



UNITED STATES TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

November 18, 2014

The Honorable Penny Pritzker
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Pritzker:

On behalf of the United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (Board), we are writing to offer the Board's initial recommendations for further integrating travel and tourism into the U.S. government's infrastructure plans, programs and investment priorities. The United States requires world class infrastructure to attract tourism, serve current and future travelers, and maintain its global position as a top global destination. Our call for integrating travel and tourism into our nation's infrastructure cuts across many Cabinet agencies, but in particular the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT). Specifically, we recommend:

- As chair of the Tourism Policy Council (TPC), we encourage you to engage with USDOT Secretary Foxx and other Cabinet members on the importance and urgency of integrating travel and tourism infrastructure into key U.S. transportation policies and legislative proposals. It is critical that travel and tourism infrastructure be elevated as a TPC priority to ensure consistent senior leadership engagement across Cabinet agencies.
- The Commerce Department provide input to the development of USDOT's 30-Year Strategic Transportation Plan. Travel and tourism shouldn't be an addendum to USDOT's plan; it must be tightly woven into the fabric.

The Board has significant concerns that the United States does not currently have the infrastructure in place to support projected tourism growth, and there is not enough emphasis on that growth as we plan for the future. We respectfully request your help in elevating travel

and tourism to become a priority consideration as the nation's long term infrastructure plans are created and implemented. This is an especially critical time as federal surface transportation and aviation legislation is currently under review and consideration by the Administration and the Congress.

As you noted at the onset of this year, travel exports "shattered" previous records and generated \$181 billion for the U.S. economy. By any measure, our success has been remarkable. However, we simply are not making strategic or sufficient travel infrastructure investments to support the expected growth in international visitors.

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) recently published a report concluding that the "relatively poor current state of Travel & Tourism related infrastructure" threatens the United States' ability to realize the benefits from anticipated travel growth." WTTC President David Scowsill observed that "weaknesses in the U.S. travel and tourism infrastructure pose a threat to travel and tourism growth in the country and could cost the U.S. in terms of jobs and a reduced contribution to the economy."

This is a sobering assessment of the future of travel and tourism in our country that must be boldly highlighted and urgently addressed.

USDOT is currently developing a 30-Year Strategic Transportation Plan. The draft plan considers the key role of the aviation sector in supporting tourism; the costs of airport congestion; the forecast growth in international air traffic; and working with federal, state and local stakeholders to ensure the adequacy, efficiency and reliability of our land, sea and air international gateways. In addition to these considerations, USDOT should acknowledge the President's goal of attracting 100 million international visitors by 2021 – and develop specific strategies for how the United States will be able to accommodate these visitors on arrival or as they move throughout the country.

The USDOT has proposed the GROW AMERICA Act to modernize our road, bridges, rail, and transit systems, and is also developing policy recommendations pertaining to aviation legislation. The GROW AMERICA Act would increase surface transportation investment and includes provisions that encourage USDOT grant recipients to fund projects and to consider the effects of travel and tourism-related infrastructure. However, the Board believes that it is imperative that the key visitation goals the President has set and the particular needs of international visitors, both arriving and departing the United States and as they move across the country, should be given greater prominence within USDOT's plan and policy and legislative positions.

Some examples of the types of issues that are particularly important to international visitors (and in many cases domestic travelers) that should be considered in developing long range transportation plans are:

- Intermodal connections – A November 2013 study released by the U.S. Travel Association and the American Public Transportation Association concluded that cities with rail-to-airport connections average nearly a 50 percent higher daily room rate when located within a quarter mile of a rail station. Cities with direct public transit from airports have a competitive edge in winning global business meetings, conventions and events.
- Antiquated infrastructure, entry reform and increases in international arrivals - With an expected 100 million visitors a year and the recent call for improvements in the process for international visitors as they enter the country, it is clear that US Customs and Border Protection facilities at airports may need to be reconfigured, baggage systems redesigned, larger jet bridges provided to accommodate jumbo aircraft, and airports modernized to serve current and future travel needs. In addition to the critical NextGen system, investments must be made to modernize our nation's airfields, terminals, and facilities to make them safe, efficient, and globally competitive.
- Understanding demand and how international visitors move across the country – The travel and tourism industry is uniquely qualified to provide insights into the desires and habits of international visitors. Is more universal signage warranted? Are our national parks sufficiently served by the highway system and public transportation?

Many of the infrastructure improvements needed to serve the projected increase in international visitors also will particularly benefit domestic travel and other industries. For example, Myrtle Beach South Carolina is the busiest vacation destination in America without Interstate highway-access. More than 15 million visitors annually travel to Myrtle Beach, stuck in traffic on a four lane state highway. According to the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, completing the 35 mile connection to the Interstate will create 29,000 jobs, boost tourism, attract new industries and save lives.

The recent fire at the FAA's air traffic control facility (TRACON) is a clarion call for action for the aviation sector, similar to the Minnesota I-35W Bridge collapse for surface transportation in 2007. The TRACON fire points out the need for a modern, more agile air navigation system, capable of fluidly responding to such outages, for the benefit of domestic and international travelers alike.

All the outstanding public and private work that's being done to secure the economic benefits of travel and tourism will be for naught if we don't have the infrastructure in place to support its growth. The United States cannot afford to be "complacent", as the WTTC warned we are at risk of becoming. Without sufficient strategic and targeted investment in our travel and tourism-related infrastructure, the United States will not favorably compete globally and not realize the tremendous benefits – visitor spending, jobs, cultural exchange and reputation - that come with international visitors. Repairing and scaling our nation's infrastructure is among the hardest problems the US Government and its private sector partners face. The fact that the Administration has introduced a multi-year surface transportation legislative proposal, is taking actions to increase public-private partnerships and investments in infrastructure projects, is accelerating near-term air traffic control modernization efforts, and has a long-term planning effort underway is encouraging. However, it is critical that travel and tourism's priorities be fully considered as this work continues.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views and recommendations on integrating travel and tourism into our nation's infrastructure plans and programs. Our nation's travelers and visitors expect and deserve to have a transportation system that is safe, efficient and modern. Proper investment in infrastructure is critical to serving and growing travel and tourism to and within the United States. As the travel and tourism industry works to support the goal of welcoming 100 million annual international visitors by 2021, we must ensure that our nation's infrastructure is similarly up to the task. We stand ready to assist in this important initiative.

Sincerely,



Sam Gilliland
Chair



Kathleen Matthews
Vice Chair