when source-to-planner delivery succeeds. (aviobook.aero) The crew-facing package should show the appropriate reviewed information for the assigned leg, with failures visible to the accountable team.

Data Analysis and Evidence

The quantitative core is interval handling

No operator dataset, comparable implementation prices or independently measured handoff benchmark was supplied or verified. The defensible numerical core is therefore the published repair-category framework and a proposed measurement plan. It would be misleading to turn broad aviation interest or vendor integration language into an estimate of buying demand or efficiency improvement.

Table 3 summarizes the circular's interval descriptions. Actual authority remains with the operator's approved MEL and authorization.

Category	Published interval description	Recommended data test
A	Item-specific interval. (www.faa.gov)	Preserve the actual interval basis and governing text
B	3 consecutive calendar days, excluding discovery day. (www.faa.gov)	Test discovery-date correction and the approved calculation
C	10 consecutive calendar days, excluding discovery day. (www.faa.gov)	Reconcile the source deadline with each receiving system
D	120 consecutive calendar days, excluding discovery day. (www.faa.gov)	Keep overdue open items visible; remove restrictions through authorized source changes

A category letter should not be converted into a free-standing dispatch permission. The useful integration result is agreement with the authorized source interval, including its basis and provenance. The circular discusses authorized B/C extensions; a deadline edit alone is not evidence of such authorization. (www.faa.gov)

Recommended measures should use explicit denominators and preserve unresolved cases:

- **Completeness:** Required field values received, divided by required values expected.

- **Reconciliation:** Source deferral instances matched correctly to destination instances.
- **Applicability:** Affected legs linked to the correct aircraft and reviewed source state.
- **Delivery:** Changes accepted, rejected, retried and awaiting reconciliation.
- **Review:** Operationally relevant changes with recorded recipient disposition.
- **Closure:** Closed source instances reconciled across receiving systems.

These are proposed measures, not published performance results. Targets should be agreed by the operator using its approved workflow. Comparing tools without common definitions of “received,” “reviewed” and “applied” would obscure rather than resolve the handoff question.

N-Flight Planning documents an option to include alerting for items without a performance effect. An evaluation restricted to performance penalties could therefore miss other operationally relevant information. (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com) Its documentation also describes notification of successful restriction application, a distinct observation from arrival of a maintenance message. (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com)

A balanced evidence pack should contain successful examples, rejected mappings and incomplete reviews. It should identify the source revision, destination version, test configuration and operational reviewers. No public documentation reviewed establishes a common MEL-interface latency, completeness or release-rework benchmark across the vendors discussed.

Audit Trail and Source-of-Truth Limits

Preserve the record of decisions

The recommended audit model keeps source changes separate from interface deliveries and from operational decisions. Maintenance should remain the authoritative source for its approved defect and deferral records; planning and release systems should preserve the decisions made through their authorized workflows. Copying data creates a representation whose freshness and scope must be explicit. The interface mechanisms AMOS documents are transport choices to evaluate within that boundary. (swiss-as.com)

IFS documents a configuration-validation trigger when a fault changes to Deferred. That demonstrates a meaningful source event, but does not by itself prove that a flight planner received a complete operational package. (docs.ifs.com) Conversely, ForeFlight's historical API notes describe a release-status object; a destination status alone would not prove which source revision informed a decision. (www.foreflight.com)

A reviewer should be able to follow a selected flight backward from its released plan to the deferral state actually reviewed. The reverse trace should identify flights affected by a selected maintenance change. If the interface retains only current values, the team should establish where historical evidence can be recovered.

Distinguish the contract from its transport

A documented payload contract can use existing technical standards. **OpenAPI** describes Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) API input and output schemas. **CloudEvents** distinguishes event identity and duplicate events. **AsyncAPI** describes producer and consumer runtime message validation. These are technical

building blocks, not aviation approvals or evidence of operational review. (spec.openapis.org) (raw.githubusercontent.com) (www.asyncapi.com)

The design should also specify what happens after a recipient rejects a message, an item cannot be represented, or an authorized reviewer requests correction. Retrying a technically valid message cannot resolve an incorrect aircraft mapping or an unsupported operational restriction.

AvioBook documents acceptance or rejection messages for integrated loadsheets. That is an example of acknowledgment semantics to investigate; it does not establish an MEL-review workflow. (aviobook.aero)

A review acknowledgment should name the actor, reviewed state and disposition. A transport receipt should identify message handling. A delivery log should show attempts and outcomes. These records can be linked without being treated as equivalent proof.

Access controls should follow the agreed source-of-truth boundary. A bridge should not create apparently authorized maintenance or release records merely to make synchronization easier. If a destination permits updates only in certain lifecycle states, the integration should demonstrate the approved alternate route for later changes. Historical ForeFlight notes about dispatcher-note support illustrate a data channel to investigate, not evidence that a note changes a release. (www.foreflight.com)

Conclusion

Lido documents aircraft-configuration inputs for performance work. That is a reminder to test configuration as well as the defect label: a technically successful message can still require additional data to become a usable planning input. (www.lhsystems.com) N-Flight Planning's documented manual restrictions similarly show why a generic "MEL imported" result is too coarse for acceptance. (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com)

The documented N-Flight Planning alert scope is a configuration to inspect, including its treatment of non-performance items. (n-flightplanning.support.skywise.com)

LANDING.AERO describes tailored flight-operations software and data-integration work. Its relevant category here is a custom implementation provider when the operator has established a specific integration need. That role should be evaluated alongside configuration of existing systems, not assumed to be necessary. (www.landing.aero)

Artificial intelligence (AI) assisted extraction or summarization, if proposed, should be tested against controlled source text and reviewed mappings before any operational use. The acceptance contract should preserve the approved restriction and its provenance rather than substitute an unconstrained summary. This is a design recommendation, not a verified vendor capability or a claim that AI can authorize a deferral.

Complete the handoff matrix in Table 1 with sample records and results from the exception tests in "Exceptions, Reconciliation and the Release Boundary." Use the unresolved gaps to agree whether configuration, a vendor interface or a narrow custom bridge is justified.

Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

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33. <https://www.landing.aero/about/>

THE PUBLISHER

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What it builds

Operations tools that reduce manual steps in day-to-day flight operations; integration of existing systems and data sources into one operational picture; workflow automation; real-time operational dashboards; bridges between legacy systems and modern applications; and mobile apps for staff in the field. Each application is designed around the operator's own workflows rather than sold as an off-the-shelf platform.

How it works

Work starts with discovery of the operator's workflows, continues with iterative development alongside the operator's team, and includes integration with the tools already in use and ongoing support.

Its own tools

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