



UNITED STATES TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

June 10, 2013

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

Dear Secretary Kerry:

Through this letter, we respectfully submit the United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board's recommendations to better enable us to work together to meet the President's goals set forth in his National Travel and Tourism Strategy. We applaud the many great achievements and policies this Administration has brought forward over the last two years to enhance exports through travel facilitation initiatives.

First and foremost, the issuance of the President's executive order on January 19, 2012 establishing visa and foreign visitor processing goals set a clear directive for all Federal agencies. The Presidential Order started the process of this goal setting, followed quickly by the establishment of the task force on travel and competitiveness that led to the development of the National Travel and Tourism Strategy released on May 10, 2012. These bold moves directly led the State Department to achieve visa wait times of less than five days in key growth markets such as China, Brazil and India. The success and turnaround within those markets was nothing less than stellar in the eyes of the subcommittee, and the men and women of our State Department, who made that happen, need to be congratulated for their work in generating jobs and exports that improve our economy. We note the importance of modernizing our nation's employment and family-based immigration systems, a change we view as critical to our nation's economic and cultural future. Likewise, travel to the United States by non-immigrant visitors represents a significant source of revenue and job-creation for our country. Neither of these vital goals – immigration and facilitation of non-immigrant travel – should compete with the other. We strongly recommend that comprehensive immigration reform (CIR) be adequately resourced and managed so that the Departments of State (State) and Homeland Security (DHS) will be able to maintain short visa interview wait times and other improvements to the visa and port of entry processes even as they work to implement the bulk of any new CIR initiatives.

We are pleased with the recent work of the Tourism Policy Council to create better cross-agency collaboration around travel and entry policy, but we must not allow the momentum to falter in the Administration's second term as new people assume key policy-making positions. The Administration has made progress toward attracting 100 million visitors by 2021, but more work needs to be done. In this letter, we identify "pinch points" that will continue to inhibit the facilitation process and prevent the Administration from reaching its goals unless they are addressed.

Your Travel Facilitation Subcommittee has selected five areas to focus ongoing work. They are, in equal order of importance: 1) Streamlined Visa Processing, 2) Staffing/Resource Integration, 3) Reciprocity of Global Entry, 4) Expansion of TSA Pre-Check Program, and 5) the Model Ports Pilot Program.

STREAMLINED VISA PROCESSING: VISA ACCESS - ANALYSIS AND SOLUTIONS

The Administration has made excellent progress in facilitating increased visitation to the United States, with the most notable progress in China and Brazil, and we appreciate those efforts. The Administration has also lent significant support to Brand USA, a public-private partnership charged with promoting the United States as the premier global travel destination and educating travelers about U.S. security and entry policies. Brand USA will be in nine markets by the end of 2013, including China and Brazil. As we continue to market the United States as a travel destination and encourage greater visitation through Brand USA efforts, the increase of visitors will place additional pressure on consulates to maintain and improve visa facilitation.

It is with this anticipated growth in mind that we request an analysis from the Administration focused on identifying and remedying visa access issues. Recognizing that resources are finite and will continue to be constrained in the current fiscal environment, many factors influence U.S. visa adjudication capacity. In this report, we request periodic one or two-page fact sheets containing the status of visa demand in key markets, with an emphasis on the places where the State Department is currently experiencing, or anticipates challenges with providing access to U.S. visa adjudication processes.

Of course, China and Brazil are front of mind as their middle classes continue to grow and demand for visa services increases. Both countries are geographically large and some customers already have to (unacceptably) “take a trip to take a trip.” We recognize that solutions to visa access issues in one country may not be a viable solution in another city or country, with many factors influencing the United States’ ability to place structures or people in certain markets. Consequently, in these regular updates, we recommend that the Department of State outline how it may make greater use of technology and inter-governmental data sharing to improve current and future processing procedures. We are hopeful that an Administration report will aggregate and present these findings—essentially developing a menu of options from which visa facilitation options can be pursued, both now and in the future. These updates should identify the current and anticipated visa access pressure points and multiple solutions to those geographically-unique problems. Doing so will allow the Board to better support the Administration’s efforts of encouraging more global travel to the United States.

We believe that videoconferencing is a viable solution to meet increasing demand; however, we recognize it is not the only method of improving the visa application process. It is our understanding that analysis and strategic work to address visa processing operations creatively is already underway.

ACTION ITEMS:

- As described above, regular written updates to the Board highlighting visa access issues, both current and anticipated, and the development of a “solutions menu” to address the identified access issues.

- One solution to explore and pilot is better utilization of consular locations with agents that are presently at diplomatic facilities removed from the main embassy or consulates. We understand the General Services Offices of many of our embassies are tasked with selecting locations rightly based on the security of our State Department staff. If one of the services currently being provided by an outpost diplomatic office is passport renewals for American citizens, a pilot program should be conducted to allow visa processing services for foreign nationals. Whether full time or several days a month, staff could be augmented with one or two individuals from a nearby embassy or consulate. This “micro” office would allow processing of visa requests without the need for large capital expenditures by the State Department to build more capacity. We suggest Brazil and China, both countries with large geographical distances, be considered for this pilot program.
- Extending the visa validity period between the United States and China from the current one year to five years, with multiple entries permitted. Under the current visa reciprocity schedule, a U.S. B visa is valid for only 12 months for Chinese nationals. This means that returning Chinese visitors must continuously reapply for a visa. This is often inconvenient, expensive and disruptive. These applicants who were previously vetted and approved undergo the same reviews repeatedly. With a longer visa term, valuable State Department resources could be focused on new visa applicants. Furthermore, this change would make bilateral trade between the United States and China more accessible.
- Foreign guest artists engaged by U.S. arts-related organizations are required to obtain an O or a P nonimmigrant work visa. While the Administration has made great strides in reducing processing times, artists and nonprofit arts organizations have long experienced uncertainty in gaining approval for O and P visa petitions due to varying and often lengthy processing times and inconsistent interpretation of processing requirements. The nature of scheduling highly sought after performing groups requires that the visa process be consistently efficient and reliable, otherwise tourism opportunities can suffer. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services should be required to treat any nonprofit arts-related O and P visa petition that it fails to adjudicate within the statutory timeframe as a Premium Processing case (15-day turn around), free of additional charge.

In looking at examples like China and Brazil, we would like to see the Administration do everything possible to prevent the reemergence of unacceptably long wait times. To help prevent those types of situations, a future-looking evaluation system must be developed to identify emerging markets – with plans to facilitate and grow travel from those markets, prior to them becoming critically inefficient. While we realize Congressional mandates can drive funding flexibility and allocation, we need to become more strategic in our estimations and plans for growth. As the economic importance of these emerging markets grow, so will the diplomatic importance of having greater ties. We encourage the Administration to consider a plan of action they can present to the Board to ensure statutory flexibility exists to accomplish this goal.

ACTION ITEM:

- The Board respectfully requests the State Department to submit a report briefing us on the process currently used to establish new consulate locations, to be followed by a discussion with senior Department officials on how emerging market analysis and potential visa demand may be more effectively incorporated into future evaluation criteria. The Board requests a briefing on the consulate establishment process, so that we can offer better advice on a potentially more productive action plan with respect to facilities establishment.

The Board strongly believes any increase of capacity will lead to higher revenues being generated by the State Department in application fees. It is critical that the State Department be allowed to keep these revenues to help fund capacity growth in other emerging markets. The current funding model where Consular Affairs is not permitted to keep the fees it generates through visa processing is antiquated and does not allow for quick response to emerging markets versus our competitors abroad.

JOLT Act – We support the bipartisan Jobs Originated through Launching Travel (JOLT) Act, H.R. 1354, which has been introduced as a standalone bill in the House with excellent bipartisan support. Many of the JOLT Act provisions are contained in S.744, the Senate comprehensive immigration reform bill introduced in April 2013. The following provisions are contained in H.R. 1354 and are geared toward promoting the mobility of people and ensuring U.S. visa processing standards are meeting critical benchmarks.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Currently, many spontaneous travelers are not able to travel to the United States because of wait times for visa interviews, but under some circumstances the State Department will try to accommodate them within existing interview schedules. However, this expedited service is provided without any extra fee. The JOLT Act would require the Secretary of State to develop a pilot program for “premium processing” of travel visas and authorize the State Department to charge a fee sufficient to recover the costs.
- Under current law, Canadian citizens are not permitted to remain in the United States for longer than 180 days without going through the visa process. The JOLT Act would allow Canadians to stay in the U.S. for at most 240 days per year if: (1) visitors are over age 50 (with derivative benefits to a spouse); (2) they can show that they own a residence in the United States or have purchased rental or hotel accommodations in the United States for the duration of their stay; and (3) are not otherwise inadmissible. This provision would spur Canadian consumption and investment in the United States.
- Travel to the United States varies by season, and visa interview wait times are typically longer during the summer months and shorter during the winter months. In an effort to encourage applicants to apply for visas when demand is at its lowest, the JOLT Act directs the Secretary of State to make publicly available the visa

appointment availability during low peak periods. This information would allow applicants, or those facilitating visa applications, to identify periods of low demand to submit their applications, ensuring greater transparency in wait time data.

- Currently, a number of close U.S. allies and partners – including Poland, Israel, Chile and Brazil – are not members of the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP). The VWP enables citizens of participating countries to securely travel to the United States for short-term business or tourism purposes without having to go through the lengthy and complicated visa application process. The JOLT Act would adjust the process for VWP entrance to: (1) update eligibility criteria to require applicant countries to have both a visa overstay rate and a visa refusal rate of not more than three percent; (2) reinstate the Secretary of Homeland Security’s authority to waive the three percent visa refusal rate requirement, up to a maximum of 10 percent, if a country meets all other VWP requirements; (3) clarify the Secretary of Homeland Security’s methods for tracking aliens entering and exiting the United States and for detecting visa overstays. These revisions would provide a more objective and standardized basis for adding countries to the VWP. An applicant country must demonstrate compliance with a host of security measures, including secure travel documents, watch list sharing, accepting repatriated aliens, and law enforcement cooperation.
- The JOLT Act would set goals for visa processing requiring 90 percent of all visa interviews be conducted within 10 business days of requesting an appointment. Meeting this requirement would represent small but meaningful improvements. In addition, the State Department would be required to submit annual reports to Congress that detail their strategic plans to meet visa demand in high growth countries.
- Because of the lack of access to a U.S. consulate in geographically-larger countries, the in-person interview requirement remains a major hurdle for many potential visitors in high demand markets. In order to reduce deterrents for potential visitors, the United States should use technology to minimize the burden of travel to obtain an in-person interview. This section would amend the definition of an in-person interview and require the State Department to complete a two-year pilot program to conduct visa interviews via secure videoconferencing.

STAFFING/RESOURCE INTEGRATION

The current operations of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Transportation Security Agency (TSA) (together, the “Agencies”) confront staffing challenges on a day to day basis. Peak demand flows vary greatly from off peak hours, making staffing on an hour-to-hour basis difficult. However, many in the tourism sector have been confronting similar staffing challenges for decades. Both sides have discussed how they can learn from each other, but to date, no follow up has occurred. The subcommittee has learned through the years the Agencies have not availed themselves enough of industrial engineers who would be able to design processes that could potentially meet the staffing challenges currently faced by the Agencies. That said, we understand the Agencies are in the process of collaborating with the private sector for best practice sharing.

ACTION ITEMS:

- The subcommittee respectfully requests a staffing analysis briefing prior to the next Board meeting so that travel and tourism industry experts can provide input through the Board to assist with staffing processes and to share best practices from development to implementation and roll-out. We request CBP determine an appropriate per passenger processing goal as part of the staffing analysis at each Port of Entry. On the past, the Board has recommended a processing goal of 30 minutes per passenger. The Agencies can have the advantages of learning from industry's mistakes to modernize and create a more sophisticated process. We applaud the Agencies for pursuing this collaboration.
- To facilitate the CBP's capability to reach the goals it sets, the Board supports increasing staff at all ports, but particularly at airports. Continued focus and resources to further expedite arriving international visitors will substantially enhance their arrival experience and further enable CBP to process more passengers.
- In order to ensure a welcoming environment and improve America's image around the globe, the Board encourages CBP to collect and analyze traveler feedback in the development of customer service best practices.

CBP and TSA play an important role in the mobility of people and most importantly, safety and defense of our country. The Agencies are comprised of individuals who take this mandate seriously. With such fine men and women working under DHS, greater collaboration and cross-training should be explored to better manage both CBP and TSA peak periods. To accomplish this greater synergy, new training may be required, but this may be a cost effective way of solving 'rush' period issues.

ACTION ITEM:

- The subcommittee recommends a task force within DHS be formed to evaluate the potential of shared use employees and the benefits cross-training might have on the staffing needs of both agencies and the employees. We request a report to the Secretary of DHS within a six month period. This report should also consider succession planning within each agency, and if there are TSA employees who could be eligible for further law enforcement training.

RECIPROCITY OF GLOBAL ENTRY AND EXPANSION OF UNITED STATES CITIZEN UTILIZATION

The Department of Homeland Security and more specifically Customs and Border Protection (CBP) should be commended for developing Global Entry to facilitate mobility and the entry process. The technology appears to be solid and easily expandable, but challenges exist in enticing more individuals into the system. The ability to increase Global Entry utilization should be achieved in two ways: 1) expand the outreach and marketing to citizens of existing participating countries, and 2) increase bilateral agreements to facilitate greater participation.

ACTION ITEM:

- The Board recommends Global Entry validity be extended to 10 years, creating a longer-term category for travelers, should they want and be approved for a longer validity period. Access can be granted for either a five or 10 year time period, based on whichever fee structure an applicant chooses. DHS is receiving real-time data on participants who should no longer be allowed in Global Entry. From a security standpoint it should make no difference in changing the offering from five years to 10.

Expand Outreach and Marketing to Citizens of existing participating countries –

ACTION ITEM:

- The Board believes it is critical to increase the utilization rate of Global Entry within the existing bilateral agreements (Germany, South Korea and the United Kingdom). This can only be achieved by a concentrated marketing effort. Brand USA has the expertise in reaching consumers with a compelling brand message. They've already conducted in-country research and understand consumer sensibilities in each of the main tourism feeder markets around the world as they come into the Global Entry program. Currently, the three participating countries are all targeted by Brand USA in 2013. Brand USA would most likely utilize on-line travel sites where the booking public is focused or business periodicals and upscale magazines to target the frequent business traveler. One example is the Sojern network where ads can be placed that appear on the digital boarding passes airline passengers obtain online. The cost of advertising will be a bargain versus the increased process savings realized in increased throughput capabilities.

Increase bilateral agreements participation –

ACTION ITEMS:

- The Board recommends the Administration set a goal of three new agreements in the next year. We recognize agreements take not only time to negotiate, but to verify security systems exist within the reciprocal agencies ensuring our borders remain secure. However, if we do not challenge ourselves with a set goal there will be no sense of urgency to begin dialog and complete agreements in a timely manner, especially as other CBP resources become increasingly stretched. We need this capacity in the system.
- Two logical countries to target for participation are France and Japan. Each of those countries has systems in place that appear to be similar to the three countries currently eligible for Global Entry. A recommended stretch goal would be to begin conversations with the European Union (EU) to explore a synchronized program with all EU member countries.

The subcommittee recently learned that when a person renews their passport, the State Department is not able to include Global Entry status on a new passport and DHS doesn't automatically update their database with new passport information unless contacted by the passport holder. This must be quickly remedied, as there is a valid assumption on behalf of the travelling public that Global Entry eligibility would transfer with the passport holder should they need a new passport, and the Administration should explore the full potential offered by technologies such as the ePassport and automated border control (ABC) systems.

ACTION ITEMS:

- The subcommittee recommends State and DHS meet within the next 60 days and report back on a plan and timeline to ensure Global Entry transfers to a new passport.
- The subcommittee recommends State and DHS meet within the next 60 days to coordinate all non-Global Entry renewals going forward receive collateral materials explaining the benefits of participating in the Global Entry Program.

EXPANSION OF TSA PRECHECK PROGRAM

The TSA Pre-Check program is a welcome technology initiative to expedite trusted travelers, enabling a more risk-based approach to security. With increasing usage, it and Global Entry have the added benefit of helping to manage capacity flow problems during peak travel periods. TSA is diligently working on messaging the advantages of Pre-Check to the traveling public in order to gain more participants. Increasing participants entering the system will create more capacity in the overall TSA process by realizing efficiencies in the amount of time to clear a passenger through the screening process. Real savings will be realized in manpower and machines as more trusted travelers utilize the program.

However, one major impediment in the system is the reliance on airline databases and airlines as "gatekeepers" for eligibility, which places a reliance on their willingness to partner. Having a majority of, but not all, airlines involved in Pre-Check, and Pre-Check only available at certain airports, are confusing to the traveling public. On one leg of a trip, a flyer may be Pre-Check authorized, but on another, through a different carrier, they may be denied access. Simply put, the Administration either needs to mandate all airlines participate, or develop a way to run the program themselves using a different identifier, like the issuance of a Global Entry card once a traveler is accepted into the program. A boarding pass identifier is not a consistent and reliable way to authorize Pre-Check status.

ACTION ITEM:

- The Board recommends TSA create a long-term plan to manage Pre-Check, including data and inclusion criteria, independently of airlines.

MODEL PORTS PILOT PROGRAM

It is imperative that the United States' aviation ports of entry, while always first and foremost focusing on security, be inviting and welcoming to the international traveling public. We have developed a system of entry that is often confusing and aesthetically unwelcoming, missing an opportunity to create a memorable entry experience. There is no study of which this subcommittee is aware that correlates safety with an austere look. In fact, when a facility has a more welcoming look, anecdotal evidence suggests higher CBP employee morale, leading to a greater level of customer interaction and satisfaction. Three factors that must be executed on a national level to expedite the growth of the Model Ports Program are:

ACTION ITEMS:

- Standardize in the point at which CBP be included in discussions with a local port authority during consideration of renovations, additions or new facilities. We believe it is critical to include CBP from the beginning of any design activities involving space where CBP officials will be located. The entry process loses efficiencies when the design needs of the ultimate end users are not fully considered in the basic design process. Many of us who have retail or food and beverage operations would never consider building new space without having the operating departments tied to the architects and designers.
- Integrated public art and design enhancements instill a visible connection to the specific 'place' or port of entry. Visitors travel is enhanced through physical improvements to port of entry environments that create memorable experiences upon arrival. Public art and design enhancements can be implemented through new construction or renovation budgets and/or installed in existing spaces funded through Port of Entry fees. Remediating austere environments adds value to Port of Entry infrastructure for travelers and improves staff morale.
- National standardization of signs and symbols utilized to guide the traveling public. The successful Model Ports Program in Orlando created a task force between public and private entities to focus on "way finding" signage visitors followed throughout their entire visit. There was a need to create one set of standards instead of each sector within the tourism market only focusing on their immediate business needs. Therefore, a guest following directional signage in market had the potential to become easily confused by three or four sets of standards between the time of debarkation and ultimate return to the airport.

The Model Ports Program has the potential to better relations between Port Authorities and CBP. While these relations in most cases have always been cordial, they frequently do not appear to have been particularly collaborative. This leads to our third recommendation:

ACTION ITEM:

- DHS/CBP must dedicate a staff resource to help expand and enhance the Model Ports Program, including working with the private sector. The private sector has been instrumental in helping advance the program, but a dedicated resource to coordinate activities is necessary to ensure continuity and consistency in Model Port standards. The cost of this staff person will be paid back tenfold by the efficiencies that will be created in the system versus simply spending more capital to increase capacity.

The Model Ports Program administration is often left to the area CBP Director trying to bring together a group of public/private participants and report out statistical analysis. We need a more coordinated and strategic approach to Model Ports to create consistency and share best practices system-wide. It must be noted here the DHS Secretary's office has been more than willing to assist in this endeavor in every way, and we look forward to measurable progress to ensure Model Ports becomes a more accountable program.

In closing, we note that previous incarnations of this subcommittee have recently and historically identified real, measurable steps and actions that can have a significant impact on the issues of travel facilitation and the increases of national exports and jobs creation in the travel and tourism sector. Indeed, the work of the previous TTAB Facilitation Subcommittee formed the basis for many of the actions and goals contained in the President's Executive Order and the National Travel and Tourism Strategy. It is our humble hope that the recommendations and ideas contained herein will continue to drive efficiency and effectiveness in travel facilitation processes and allow us not only to cement the gains achieved over the last several years, but also to continue to enhance the travel process for all.

Sincerely,



Todd Davidson
Chair



Sam Gilliland
Vice-Chair



John Sprouls
Travel Facilitation
Subcommittee Chair



Kathleen Matthews
Travel Facilitation
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