

UNITED STATES TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

September 13, 2023

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

Thank you for placing your confidence in us to make recommendations regarding how the federal government can spur progress in accessible travel for the 1.3 billion¹ People with Disabilities (PwD's) including 61 million Americans with disabilities². These include individuals with mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive/sensory and allergy disabilities.

In leisure travel, making travel more welcoming and inclusive for people with disabilities will allow them to more fully enjoy the benefits of travel while the travel industry will benefit from their substantial spending power. Many of these individuals are retirees with the time and money to travel, and they choose to travel in non-peak periods.

In business travel, improvements in accessible travel will make private sector and public sector workplaces more equitable and inclusive. Often employees with disabilities must spend additional work time to plan their own trips and still encounter difficulties during their trip. Sometimes they encounter segregation by being forced to stay at a different hotel or take different transportation than their able-bodied colleagues. Improving accessibility in business travel aligns with [President Biden's Executive Order 14305](#) which states that as "As the Nation's largest employer, the Federal Government must be a model for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility".

Actions taken by the federal government can build on the growing interest in accessibility among destinations and travel businesses. In fact, accessibility appears to be "the next big thing" in the travel industry following in the footsteps of DEI and Sustainability. Accessibility projects are recently finished or ongoing at the UNWTO, Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), Destinations International (DI), Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (SHA), Tourism Diversity Matters (TDM), Travel Unity (TU), and elsewhere.

To participate in the travel market, people with disabilities require that the Three Pillars of Accessible Travel are adequately addressed:

1. Accessible Facilities: Physical facilities and digital communications technologies should be accessible to people of all abilities. The Seven Principles of Universal Design and the

- [ADA Accessibility Standards](#) published by the U.S. Access Board should be used to guide building design. [ISO 21542](#) should be used for furniture selection and placement.
2. Accessible Customer Service: Staff should be trained to avoid accidentally creating accessibility barriers and to remove existing accessibility barriers. Processes should be designed to avoid creating accessibility barriers. Policies should focus on inclusion of PwD's including allowing them to book through all booking methods. Guidelines like [ISO 21902: Accessible Tourism for All](#) should be used to guide policy and process development.
 3. Accessibility Information: Transparent accessibility information should be accurate, detailed (with measurements), clear (with photographs), comprehensive (for all parts of the trip), and trusted. It should be publicly available, easily discoverable, and free.

Recommendations

Recognizing this is a broad topic that will require ongoing attention and significant collaboration between the public and private sectors, we recommend you take the following actions:

- 1. Develop adequate benchmarking tools that can be used for evaluating accessible travel status and progress.**
 - It is broadly recognized that we can't manage or change what we don't measure.
 - This supply-side analysis would complement existing demand-side analysis. It would have the added benefit of encouraging competition in the accessible travel market.
 - It should be a systematic analysis comparing the current state of accessible travel to international accessible travel standards (e.g. ISO 21902).
 - It should allow for a comparison between destinations, between sectors, and between travel businesses. Accessible travel progress should be tracked over time, and a "dashboard" should be hosted on the NTTO website, so that it can be easily utilized by destinations of any size.
- 2. Review government policies related to travel procurement. Ensure that only vendors that meet minimum accessibility standards are used by federal employees.**
 - Equitability and inclusion are priorities for the federal government workforce. This includes the ability for employees with disabilities to travel in an equitable manner as their able-bodied colleagues. No federal employee with a disability should ever have to stay in a different hotel or use different transportation than their colleagues because of accessibility barriers.
 - Taking an inclusive and equitable approach allows the US government to lead by example. It also increases the demand for accessible travel which spurs accessibility progress.
 - A good example of where this approach has been done previously is [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) which required the General Services Administration to only procure software that met minimum accessibility standards. For accessible travel, progress could start with www.fedrooms.com.
- 3. Mobilize government resources (grants, loans, tax credits, etc...) for accessibility projects. Funding should be allocated not only for physical accessibility, but also for training and traveler-facing accessibility information.**

- Accessibility information should be accurate, detailed (with measurements), clear (with photographs), comprehensive, and trusted. It should address the accessibility needs for all disability types including mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive/sensory, and allergy. It should cover all components of travel including airports, private transportation, public transportation, pedestrian routes, short-term rentals, hotels, attractions, restaurants, convention centers, and visitor centers.
- Accessible travel training should cover disability awareness training including common accessibility barriers and disability etiquette. It should be specifically designed for the travel industry and include role-specific training for various travel businesses.

4. Support Brand USA's inclusion of accessible destinations in its marketing efforts PwD's internationally.

- The United States already has better accessibility than many other countries. This high level of accessibility should be communicated to consumers and the international travel trade.
- The aforementioned benchmarking analysis and traveler-facing accessibility information can be used as a resource for Brand USA and the travel and tourism industry.

Thank you for your continued leadership and support of the travel and tourism industry. We are grateful that you've initiated this process to ensure that travel and tourism is accessible, welcoming, and inclusive for People with Disabilities. We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations and are committed to assisting in the implementation of these initiatives.

Respectfully submitted,



Bill Hornbuckle
Chair



Brad Dean
Vice Chair

¹ According to the World Health Organization

² According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention