



.....

A Vision for a World-Class Travel System in America

Commission on Seamless
and Secure Travel Report
February 2025

COMMISSION ON
SEAMLESS & SECURE
TRAVEL

U.S. TRAVEL
ASSOCIATION®





TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	<u>Executive Summary</u>
6	<u>Introduction</u>
15	<u>A Call for Government-Wide Leadership and Coordination</u>
16	<u>Recommendations for Ensuring Federal Leadership on Travel</u>
23	<u>Transforming Aviation Security</u>
24	<u>Key Challenges</u>
26	<u>Solutions and Recommendations</u>
48	<u>Modernizing Airport Customs and Borders</u>
51	<u>Key Challenges</u>
52	<u>Solutions and Recommendations</u>
66	<u>Strengthening Visitor Visa Policy</u>
72	<u>Key Challenges</u>
73	<u>Solutions and Recommendations</u>
84	<u>Commission on Seamless and Secure Travel</u>

Executive Summary

America is no longer the top destination for global travel. International visitation to the U.S. peaked in 2018 under President Trump but has failed to reach those levels since. The U.S. now ranks behind Spain and France in the global competition for visitors. China is on a path to catch or surpass us over the next decade. Our competitors are investing billions to leapfrog the U.S. and win a bigger share of the \$11.1 trillion in economic benefits from the global travel market.

It's time for a new strategy — a strategy to secure America's global travel leadership and establish the U.S. as the world's top destination. Just regaining our lost market share, which declined from 12.8% to 9.1% since 2015, would generate 127 million additional visitors over the next decade, resulting in \$478 billion in additional spending with U.S. businesses, 140,000 new American jobs and generate \$55 billion in tax revenue.

But we should aim higher. And the opportunity is right on our doorstep.

Over the next four years, America is set to host several premier events — including the 2025 Ryder Cup, America's 250th birthday, the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games.

With Presidential leadership and the right policies in place, these events can welcome 40 million international visitors and drive \$95 billion in economic activity.



We need a new strategy to secure America's global travel leadership.

To help seize this opportunity and regain American travel dominance, the [U.S. Travel Association](#) established the [Commission on Seamless and Secure Travel](#). Comprised of key leaders across the private and public sectors, the commission spent nearly a year gathering evidence, studying the latest security technologies and learning how progress is being made both at home and abroad.

The commission's report offers a guide for the Trump Administration and Congress to fulfill President Trump's pledge to usher in a Golden Age of Travel. Based on the commission's work, U.S. Travel recommends that Congress and the Trump Administration take four crucial steps to make America the top travel destination:

1

Establish White House leadership to showcase America at premier events. In the first 100 days, the Trump Administration should establish an interagency task force, chaired by a senior White House official, to bring sustained leadership and focus across the federal government to take advantage of global events coming our way over the next four years. The administration should leverage Brand USA, a public-private partnership, to market America's destinations to the world and increase international visitation for these events.

2

Deliver on President Trump's promise to efficiently and securely process visas for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

- **Provide full-strength consular staffing for visa processing.** Fully staff visa processing windows during all available business hours and surge staff to remotely process visa applications.
- **Extend visa validity for vetted, lawful visitors.** Extend B-1/B-2 visa validity for two years for lawful visa holders who have never been refused a visa, have previously visited the U.S., left the country on time and have no immigration or criminal violations.



- **Establish a National Vetting Service that builds on President Trump’s National Vetting Center.** Rather than relying on entry-level foreign service bureaucrats to conduct visa processing, seek legislation to establish a new National Vetting Service (NVS) dedicated to visa processing and traveler vetting. The NVS would be a professional national security workforce that is fully funded through visa fees, separate from the Foreign Service, and could be surged anywhere in the world to efficiently handle visa processing demand.
- **Create a “Secure Travel Partnership” program to increase countries that have strong travel security agreements with the U.S.** Establish a Secure Travel Partnership program where countries could qualify for visa facilitation benefits by meeting all security requirements of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) and keeping refusal rates below 12% and overstay rates below 5%. In return, highly qualified first-time B-1/B-2 visa applicants from Partnership countries could have in-person interviews and biometric collection done by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) upon arrival at U.S. airports, rather than by appointment at U.S. consulates and embassies.

3

Create the world’s most advanced and secure airport screening process. Deploy state-of-the-art screening technology that strengthens security AND reduces wait times by allowing all travelers to carry water bottles and larger liquids, leave all electronics in their bags and keep their shoes, jackets and belts on.

- **Make a historic investment in security technology.** Immediately end the diversion of the Passenger Security Fee and increase technology funding to generate \$10 billion to modernize the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and put new identity verification, on-person screening and baggage scanning technology in every U.S. airport lane within five years.



4

Create strong, modern and efficient airport borders to keep America safe and global travel moving.

- **Provide full-strength staffing at airport customs.** Fund an additional 2,000 CBP officers to fully staff U.S. airports of entry. Surge CBP staffing to the National Targeting Center, National Vetting Center and Global Entry processing to maximize security while facilitating record travel.
- **End hours-long customs wait times for Americans returning home from abroad.** Expand CBP's Enhanced Passenger Processing (EPP) and Seamless Border Entry (SBE) to the top 25 airports by the end of 2026. EPP allows low-risk U.S. citizens to forgo customs interviews if they pass pre-arrival vetting, have their identities biometrically confirmed and have nothing to declare. SBE uses advanced biometric technology to confirm the identities of Global Entry travelers on the move, without the need to stop at a kiosk.
- **Strengthen protection against immigration overstays.** Invest \$600 million to complete CBP's biometric air exit system within two years and enhance the Traveler Verification Service (TVS) that is used to identify travelers entering and exiting the U.S.



Implementing these recommendations will strengthen our economy, create jobs across the country and improve our trade balance while ensuring America remains a secure and welcoming destination for international travelers.

To learn how modernizing our travel systems will deliver a world-class experience for both domestic and international travelers, visit [ShowcaseAmericanTravel.org](https://www.showcaseamericatravel.org).

Introduction

America is Losing Ground

THE UNITED STATES IS IN A RACE — AND WE'RE FALLING BEHIND

One of the fastest-growing, most strategically important and most lucrative segments of the global economy is up for grabs. The industry at stake is travel — the everyday movement of millions of people across the world.

America once led this competition. But today, we are no longer the top destination for global travel. International visitation to the U.S. peaked in 2018 under President Trump and has not returned to those levels since.¹

While the U.S. currently boasts the world's largest travel market, China's rapid travel growth has the country on track to catch and then surpass the U.S. by nearly \$500 billion over the next decade.²

India's travel market is also expanding quickly, which should help that nation jump from eighth place globally to fourth in terms of market size by 2034.³

By 2035, China plans to increase the number of civil airports by over 50%, while India expects to increase annual air passenger traffic from 376 million today to over 3 billion by 2047.⁴ Overall, the Asia Pacific region is rapidly building out its travel infrastructure to accommodate aspiring travelers, accounting for more than one-third of major construction projects at existing airports and more than half of new airport construction.⁵



And other countries are also intent on seizing a larger share of the global travel boom.

Saudi Arabia is investing more than \$1 trillion over the next decade as part of its strategy to attract 100 million visitors by 2030.⁶

The goal is to diversify the oil-rich country's economy, using travel as one of the main levers. Saudi officials are actively marketing the nation's UNESCO sites as cultural destinations, while building up Saudi Arabia as a sports tourism hub.⁷

In the UAE, Abu Dhabi's Tourism Strategy 2030 aims to double overnight visitors, create nearly 200,000 tourism jobs and invest \$10 billion in new museums, theme parks, cultural sites and hotel rooms.⁸ To attract new visitors, Abu Dhabi plans to more than double its marketing and promotion campaign to reach out to 15 new markets.⁹

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP IS NEEDED

As the examples above illustrate, our competitors in the travel market are developing bold strategies, making large investments and focusing on supporting travel at their countries' highest levels. This is the primary reason that when it comes to the strength of our national travel strategy, the U.S. ranks dead last among the top 18 travel markets.¹⁰

The result: America is losing global market share for long-haul travelers — declining 41% since 2000.¹¹

We've slipped to third in the global competition for travelers, behind Spain and France, despite our status as the world's most desirable destination.¹²

Research by Oxford Economics reveals that our nation's total global market share has also declined, falling from 12.8% to 9.1% since 2015.¹³ Simply regaining our losses would result in an additional 127 million visitors over the next decade, generating \$478 billion in extra spending at U.S. businesses, adding 140,000 additional jobs and generating \$55 billion in extra tax revenues compared to the baseline scenario.¹⁴



• • • • •
41% decline in market share of long-haul travelers.

Reaping these benefits requires overcoming some serious challenges:

- **Limited biometric screening capabilities**, with only 50% of total outbound international air passengers screened through biometric exit.¹⁵
- **Delayed timelines for new technology** means the U.S. will not fully deploy leading-edge Computed Tomography (CT) bag scanners until 2042, compromising both greater efficiency and security.¹⁶
- **Low visa-free travel opportunities** mean visitors from only 43 countries can visit the U.S. visa free, compared to 102 countries for the U.K.¹⁷
- **High visa wait times**, with visitors requiring a visa experiencing wait times that can exceed six months or even a year.¹⁸
- **Border processing resources** are not being prioritized, leading to staffing shortages, lengthy wait times at airport customs and denial of new international routes.
- **Existing security and screening systems** will increasingly struggle to handle rising travel volume. On December 1, 2024, TSA screened almost 3.1 million travelers — the highest ever in a single day.¹⁹ In two years, they'll have to do it 50 times a year. By 2028, when we host the Summer Olympics, they'll have to do it 100 times a year. And according to projections by Oxford Economics, within this decade we will average 3 million passengers every day of the week.

These inefficiencies and shortcomings pose dire economic consequences.

Excessive visa wait times alone could cost the U.S. \$150 billion in spending over the next ten years by encouraging 39 million visitors to travel elsewhere.²⁰ Losing just a single international route due to Customs and Border Protection staff shortages translates into up to a \$227 million loss to the U.S. economy every year.²¹

A VISION FOR AMERICAN TRAVEL DOMINANCE

Despite these challenges to America’s travel leadership and the threats from global competitors, the U.S. has a tremendous opportunity to dominate the global travel race.

Over the next decade, the U.S. will host a series of marquee events, including the 2025 Ryder Cup, the 2026 FIFA World Cup, America’s 250th birthday, followed by the 2028 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, the 2031 Men’s Rugby World Cup, the 2034 Winter Olympics and Paralympics and annual Formula One races in Las Vegas, Miami and Austin.

Millions of visitors will come to the U.S. for these events, giving America the chance to showcase some of our greatest destinations and turn new international visitors into repeat customers.

These events will only accelerate the global travel boom. Over the next decade, travel’s global economic impact is projected to grow from \$11.1 trillion today to a staggering \$16 trillion — growing at a rate significantly faster than the overall global economy and employing over 12% of workers worldwide.

We need to win our share of this expanding market.

Travel is already vital to the U.S. economy, generating \$2.8 trillion in economic output in 2023, representing 2.5% of our nation’s GDP.²² More than \$1.3 trillion in travel spending contributed \$89 billion in tax revenues in states and communities across the U.S.²³

And more than 15 million American workers are either directly employed or heavily supported by travel.²⁴

Our goal must be to make travel more modern, convenient and secure. This requires establishing leadership, developing solutions, prioritizing funding and driving substantive policy change in Washington that generates real benefits.

To further this goal, U.S. Travel established the Commission on Seamless and Secure Travel. Comprised of former government leaders from key agencies impacting travel and experts from across the private sector, the commission spent nearly a year gathering evidence, conducting field



According to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the event alone could bring some six million visitors to our country.

visits and traveling to learn how progress is being made at home and abroad and how the U.S. can harness and expedite innovation.

OUR VISION FOR AMERICAN TRAVEL DOMINANCE RESTS ON THREE PILLARS

1

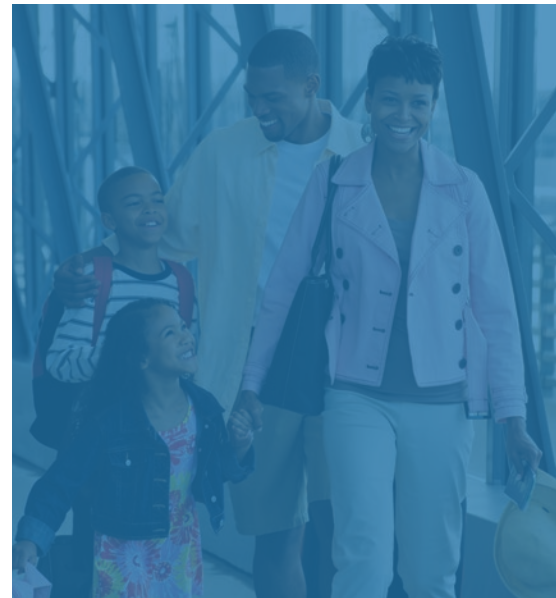
A thriving travel economy where the U.S. government and private sector work hand-in-hand to capture a greater market share from our competitors and beat other countries for visitors. Where travel makes a rising contribution to America's economy, creates more good-paying middle-class jobs and generates rising exports to drive down our trade deficit. And where travel is valued by national leaders as an essential engine of U.S. economic growth.

2

A shift in government mindset so Washington recognizes it has a dual mandate to both ensure security and foster travel growth. Where travel security and efficiency are viewed as mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive. Where the best security measures are understood as those easiest to follow, not the most burdensome. Where travel becomes a top priority for Congress, equipping agencies with the funding, tools and support to drive innovation.

3

A new traveler experience where a seamless, efficient and welcoming travel process is the norm. Imagine a future where travelers move efficiently through airports, customs and security checkpoints. Biometric innovations and automated screening create an environment where safety and security are assured without sacrificing efficiency, comfort or privacy. In this vision, the journey to and within the United States becomes a highlight rather than a hurdle, setting a new global standard for traveler satisfaction and operational excellence.



MOVING FROM VISION TO ACTION

This report presents a path for change. It not only outlines the major challenges that must be overcome, but also provides a specific set of recommendations that can — and must — be achieved. Major areas of focus include:

CREATE THE WORLD’S MOST ADVANCED AND SECURE AIRPORT SCREENING PROCESS.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Americans say shorter airport lines is their top priority for improving air travel.²⁵ And they overwhelmingly support the technology that can get us there. In fact, a strong majority of air travelers (79%), Americans (78%), Republicans (76%) and Democrats (80%) favor the use of biometrics at TSA security checkpoints.²⁶ This technology not only makes screening faster and more accurate, it also greatly improves security by replacing weak manual identity verification. Yet, at current congressional funding levels, TSA will not be able to fully deploy advanced Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) across the entire U.S. aviation system until 2049.²⁷



We need to make a historic investment in security technology, including leading-edge CT baggage scanners, CAT and biometric identity verification, as well as research and development. Approximately one-third of the Passenger Security Fee — designed to fund aviation security — is currently being diverted to general government programs. Ending this diversion would generate \$10 billion to invest in state-of-the-art identity verification and screening technology at every U.S. airport.

ESTABLISH A ROBUST, EFFICIENT AND SECURE VETTING PROCESS FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS.

Critical reforms are needed to modernize America's outdated visa processing system and to enhance security while mitigating severe backlogs and inefficiencies. Comprehensive reforms would include fully staffing consular offices to maximize processing capacity while extending visa validity periods for proven low-risk travelers. In addition, rather than relying on entry-level foreign service officers, the U.S. should create a National Vetting Service with specialized professionals dedicated to visa processing and traveler vetting funded through visa fees. We should also establish a new Secure Travel Partnership program with qualified countries that meet strict security requirements and receive facilitation benefits. These changes would maintain robust security standards and bring U.S. visa processing into the 21st century.

STRENGTHEN AND MODERNIZE BORDER ENTRY AT U.S. AIRPORTS TO FORTIFY SCREENING AND SPEED PROCESSING.

Too often, poorly resourced U.S. customs operations and outdated technology result in hours-long delays that hamper efficiency and undermine security effectiveness. CBP staffing must be ramped up. Enhanced Passenger Processing (EPP) and Seamless Border Entry (SBE) should be expanded and we should provide the resources necessary to complete CBP's biometric exit tracking by 2026. This would strengthen the identification of both arriving and departing travelers, creating a more efficient and secure entry-exit system at U.S. airports and protect against visa overstays.

These and other needed reforms to make America's travel experience more secure and seamless require leadership from the White House.

America should be a leader, not a laggard when it comes to integrating the best innovations to create a better travel experience. The commission's report should serve as a wakeup call for policymakers that action is urgently needed. But it also points to solutions that will enable the U.S. to secure dominance of the strategically and economically vital travel market.



Only the White House can generate the urgency and focus needed to galvanize change across the federal government and build support in Congress for legislative action.

The commission’s bottom-line conclusion is clear. Through immediate investment, innovation and technology, America must act now to transform travel into a more efficient, secure, and frankly, more welcoming experience. By implementing the commission’s recommendations within this critical four-year window, we can realize tangible benefits: accelerated economic growth, rapid job creation across the nation, and an improved trade deficit. Every day of delay represents missed opportunities. With decisive action today, we can strengthen our position as a secure, friendly, and welcoming destination for global travelers.



Endnotes for Introduction

¹ U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration, “International Visitor Arrivals Program - ADIS I-94.” <https://www.trade.gov/i-94-arrivals-program?anchor=content-node-t14-field-lp-region-2-1>

² WTTC Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Report 2024 Global Trends, September 2024, pg. 9-11.

³ WTTC Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2024 Global Trends, September 2024, p.9.

⁴ China Daily, “Executive: More airports needed in interior areas,” March 6, 2024. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202403/06/WS65e7c79ca31082fc043baea4.html>; [Construction World](https://www.constructionworld.in/transport-infrastructure/aviation-and-airport-infra/india-to-reach-300-airports-by-2047-amid-rising-passenger-demand/58938), “India to reach 300 airports by 2047 amid rising passenger demand,” July 15, 2024. <https://www.constructionworld.in/transport-infrastructure/aviation-and-airport-infra/india-to-reach-300-airports-by-2047-amid-rising-passenger-demand/58938>

⁵ CAPA, “The world’s airports – the state of the industry in Jan-2023 in 11 numbers,” January 20, 2023. <https://centreforaviation.com/analysis/reports/the-worlds-airports-the-state-of-the-industry-in-jan-2023-in-11-numbers-635413>

⁶ Skift, “Ask Skift: Why Is Saudi Arabia Making a Big Investment in Its Tourism Industry?” October 3, 2024. <https://skift.com/2023/08/15/ask-skift-why-is-saudi-arabia-making-a-big-investment-in-its-tourism-industry/>

⁷ Skift, “Ask Skift: Why Is Saudi Arabia Making a Big Investment in Its Tourism Industry?” October 3, 2024. <https://skift.com/2023/08/15/ask-skift-why-is-saudi-arabia-making-a-big-investment-in-its-tourism-industry/>

⁸ Skift, “Abu Dhabi’s \$10 Billion Plan For Tourism,” October 3, 2024. <https://skift.com/2024/04/05/abu-dhabis-10-billion-plan-for-tourism/>

⁹ Skift, “Abu Dhabi’s \$10 Billion Plan For Tourism,” October 3, 2024. <https://skift.com/2024/04/05/abu-dhabis-10-billion-plan-for-tourism/>

¹⁰ U.S. Travel Association, “Stunning New Research Ranks United States Nearly Dead Last in Competition for Global Travelers,” January 11, 2024. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/stunning-new-research-ranks-united-states-nearly-dead-last-competition-global-travelers>

¹¹ U.S. Travel Association and Tourism Economics, “Global Market Share Analysis,” 2024.

¹² U.S. Travel Association, “Stunning New Research Ranks United States Nearly Dead Last in Competition for Global Travelers,” January 11, 2024. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/stunning-new-research-ranks-united-states-nearly-dead-last-competition-global-travelers>

¹³ Tourism Economics, “US Travel: International and Air Passengers Research 2024.”

¹⁴ Tourism Economics, “US Travel International and Air Passengers Research 2024.”

¹⁵ U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

¹⁶ Transportation Security Administration, “Fiscal Year 2025 President’s Budget Request for the Transportation Security Administration,” April 16, 2024. <https://www.tsa.gov/news/press/testimony/2024/04/16/fiscal-year-2025-presidents-budget-request-transportation-security>; House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, “Homeland Security Committee Hears TSA Testimony on Organizational Structure, Technology Implementation, Frontline Workforce,” March 14, 2024. <https://homeland.house.gov/2024/03/14/homeland-security-committee-hears-tsa-testimony-on-organizational-structure-technology-implementation-frontline-workforce/>

¹⁷ U.S. Travel Association, “Stunning New Research Ranks United States Nearly Dead Last in Competition for Global Travelers,” January 11, 2024. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/stunning-new-research-ranks-united-states-nearly-dead-last-competition-global-travelers>

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State – Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Visa Appointment Wait Times.” <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/wait-times.html>

¹⁹ Transportation Security Administration, “Passenger Volumes,” 2024. <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/passenger-volumes>

²⁰ U.S. Travel Association, “Stunning New Research Ranks United States Nearly Dead Last in Competition for Global Travelers”, January 11, 2024. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/stunning-new-research-ranks-united-states-nearly-dead-last-competition-global-travelers>

²¹ U.S. Travel Association, “Stunning New Research Ranks United States Nearly Dead Last in Competition for Global Travelers”, January 11, 2024. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/stunning-new-research-ranks-united-states-nearly-dead-last-competition-global-travelers>

²² U.S. Travel Association, “Economic Impact of the U.S. Travel Industry: 2023 National Data.” https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/National%20Data_0.pdf

²³ U.S. Travel Association, “Economic Impact of the U.S. Travel Industry: 2023 National Data.” https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/National%20Data_0.pdf

²⁴ U.S. Travel Association, “Economic Impact of the U.S. Travel Industry: 2023 National Data.” https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/National%20Data_0.pdf

²⁵ Simple Flying, “SITA Survey: 64% Of Passengers Say Shorter Airport Queues Is Top Priority”, September 18, 2024. <https://simpleflying.com/64-percent-passengers-want-shorter-airport-queues/>

²⁶ U.S. Travel Association, “Survey: 4 out of 5 American Travelers Embrace Biometrics Use at Airport Security,” September 5, 2024. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/survey-4-out-5-american-travelers-embrace-biometrics-use-airport-security>

²⁷ Transportation Security Administration, “Review of the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for the Transportation Security Administration,” May 15, 2024. <https://www.tsa.gov/news/press/testimony/2024/05/15/review-fiscal-year-2025-budget-request-transportation-security>

A Call for Government-Wide Leadership and Coordination

ENSURING FEDERAL LEADERSHIP ON TRAVEL

The U.S. holds a dubious distinction among the world's major economies: We are the only G20 country without a federal agency or Cabinet-level official in charge of travel policy.

Most top travel markets have a minister of travel or tourism to guide national strategy for competing in the highly lucrative and strategically important travel sector. In the U.S., the top federal travel official is the Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism at the Department of Commerce. But that role remains empty, despite Congressional funding to fill it.

This helps explain why, according to a recent study by Euromonitor International, the U.S. ranks last when it comes to government leadership on travel-related issues and the strength of its national travel strategy.¹

Travel industry policy issues cut across many areas of the federal government, including the Departments of Commerce, Transportation, Homeland Security and State. Each department, as well as their component agencies and offices, have unique missions that impact travel to and within the U.S. However, absent senior leadership, high-level strategy and effective coordination, the federal government cannot properly assess and prioritize the entire travel process or ensure American leadership in this market.

RANKINGS OF COUNTRIES FOR GLOBAL TRAVEL LEADERSHIP

- 1 Thailand
- 2 Brazil
- 3 Greece
- 4 Saudi Arabia
- 5 Turkey
- 6 South Africa
- 7 Italy
- 8 China
- 9 Canada
- 10 Australia
- 11 France
- 12 UAE
- 13 United Kingdom
- 14 Mexico
- 15 Spain
- 16 Germany
- 17 Singapore
- 18 USA**

MEGA-DECADE OF EVENTS

MILLIONS OF VISITORS ARE EXPECTED TO ATTEND

2025

- FIFA Club World Cup
- Ryder Cup

2026

- FIFA World Cup
- America250

2028

- Summer Olympics
- Paralympic Games

2031

- Men's Rugby World Cup

2033

- Women's Rugby World Cup

2034

- Winter Olympics
- Paralympic Games

As a result, many federal actions and initiatives that impact travel are often planned and executed in a silo. Additionally, agencies responsible for essential elements of travel, like CBP and TSA, must do more with their limited resources and without proper guidance from the most senior levels of government. This lack of leadership hinders America's ability to advance major improvements to the entire travel ecosystem due to a lack of coordination across key components of government.

These challenges will become even more pressing as the mega-decade of events unfolds beginning in 2025. With millions of international visitors needing to attain visitor visas, clear customs, and go through aviation security checkpoints — as well as the millions of domestic travelers entering the travel system — the U.S. must be ready. However, that will not happen without White House leadership.

RECOMMENDATION: In its first 100 days, the Trump Administration should establish an interagency task force, chaired by a senior White House official, to bring sustained leadership and focus across the federal government on preparations for the 2025 Ryder Cup, America 250, the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the 2028 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, and other large scale global events hosted in the U.S.

Filling the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism is important for advancing travel in the U.S. But one assistant secretary in one department cannot oversee and direct the numerous agencies responsible for different elements of the travel system. Nor does this role have the power and standing of the cabinet- and minister-level officials who lead travel in other nations that compete with the U.S.

The Assistant Secretary is responsible for developing and implementing a national strategy to grow domestic and international travel, streamlining government processes affecting both business and leisure travel, and helping U.S. cities and counties compete for large international meetings

and events, among other responsibilities. The Department of Commerce does not have the necessary authority or resources to execute these priorities on its own and must rely on other departments and agencies to help fulfill such initiatives — especially when facing a mega-decade of events.

A senior level interagency task force must be driven by the White House to ensure maximum prioritization and coordination. It could be chaired by the Department of Commerce but must include key leaders from the Departments of State, Homeland Security and Transportation, among others.

The task force should focus on near-term challenges — such as preparing for the mega-decade of events coming to the U.S. — while also developing a long-term strategy to expand travel to and within the U.S.

Leveraging Brand USA, a public-private partnership, to provide visa, security and other key travel information to visitors and increase international visitation for upcoming events will be critical to maximizing this unprecedented opportunity.

EXPANDING TRUSTED TRAVELER ENROLLMENT

Over the past decade, DHS Trusted Traveler Programs such as TSA PreCheck and CBP’s Global Entry have expanded significantly in response to rising demand among travelers seeking expedited processing and enhanced security.

Launched in 2013, TSA PreCheck has grown from a pilot program to one of the most popular expedited screening programs in the world. Airport and airline participation has increased greatly, helping enrollment surge to over 20 million active members as of August 2024.² CBP’s Global Entry, introduced in 2008, has also expanded significantly, with more participating countries and airports and membership rising to meet demand.³ CBP saw a record 4.1 million Trusted Traveler applications in 2023 and is on pace for nearly 5 million this year.⁴

Other programs, such as NEXUS, SENTRI, and FAST, have expanded to serve specific traveler needs for border crossing, enhancing security while facilitating faster processing.





Congress and federal agencies must provide the resources and leadership to expand the Trusted Traveler population to keep pace with rising demand.



As more travelers, airports and countries participate, Trusted Traveler Programs are building a track record of success in managing both travel volume and security risk. The U.S. government — both Congress and relevant Executive branch agencies — must provide the resources and leadership needed to keep pace with rising demand, which will encourage more individuals to travel and join the “trusted” category — a major benefit to both security and efficiency.

The commission commends TSA and CBP for recognizing the need to increase capacity to meet these demands. For example, TSA expanded its partnerships to now include three enrollment providers for TSA PreCheck.⁵ For its part, CBP has increased Global Entry enrollment options by adding Enrollment on Arrival — where conditionally approved applicants complete the final interview with a CBP officer upon return from an international trip.⁶

However, the agencies must continue streamlining the enrollment process, with the goal of expanding the programs to include more travelers in the future.⁷ By leveraging other government entities and the private sector, both agencies can improve efficiency, reduce administrative burdens, and expand Trusted Traveler enrollment.

RECOMMENDATION: CBP should move administrative actions from officers to non-law enforcement personnel or private sector partners for the Global Entry enrollment process. CBP and the State Department should allow applicants for U.S. passports to apply for Global Entry on the same application.

Currently, the entire Global Entry enrollment process is conducted by CBP law enforcement officers. While many critical security steps require CBP law enforcement personnel, other steps could be performed by civilian personnel or even private sector partners, similar to how TSA has leveraged private sector providers to perform PreCheck enrollment functions.

Much of the administrative burden of enrollment lies in collecting identification and other enrollment documents. Since documentation requirements for U.S. passport and Global Entry applicants largely overlap, CBP and State should streamline processes by allowing passport applicants to apply for Global Entry at the same time. This could reduce administrative burdens on the government and ease the application process for travelers — ultimately reducing application timelines and increasing the number of Trusted Travelers.

Streamlining the application process would also enhance personal privacy protection by minimizing the number of times individuals must submit sensitive personally identifiable information (PII). The federal government already has established mechanisms for securely sharing sensitive information, including CBP and State as they share traveler and immigrant vetting information, for example.

RECOMMENDATION: TSA should partner with state DMVs to allow REAL ID applicants to apply for PreCheck in the REAL ID application.



.....

Streamlining the Global Entry application process will reduce administrative burdens on the government and travelers — ultimately reducing application timelines and increasing the number of Trusted Travelers.

TSA could reduce its administrative burden and ease the application process for travelers by allowing REAL ID applicants to add PreCheck to their application, given the overlapping requirements for identification and other enrollment documents. This could increase PreCheck enrollment and expand the lagging REAL ID adoption rate ahead of the May 2025 deadline. Establishing mechanisms to securely share documentation between TSA and state DMVs could result in major efficiencies for REAL ID and PreCheck applicants while reducing security vulnerabilities associated with submitting PII and other sensitive information across multiple agencies.

STREAMLINING TECHNOLOGY OVERSIGHT

DHS supports the operational needs of its component agencies by providing essential funding, equipment, and personnel. It offers strategic guidance to ensure operational activities align with national security goals and priorities, while supporting training and development to enhance the capabilities of its people. DHS facilitates coordination among agencies to address complex, multi-faceted threats effectively. It also oversees and integrates data and intelligence sharing to enhance situational awareness and decision-making. These activities help ensure consistency and efficiency across DHS agencies.

DHS actions should ultimately work to streamline and enhance field operations by providing operators with the necessary resources and strategic coordination. By aligning policies and support mechanisms with operational realities, DHS should enable field personnel to respond effectively to emerging threats and manage incidents efficiently. This support empowers operators with the tools and information needed to carry out their missions and maintain national security.

The commission notes that both CBP and TSA have robust strategies for maintaining accountability, transparency, and privacy in emerging technology, especially biometrics. Strong protections are in place to oversee the use of biometrics, including statutorily mandated public disclosures, published strategies and roadmaps,



Allowing travelers to add PreCheck when applying for REAL ID will help increase enrollment and adoption rates.

interagency and Congressional oversight, privacy impact assessments, and opportunities for the public to opt-out of biometric collection. These robust privacy safeguards have allowed CBP and TSA to develop privacy by design processes and deploy technology with a strict adherence to maintaining accountability and transparency to the public. One commission Member noted that CBP has done more to ethically advance facial recognition than any other agency across the federal government.

The commission is concerned that DHS is currently revisiting use cases that have already undergone robust testing and deployment. Further, the commission is aware that CBP and TSA have maintained strict adherence to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) testing process, establishing an important policy layer in the process to leverage biometrics to support the agencies' respective missions. The commission is concerned that redundant testing and evaluation will limit innovation and hinder the agencies' ability to enact new processes and deploy technology.

RECOMMENDATION: DHS should immediately review IT, procurement and other requirements and processes in place for component agencies to ensure they are not duplicative, overburdensome or limiting the ability to test, trial and deploy technologies and other innovative initiatives.

DHS agencies must be able to deploy tools that support their mission without unnecessary impediments. This is especially important for operational agencies like CBP and TSA that must maintain security effectiveness while adapting to increased travel volumes and other operational challenges.

DHS should provide personnel and other resource support to supplement and advance agency capabilities, rather than duplicate or hinder efforts.

For example, when testing emerging technologies like biometrics, the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) should conduct joint testing and evaluation in



Redundant testing and evaluation hinders the deployment of new technology.



partnership with agencies to streamline the process and timeline for operational deployment of technology. S&T should not conduct duplicative testing after components internally test emerging capabilities. DHS should maximize its resources and achieve additional efficiencies wherever it can to provide effective and nimble security for the American people.

Endnotes for A Call for Government-Wide Leadership and Coordination

¹ U.S. Travel Association, “Stunning New Research Ranks United States Nearly Dead Last in Competition for Global Travelers,” January 11, 2024. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/stunning-new-research-ranks-united-states-nearly-dead-last-competition-global-travelers>

² U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “TSA PreCheck® reaches milestone with 20 million members,” August 8, 2024. <https://www.tsa.gov/news/press/releases/2024/08/08/tsa-precheckr-reaches-milestone-20-million-members>

³ U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “Eligibility for Global Entry,” November 27, 2024. <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/trusted-traveler-programs/global-entry/eligibility>

⁴ The Points Guy, “Top Global Entry official: Application delays improving, but ‘we have work to go,’” August 6, 2024. <https://thepointsguy.com/news/global-entry-wait-times-update/>

⁵ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “TSA PreCheck®.” <https://www.tsa.gov/precheck>

⁶ U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “Global Entry Enrollment on Arrival,” November 25, 2024. <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/trusted-traveler-programs/global-entry/enrollment-arrival>

⁷ The Points Guy, “TSA chief wants huge TSA PreCheck member growth — and says those big CT scanners are faster than you think,” October 1, 2024. <https://thepointsguy.com/news/tsa-administrator-precheck-growth-ct-scanners/>

Transforming Aviation Security

INTRODUCTION

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was established after 9/11 to secure the nation's transportation systems to ensure the freedom of movement of people and commerce. In carrying out this vital national security mission, TSA must constantly adapt to meet new and evolving threats, while facilitating increased travel and the economic growth that accompanies it.

TSA is responsible for security at 440 airports. Everyday, TSA screens passengers and luggage for explosives, weapons and other dangerous items.

That volume continues to grow, upping the pressure on TSA to develop new methods for efficiently and securely screening more travelers, bags and cargo.

In 2023, TSA screened more than 858 million travelers at airport security checkpoints across the country — a record. Of the 100 busiest days in TSA's history, almost half (46) occurred during the summer of 2024. On July 7, 2024, the Sunday after the July 4th holiday, TSA screened over 3 million travelers for the first time in its history.¹

The commission commends TSA, especially the Transportation Security Officers, Federal Air Marshals, Transportation Security Inspectors, vetting and intelligence teams and other TSA staff working on the frontlines and behind the scenes to ensure the security of the nation's transportation systems and the safety of the traveling public in the face of record travel volume.

On a daily basis, TSA screens an average of:



The agency has made significant strides in improving its operations through innovative programs, processes and technologies. But key challenges remain, including rising aviation security threats, unprecedented travel demand, inadequate resources and wide variations in international security requirements.

These challenges must be addressed through effective public policies aimed at making the overall experience of air travel in the U.S. both more secure and more efficient. Indeed, challenges also present opportunities to adopt new approaches and implement advanced technologies, resulting in stronger security, greater system-wide capacity and higher traveler satisfaction.

The commission envisions the most significant transformation of TSA security screening since the creation of TSA PreCheck. Within 5 years, all passengers — whether PreCheck or standard — should be able to carry on larger liquids, leave all electronics in their bags and keep their shoes, jackets and belts on. TSA PreCheck travelers should be screened at speed using automated identity verification and advanced passenger and baggage screening systems.



5 year goal for all travelers:

- Carry on liquids
- Leave electronics in their bag
- Keep on shoes, jackets, belts

KEY CHALLENGES

1. AVIATION SECURITY THREATS REMAIN DYNAMIC

The transportation sector, especially aviation, remains a top target for foreign terrorist organizations and other bad actors. And threats are not diminishing. From March 2023 to April 2024, more than 300 individuals tried to evade some aspect of airport security, according to TSA.²

In January 2024, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) posted videos calling for terrorist attacks against the west, including against U.S., U.K. and European airlines.³

Identifying these threats and determining real-time risk is critical for TSA to successfully carry out its mission, especially given the strain of rising traveler volumes.

2. INCREASED TRAVEL VOLUME CREATES POTENTIAL FOR LONGER WAIT TIMES

Travel demand continues to surge post-pandemic, which will challenge TSA to maintain security within its wait time standards. The increasing volume of travelers puts pressure on existing infrastructure and processes, potentially leading to longer wait times and decreased traveler satisfaction.

During peak summer travel in 2024, from the Memorial Day holiday through the Labor Day holiday, TSA screened almost 279 million travelers. This record-breaking summer volume represents a nearly 6% increase over the previous year. TSA screened almost 3.1 million travelers on Sunday, December 1, 2024 — the highest one-day total ever.⁴

Rising travel demand translates into significant economic benefits — if the travel process becomes more efficient.

Recent research shows that a more efficient security screening process could add three million domestic trips this year, resulting in an additional \$7.4 billion in spending.⁵

With the right policies and priorities in place, 3 million travelers will likely be a monthly occurrence when the U.S. hosts the 2026 FIFA World Cup and a weekly occurrence when it hosts the 2028 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games.

3. RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS UNDERMINE TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

Limited federal appropriations and the diversion of the Passenger Security Fee severely hinder TSA's ability to deploy cutting-edge security technology across the aviation system. As a result, the U.S. is falling behind other nations in the race to modernize the air travel experience. Due to resource constraints, TSA will not be able to fully deploy Computed Tomography (CT) bag scanners until 2042 and Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) until 2049.⁶ In comparison, the U.K. government has set a June 2025 deadline for all U.K. airports to complete full deployment of CT scanners, far ahead of the U.S. timeline.⁷

The U.S. must address this concerning timeline to remain the top global travel destination.

Streamlined travel screening and processes will benefit the economy:



4. DISPARATE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY REQUIREMENTS CREATE INEFFICIENCIES

Aviation security structures and requirements differ greatly between countries, leading to passenger confusion, inefficient operations and unequal security outcomes. While many foreign governments regulate security at only a limited number of airports, TSA manages the security operation at 440 federalized airports utilizing over 50,000 federal officers.⁸

In June 2024, the U.K. government allowed some airports to remove the 100ml liquid requirement only to reinstate it following issues with the effectiveness of the detection technology, creating confusion and chaos at some U.K. airports over the busy summer travel season.⁹

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. IMPROVING IDENTITY VERIFICATION AND QUEUE MANAGEMENT

Despite rising security threats and unprecedented travel demand, TSA still manually verifies the identity of many travelers, creating security vulnerabilities and inefficiencies for travelers. Moreover, the lack of consistency and predictability at the checkpoint can create confusion and unpleasant experiences for travelers.

Identity verification is a critical aspect of security screening. Without proper identity verification, bad actors can enter the aviation system by using false identities or receiving less scrutiny than needed. Indeed, many of the 9/11 terrorists used fraudulent identities or immigration documents to carry out their heinous attacks. “For terrorists,” the 9/11 Commission concluded, “travel documents are as important as weapons.”¹⁰

With proper verification tools in place, TSA can identify known or suspected bad actors to prevent them from traveling and determine who presents higher or unknown risk to ensure appropriate physical screening is applied.



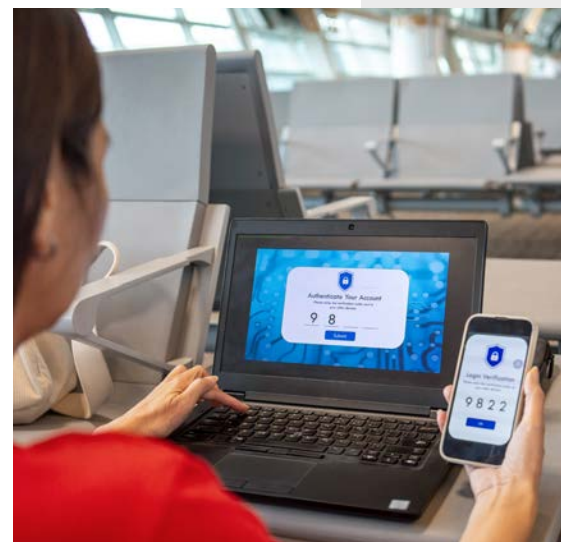
Manual verification of identity is a nearly impossible task, especially at airport security checkpoints where the stakes could not be higher. Major investment in automated identify verification is an absolute necessity — especially given the growing sophistication of fraudulent identity documents; the inherent difficulty of visually matching document photographs with the individual presenting them; and the pressure of crowded checkpoints filled with anxious travelers.

Technology and automation tools can not only improve the security and efficiency of the identity verification process, but they can also improve queue management and wait times — among the biggest traveler complaints. Without these advanced solutions, travelers will continue to face mounting frustration and inconvenience when navigating airports.

RECOMMENDATION: Congress must increase funding for Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) by \$300 million over the next five years to enhance identity security across the entire aviation system.

TSA has invested in automated identity verification technology that is effective at mitigating the vulnerabilities of manual identity checks.

According to TSA: Credential Authentication Technology is a security game changer, ensuring ID authentication, reservation verification and Secure Flight pre-screening status are known in “near” real-time at the airport security checkpoint. CAT is an effective tool for TSA officers, providing enhanced fraudulent ID detection capabilities while confirming the identity and flight information of travelers.¹¹



CAT also enables TSA officers to engage passengers and assess security risks rather than spend their limited passenger engagement window looking down at identity documents and boarding passes. Enabling officers to use their analytical skills to assess passenger behavior adds another layer of security for identifying higher risk individuals, human trafficking and other illicit activities.

To date, TSA has deployed 2,093 CAT units to 231 airports. Among those, 1,916 CAT units represent the second generation (CAT-2) technology. However, at current funding levels from Congress, it will take until 2049 for TSA to reach full operational capability of CAT across the entire U.S. aviation system. From both a security and efficiency standpoint, this is unacceptable and must be immediately addressed by Congress.

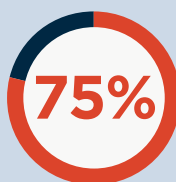


RECOMMENDATION: Congress should provide legislative support and funding for TSA’s biometrics and digital identity initiatives to enable the agency to expand CAT-2, mobile driver’s license and TSA PreCheck Touchless Identity Solution with private sector partners.

While the commission would like to see more rapid progress, it commends the agency’s efforts to incorporate biometrics into its operations. By prioritizing transparent public information and focusing on voluntary TSA PreCheck passengers, TSA has gained extensive knowledge and data that has equipped the agency to harness and expand this game-changing security technology.

Travelers enthusiastically embrace biometric technology as a secure, convenient way to improve travel.

An October 2023 survey by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) found:

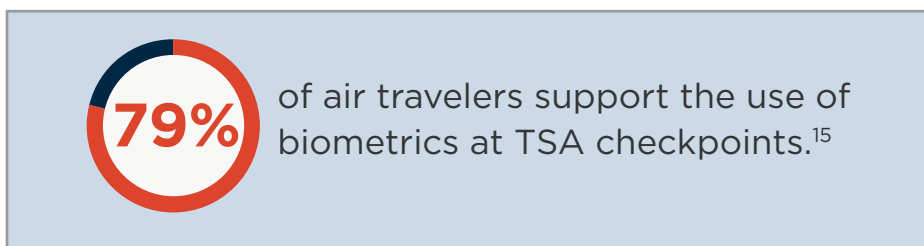


of passengers prefer using biometrics over physical documents like passports and boarding passes.¹²

Many countries are already leveraging biometric technology to enhance travel efficiency. Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport launched the Smart Travel Project to incorporate biometric identification at all points in the passenger journey — immigration, duty free, lounges and boarding — by 2025.¹³ Singapore's Changi Airport adopted a similar initiative in August 2024 to enhance security and the traveler experience by replacing passports with biometrics.¹⁴

American travelers also welcome more biometric options as they recognize the security and efficiency benefits of the technology.

A September 2024 survey conducted by the U.S. Travel Association and Ipsos found:



Therefore, Congress and the Administration should provide strong support and funding for TSA's biometric technology solutions, not seek to undermine them. These tools have the power to make travel both more secure and more enjoyable, helping the U.S. remain an innovation leader and attract more visitors.

TSA is deploying second-generation CAT systems (CAT-2), which enable features like self-service, facial matching and digital identity. Facial matching automatically matches the credential photo with an optional live photo of the passenger that is deleted soon after matching is complete. This automated system enhances CAT's security effectiveness, improves efficiency and prioritizes privacy by ensuring optionality and minimizing data retention.¹⁶

Digital identity is another major innovation for automated ID verification. TSA is also using these CAT-2 units to conduct an operational assessment of digital IDs, including mobile driver's licenses (mDL) and passport-derived IDs, to provide for a secure and seamless method of verifying an individual's identity.



A digital ID is an electronic representation of identifying information that may be used to verify a person's identity. A mobile driver's license, which is a type of digital ID, is a digital representation of a state-issued physical driver's license, stored on a mobile electronic device, such as a smartphone, and read electronically.

Currently, 12 states offer digital identities or mDLs in partnership with major technology providers, including Apple, Google and Samsung, that can be used at TSA security checkpoints.¹⁷

Participants can voluntarily present the ID at select TSA checkpoints by scanning the ID's QR code or tapping their Bluetooth enabled phone. Using facial matching, the traveler's photo is taken and matched to the photo stored on the digital ID. This provides greater privacy to the users since the traveler controls their ID while the photo and associated data are deleted after verification.

TSA must continue progress on digital identity solutions with states and the private sector. Congress should consider targeted grant funding for states to expedite digital identity solutions, especially as an investment in meeting the May 7, 2025 REAL ID deadline. For its part, TSA published a final rule in October 2024 that would allow travelers to continue using mDLs for identity verification at TSA security checkpoints once REAL ID enforcement begins.¹⁸

In addition, TSA currently partners with Delta Air Lines and United Airlines, with American Airlines soon to follow, in offering the TSA PreCheck Touchless Identity Solution, where TSA PreCheck trusted travelers can opt in to the technology and experience a more seamless security process — from bag drop to the checkpoint to boarding — at nine U.S. airports:



- Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA);
- Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL);
- Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (DTW);
- Los Angeles International Airport (LAX);
- Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR);
- LaGuardia Airport (LGA);
- John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK);
- O'Hare International Airport (ORD); and
- Salt Lake City International Airport (SLC).¹⁹

This voluntary process is faster and more accurate than manual ID checks. TSA PreCheck Touchless ID should be expanded with additional airlines and other private sector partners and should include a plan to expand the pool of eligible participants beyond TSA PreCheck passengers.

RECOMMENDATION: By the end of 2025, TSA should establish and implement formal agreements with aviation and technology stakeholders to create capabilities that reduce traveler stress, provide greater predictability and decrease congestion at airport security checkpoints, such as wayfinding, real-time wait time measurements and screening appointments.

Over the last few years, TSA’s partnerships with state DMVs, Apple, Google, Samsung and others have paved the way to create a standard for states to securely provision mobile driver’s licenses (mDL) to travelers’ phones. These mDLs can now be securely presented at TSA checkpoints instead of physical IDs, and even used for other transactions. This public-private partnership model is ripe for use in additional arenas.

Several of the technology providers TSA works with for mDLs also provide wayfinding solutions that many travelers use daily — from driving and walking to riding a train or metro. This is another area where TSA, airports, airlines and technology providers could agree on a standard, then test and deploy end to end wayfinding through existing applications — complete with real-time wait times similar to current traffic-based drive times. Some airline apps already include interactive airport mapping and wayfinding for bag drop, check-in, checkpoints, lounges and departure gates.

Similarly, TSA has worked with Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA) and other airports on screening appointment windows.²⁰ If TSA and its partners can ensure that systems are interoperable, these tools could be just one offering available through the traveler’s preferred app — Apple or Google Maps, an airline app or the myTSA app.



Each of these examples represents opportunities now and in the future to promote a more integrated, autonomous and seamless process while ensuring traveler privacy and control. Providing predictability to travelers can lead to major improvements in efficiency and the travel experience while mitigating the security risk of large crowds at airports.

2. ENHANCING PASSENGER SCREENING AND PROCESSING

Improving identity verification alone without addressing the physical screening process will not reduce long wait times or improve the overall travel experience. In addition, bad actors have attempted to carry threat items on their person for decades, pushing TSA to deploy Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) in addition to walk-through metal detectors. Until AIT and alarm resolution technology deployment is complete, legacy metal detectors for non-low risk passengers will present security gaps and can lead to unpleasant, time-consuming physical pat-downs of passengers.



RECOMMENDATION: Congress must increase funding for the procurement of next generation Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) and alarm resolution technology by \$1 billion over the next five years to improve on-person screening and significantly reduce the need for traveler pat-downs.

AIT screens for both metallic and non-metallic items, providing greater protection against security risks and enabling automatic detection and alarm resolution of potential threat items.

According to TSA: Millimeter wave advanced imaging technology safely screens passengers without physical contact for metallic and non-metallic threats, including weapons and explosives, which may be concealed under clothing.²¹

In addition to improving security, Next generation AIT also reduces the likelihood of physical pat-downs by automatically identifying the potential threat item and location. Next generation AITs in conjunction with alarm resolution technology would enable TSA to consider modifying or lifting requirements to remove shoes, belts and jackets depending on specific threats and the ability of the technology to distinguish and resolve any false alarms from these items.

RECOMMENDATION: Congress should reauthorize and expand TSA’s pilot authority for the reimbursable screening services program (RSSP) to allow additional locations for offsite or off-airport partnerships, which will improve operational efficiency and reduce congestion at airport security checkpoints.

TSA has set an internal goal to keep wait times under 10 minutes for TSA PreCheck lanes and under 30 minutes for standard screening lanes. More progress must be made to maintain or even lower these wait times in the face of unprecedented travel volume.

Congress authorized a pilot program allowing TSA to enter reimbursable screening services program (RSSP) agreements with TSA regulated entities to provide screening services outside primary passenger terminal screening areas. Three RSSP locations are currently operating, two at LAX and one at ATL.²² TSA is authorized to have up to eight locations through FY 2025.²³

TSA should work with airports, airlines and lounges, as well as non-aviation entities like seaports, cruise lines, major destinations and convention centers to expand this program. Offsite screening could be an important option for travelers looking to avoid crowded checkpoints by leveraging private lounge screening or regional airport capabilities, but also for those travelers departing cruise ships, conventions or major destinations seeking a more efficient screening process before reaching the airport. These opportunities can both enhance the traveler experience and provide major operational relief to TSA and airports.



3. STRENGTHENING CARRY-ON BAGGAGE SCREENING CAPABILITIES

Investments in modern security technology can also address the major risk that carry-on baggage and accessible property present to aviation security. From the 2006 liquids plot to the 2017 laptop plot, terrorists and bad actors have long sought to exploit baggage vulnerabilities. Yet due to funding challenges, TSA still uses outdated two-dimensional (2-D) x-ray scanners in many airports, creating unnecessary security vulnerabilities.

Leading-edge Computed Tomography (CT) x-ray technology, which is similar to technology already utilized for checked baggage, provides much greater visibility into baggage, automates detection of threats and reduces unnecessary bag searches.

However, according to recent testimony, TSA will not fully deploy CT scanners across the aviation system until 2042 at the current funding and procurement rate.²⁴ This extended timeline allows other countries to leap far ahead of the U.S. in terms of security technology. For example, the U.K. requires all British airports to fully deploy CT by the summer of 2025.²⁵

The U.S. must be a leader, not a laggard, in advanced CT technology. To take full advantage of the security and efficiency opportunities, such as automated threat detection, TSA must reach full deployment of CT far more quickly. By working closely with technology manufacturers, leveraging an Open Architecture approach with the CT hardware and undertaking joint testing of software with international partners, TSA should be able to deploy advanced algorithms that can automatically detect prohibited items and non-metallics, enabling travelers to keep all items in their bags and eventually carry liquids over 100ml.



RECOMMENDATION: Congress must increase funding for Computed Tomography (CT) baggage scanners, software development for automatic detection and alarm resolution technology by \$2 billion over the next five years. This would significantly enhance bag screening capabilities and efficiencies, while providing major opportunities to improve the traveler experience by allowing more items to remain in bags and larger liquids through the checkpoint.

To date, TSA has deployed 894 CT units at 236 airports nationwide.

According to TSA: CT is the latest checkpoint X-ray scanning equipment to enhance threat detection capabilities for carry-on baggage. The technology is similar to CT technology used in the medical field and...[it] applies sophisticated algorithms for the detection of explosives and other threats by creating a 3-D image that can be viewed and rotated 360 degrees for a thorough analysis.²⁶

When properly utilized, CT technology is more accurate and efficient than outdated 2-D systems. It also reduces the load on TSA officers, allowing them to focus attention on flagged bags and secondary screening of potential threat items rather than every bag that comes through the checkpoint.

Maximizing the full capabilities of CT is critical to experiencing all the benefits the technology has to offer. The hardware provides enhanced 3-D imaging and manipulation features that greatly improve security effectiveness. But these are only part of the benefits of CT. Software capabilities enable artificial intelligence to automatically detect threat items like weapons and their components, as well as non-metallic items like liquids and powders — a major security advancement. Automated detection not only elevates CT's security effectiveness even beyond what the 3-D imaging provides, it also creates dramatic improvements in operational efficiency.





TSA has experienced some efficiency issues with CT, but this is mainly due to passenger familiarity and officer training challenges as well as a lack of automatic threat detection. Deploying more CTs across the aviation system — combined with advanced algorithms, passenger familiarity and additional officer training — will yield better security and efficiency results. Heathrow Airport officials told the commission during a June 2024 field visit that the airport is seeing nearly 220 passengers per hour successfully pass through lanes utilizing CT — a much higher throughput number than in the U.S. This promising sign should encourage Congress and TSA to continue investing heavily in this game-changing technology.

TSA should also evaluate solutions like remote baggage screening and viewing — similar to checked baggage screening — to improve throughput as well as officer effectiveness and experience. Such initiatives are likely to address challenges associated with growing travel volume and limited airport infrastructure, especially at checkpoints.

RECOMMENDATION: TSA should leverage Open Architecture across capability areas to rapidly develop, test and deploy solutions that allow for a significant increase in security effectiveness and operational efficiency at the checkpoint.

Open Architecture (OA) is one of the most effective ways to incorporate advanced software algorithms into transportation security technology.

According to TSA: Open Architecture is a design approach ... to allow a wide range of industry partners to create improved subcomponents (like new detection algorithms, user interfaces, or reporting systems).²⁷

In other words, OA ensures that vendors, including original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and third parties, design equipment in a way that enables interoperability with solutions from other entities to provide a platform for continuous improvements. This generates faster modernization of technology to respond to emerging

threats and implement customer experience enhancements by allowing the adoption of a new and innovative platform or software without having to completely replace hardware systems.

OA facilitates flexibility, interoperability and modularity across different technology systems. It allows non-traditional entities like third party developers to engage in the improvement cycles with lower risk and up-front investment (i.e. a lower barrier to entry). It also fosters innovation and increases TSA's ability to adopt emerging technologies to provide best-in-class security. Under OA, an artificial intelligence (AI) company could develop a detection algorithm for TSA's transportation security equipment that improves its capabilities. This allows implementation of capabilities that did not exist when the equipment was first developed — a major leap forward in innovation.

The commission commends TSA for working with international partners and technology providers to advance OA across the transportation security system, including in the emerging digital ID ecosystem and in developing automatic threat detection for CT bag scanners.²⁸

By prioritizing OA for CT equipment, TSA can increase opportunities for enhanced algorithm development, opening an avenue for better detection of prohibited metallic and non-metallic items while allowing passengers to leave items in their bags and carry larger liquids.

4. ADDRESSING FUNDING AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

While TSA's overall budget has increased in recent years, additional funding has mostly focused on the workforce rather than technology investment. In fact, technology appropriations have remained stagnant or even been reduced. For example, the FY25 President's Budget requests **\$40 million less** for security technology, including reductions for CT scanners, CAT systems and research and development.²⁹ Moreover, much of the Passenger Security Fee from traveler airfare purchases is diverted from TSA to the Treasury's general fund rather than reinvested in aviation security, which was its intended purpose after 9/11. TSA's internal acquisition processes can compound the challenges stemming from technology underfunding.



RECOMMENDATION: Congress must take legislative action to immediately end the Passenger Security Fee diversion, returning it to TSA as a supplement rather than an offset for appropriations. This represents over \$5 billion in additional TSA funding over five years — resources desperately needed to invest in technology that advances secure and seamless travel.

The commission commends Congress and TSA’s recent investments in frontline workers, who have been underpaid for far too long. Recent evidence that retention and morale continue to improve support this investment.³⁰ It also suggests that Congress and TSA now have the flexibility to focus on technology and innovative security investments, which are still woefully underfunded.

Following 9/11, Congress passed the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA), which established TSA and created a Passenger Security Fee on each airline ticket purchase. This fee — currently \$5.60 per one-way trip — was intended to help finance aviation security.³¹

Yet, this fee has not kept pace with inflation and is now wholly insufficient to meet the nation’s aviation security needs. To make matters worse, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 diverted approximately one-third of Passenger Security Fees to the general fund of the Treasury for unrelated government spending. In 2018, Congress extended this diversion through FY 2027 — creating a \$5 billion hole in aviation security spending unless current law is changed.

The FY 2024 DHS appropriations bill helped alleviate some of this diversion by transferring \$800 million of the fee to the TSA budget, but as an offset. Reducing TSA appropriations by the commensurate fee amount is not a solution.

Congress must find other sources for deficit reduction that do not undermine national security. The Passenger Security Fee should be reinvested in aviation security to supplement current appropriations, not replace them.



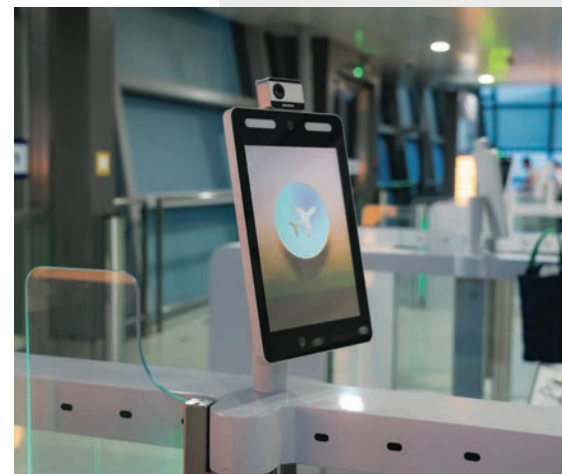
The additional \$5 billion to be gained over five years from ending the fee diversion could complete the major technology programs prioritized above — Credential Authentication Technology for identity verification, Advanced Imaging Technology for on-person screening and Computed Tomography for carry-on baggage. It could also serve as an annual technology investment for TSA to conduct research and development as well as necessary maintenance on transportation security equipment.

Lastly, the Passenger Security Fee must undergo a thorough review to allow Congress, TSA and aviation stakeholders to develop a transparent, collaborative and consistent fee structure based on security needs, travel volume and performance metrics like wait time standards.

RECOMMENDATION: The TSA Administrator should immediately initiate an internal review and issue a new management directive to establish an agency-wide risk appetite for innovation and improve key functions such as IT, acquisition and contracting to ensure the agency updates its management processes, authority mechanisms and timelines for technology deployment.

Federal acquisition and procurement processes can be lengthy and cumbersome. TSA's processes are no exception. Vendors can spend months or even years trying to qualify for and win a contract. The process for getting on the TSA Qualified Products List (QPL) is rigorous, time-consuming and expensive. This discourages technology vendors, frustrates industry partners and allows countries around the world to incorporate innovative technology ahead of the U.S.

Deploying technology that is ready to be safely used at airports and effective at mitigating security risk should certainly be a top priority for TSA, but internal requirements should not be so stringent that innovative technology rarely meets those requirements or gets deployed in a timely manner — especially when legacy technology is less effective than modern technology.



• • • • •
TSA must prioritize innovation across program offices to drive solutions at the pace of technical change.



The commission commends TSA for creating additional pathways to innovation for piloting, testing and deploying technologies. Compelling examples include piloting biometric capabilities like PreCheck Touchless ID with airline partners, developing the Capability Acceptance Process to accept transportation security equipment gifted from aviation partners,³² and creating the Innovation Checkpoint at Las Vegas McCarran International Airport (LAS) to enable operational testing and evaluation of emerging security technology.

However, these are standalone examples, not a permanent solution. Stakeholders repeatedly told the commission that TSA must improve its transition structure, funding and scalability to improve the success rate of pilots that become operational capabilities. Going forward, TSA must integrate its systems and leverage its data assets to enhance security and efficiency through a more agile approach to capability development.

When founding TSA, Congress envisioned an agency with the ability to respond nimbly and flexibly to emerging and dynamic security threats. That approach should also apply to internal agency processes like acquisition and procurement given the critical role that technology and automation play in improving security effectiveness.

The commission finds that the three biggest hurdles in improving internal agency processes include:

- 1) inconsistent risk appetite across program offices;
- 2) a lack of transition structure and funding to scale projects past the pilot phase into operational capabilities; and
- 3) an outdated IT infrastructure challenged to support major technology deployments and system connectivity.

It is paramount that TSA leadership address these hurdles and work with Congress to identify additional authority and funding needs to do so.



5. EMBRACING INTERNATIONAL INNOVATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

The difference between domestic airports is confusing enough for travelers, but that confusion is amplified even more when comparing international airports and aviation systems. Different structures, requirements and operations create inefficiencies and degrade the traveler experience, while leading to inconsistent security outcomes around the world. It is highly unlikely that the global aviation system will ever be completely uniform, but there are ample opportunities to help harmonize technology, standards and security outcomes.

To capitalize on these opportunities, the U.S. should lead an international coalition to align technology standards and testing; jointly enhance screening measures; and achieve comparable security results across multiple countries. These efforts could generate major operational efficiencies and passenger benefits by streamlining processes, providing consistency across global aviation and reducing duplicative or unnecessary requirements that do not improve security outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION: The U.S. should reach formal agreements with key international partners over the next three years on common technology standards and testing to allow passengers to experience efficiencies across international aviation systems.

As discussed above, modern security technology like CT offers major opportunities for automated threat detection. Combining research, standards and testing efforts from international partners multiplies these opportunities.

The commission commends TSA for initiating such efforts with key European partners and encourages continued cooperation. Harmonizing the standards and testing of common technology provides consistency for travelers and offers opportunities to reach comparable security outcomes across different aviation systems — ultimately enabling international travelers to be treated as domestic travelers for purposes of security measures.

This lack of harmonization can have a real impact on travelers.

In June 2024, the U.K. allowed airports to remove the 100ml liquid requirement due to confidence in automated detection capabilities of their CT scanners. The U.S. did not follow along because it lacked the same confidence in the performance of the existing automated detection capabilities and does not have CT deployed across the U.S. aviation system. Once the legitimate concerns about the effectiveness of the detection technology were shared, the U.K. reinstated the 100ml liquid requirement, creating massive confusion and chaos at some U.K. airports.³³ With harmonized standards and testing in place, this entire issue could have been avoided.

NEED FOR COMMON TECHNOLOGY STANDARDS

Ideally in the future, the U.S. and close partners like the U.K. will reach common technology standards for CT algorithms that can automatically detect liquid threats after jointly testing the technology and improving its detection capability. This will allow countries to move in tandem on reforms like relaxing the 100ml liquids requirement. The result will be a more coordinated international aviation system, elevating security around the world and improving traveler expectations and experience.

RECOMMENDATION: Congress should provide longer-term reauthorization of One-Stop Security pilot authority so TSA can execute at least five formal agreements with key international partners over the next five years to enable streamlined security processes for international travelers and their bags.

The One-Stop Security (OSS) program, authorized by Congress for its current pilot phase, creates opportunities for streamlined security processes where comparable security exists among different aviation systems and airports.

ONE STOP SECURITY IS CRITICAL

The end goal of OSS is to allow international transferring passengers to make connecting flights without being rescreened by domestic security. This creates a major transformation in international travel — raising security standards in foreign countries, reducing connection times in the U.S., enabling more international inbound flights and vastly improving the travel experience by avoiding redundant screening.

The commission commends TSA for working with multiple international partners as well as U.S. and foreign carriers and airports to seek OSS agreements. However, multiple aviation stakeholders expressed concerns to the commission about slow progress and rigid requirements stemming from negotiations between the U.S. and foreign governments as well as unclear business requirements for participating stakeholders. It is evident that the aviation industry is eager to support the implementation of OSS and recognizes the potential benefits and opportunities to showcase American leadership in aviation security, efficiency and the travel experience.

For OSS to maximize benefits to travelers, airports and airlines, the U.S. and its foreign counterparts need to take



a more flexible, innovative approach without sacrificing security. This requires prioritizing security outcomes, rather than identical processes. Congress must also commit to longer-term authorization and scaling of OSS to make stakeholder investments worthwhile.

TSA is working with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) but the commission notes that the coordination between these two DHS agencies must improve to advance OSS. CBP would likely have to divert officers to a separate, OSS-only customs area or directly to the arrival gates to prevent the comingling of travelers in the international arrivals hall. This diversion could impact general airport customs if CBP has fewer officers to process non-OSS travelers. Additionally, airports would likely have to make infrastructure changes to limit comingling upon arrival. This imposes a cost to airports that should be supported by data demonstrating additional value in terms of throughput, growth, traveler experience and security, as well as the certainty that stems from a longer-term program.



A key milestone to OSS is International to Domestic Baggage Data Screening (I2D), where international travelers arriving in the U.S. would not have to recheck their bags for a domestic connection. The airline or departing airport would share the bag screening images with TSA and CBP, providing an advanced look at the images to determine any potential threats in route to the U.S. Under current non-OSS operations, TSA and CBP would not see those bags

until they reach a U.S. airport, so this advanced screening provides a major boost for security and efficiency.

The commission supports advancing I2D as part of OSS or even separately while full OSS for passengers continues to be worked out with a partner country.

However, the commission recommends that any bag image and data sharing process be agreed upon before implementing OSS to mitigate any data privacy liability concerns, especially in light of major privacy legislation such as the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

CONCLUSION

TSA faces critical challenges in its mission to secure the nation’s transportation systems. The commission’s recommendations provide a strategic roadmap for TSA to enhance its capabilities and effectiveness, vastly improving both security and the travel experience.

These changes can yield significant benefits. Enhancing aviation security through advanced technologies could prevent potential security threats and save lives. Improving operational efficiency to reduce wait times could generate billions in additional annual visitor spending at U.S. businesses.

Optimizing resources through automation and risk-based screening could allow TSA to refocus a significant portion of its workforce on high-risk areas and complex security tasks — improving the officer experience and providing greater value to American taxpayers.

Implementing these recommendations will require concerted effort and collaboration among various stakeholders, including Congress, TSA leadership, private sector partners and the traveling public. With sustained commitment, adequate resources and strong partnerships, TSA can ensure secure and efficient travel for generations to come while contributing significantly to U.S. economic growth and enhancing America’s competitive position in global travel.



Endnotes for Transforming Aviation Security

¹U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “TSA checkpoint travel numbers (current year versus prior year/same weekday).” <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/passenger-volumes>

²CBS News, “More than 300 passengers tried to evade airport security in the last year, TSA says,” April 5, 2024. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tsa-airport-security-passengers-evade/>

³News Nation, “Al-Qaeda affiliate threatens attacks on airlines and prominent figures,” January 1, 2024. <https://www.newsnationnow.com/world/al-qaeda-affiliate-threatens-airlines-prominent-figures/>

⁴U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “TSA checkpoint travel numbers (current year versus prior year/same weekday).” <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/passenger-volumes>

⁵U.S. Travel Association, “Stunning New Research Ranks United States Nearly Dead Last In Competition For Global Travelers,” January 20, 2024. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/stunning-new-research-ranks-united-states-nearly-dead-last-competition-global-travelers>

⁶U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “A Review of Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for Transportation Security Administration,” May 15, 2024. <https://www.tsa.gov/news/press/testimony/2024/05/15/review-fiscal-year-2025-budget-request-transportation-security>

⁷Business Travel News Europe, “UK Airports Granted Extension to Install New Security Scanners,” June 12, 2024. <https://www.businesstravelnewseurope.com/Air-Travel/UK-airports-granted-extension-to-install-new-security-scanners>

⁸U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “TSA by the Numbers.” <https://www.tsa.gov/news/press/factsheets/tsa-numbers>

⁹Euronews, “100ml Airport Rule to be Removed at Some European Airports: Will It Make Flying Less Safe?” June 17, 2024. <https://www.euronews.com/travel/2024/06/17/100-ml-airport-rule-to-be-removed-at-some-european-airports-will-it-make-flying-less-safe>

¹⁰National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, “The 9/11 Commission Report,” p.384, July 22, 2004. <https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>

¹¹U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “Credential Authentication Technology.” <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/credential-authentication-technology>

¹²International Air Transport Association, “Speed and Convenience Top Priority for Passengers,” October 25, 2023. <https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/2023-releases/2023-10-25-01/>

¹³CNN, “The race to become the world’s first document-free airport,” August 7, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/travel/abu-dhabi-smart-travel-project/index.html>

¹⁴Immigration & Checkpoints Authority, “Passport-Less Immigration Clearance to be Rolled Out Progressively at Changi Airport from August 2024.” <https://www.ica.gov.sg/news-and-publications/newsroom/media-release/passport-less-immigration-clearance-to-be-rolled-out-progressively-at-changi-airport-from-august-2024>

¹⁵U.S. Travel Association, “Survey: 4 out of 5 American Travelers Embrace Biometrics Use at Airport Security,” September 5, 2024.” <https://www.ustravel.org/press/survey-4-out-5-american-travelers-embrace-biometrics-use-airport-security>

¹⁶U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “Biometrics Technology.” <https://www.tsa.gov/biometrics-technology>

- ¹⁷ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “Digital Identity and Facial Recognition Technology.” <https://www.tsa.gov/digital-id>
- ¹⁸ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, <https://www.tsa.gov/news/press/releases/2024/10/24/tsa-announces-final-rule-enables-continued-acceptance-mobile-drivers>
- ¹⁹ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “TSA announces final rule that enables the continued acceptance of mobile driver’s licenses at airport security checkpoints and federal buildings,” October 24, 2024. <https://www.tsa.gov/biometrics-technology/evaluating-facial-identification-technology>
- ²⁰ Port of Seattle, “SEA Spot Saver.” <https://www.portseattle.org/SEAspotsaver>
- ²¹ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “What is Advanced Imaging Technology?” <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/frequently-asked-questions/what-advanced-imaging-technology>
- ²² U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “TSA Reimbursable Screening Services Program,” January 2, 2024. https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/2024_0102_tsa_reimbursable_screening_services_program.pdf
- ²³ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “Reimbursable Screening Services Program.” <https://www.tsa.gov/for-industry/reimbursable-screening-services-program>
- ²⁴ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “A Review of Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for Transportation Security Administration,” May 15, 2024. <https://www.tsa.gov/news/press/testimony/2024/05/15/review-fiscal-year-2025-budget-request-transportation-security>
- ²⁵ Business Travel News Europe, “UK Airports Granted Extension to Install New Security Scanners,” June 12, 2024. <https://www.businesstravelnewseurope.com/Air-Travel/UK-airports-granted-extension-to-install-new-security-scanners>
- ²⁶ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “Computed Tomography Technology.” <https://www.tsa.gov/computed-tomography>
- ²⁷ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “Open Architecture.” <https://www.tsa.gov/for-industry/open-architecture>
- ²⁸ Joint Open Architecture Steering Group, “Open Architecture for Airport Security Systems,” 2nd edition, August 21, 2023. https://www.aci-europe.org/downloads/resources/TSA-230504-7_4.1%20Attachment%201%20OA%20for%20Airport%20Security%20Systems%202nd%20Edition%20%20FINAL.pdf
- ²⁹ Department of Homeland Security, “Transportation Security Administration Budget Overview, Fiscal Year 2025.” https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/2024_0318_transportation_security_administration.pdf
- ³⁰ U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “2023 TSA Year In Review,” https://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/17228_info_tsa_2023_year_in_review.pdf
- ³¹ 49 U.S. Code § 44940, Security service fee.
- ³² U.S. Transportation Security Administration, “Capability Acceptance Process.” <https://www.tsa.gov/for-industry/capability-acceptance-process>
- ³³ Euronews, “100ml Airport Rule to be Removed at Some European Airports: Will It Make Flying Less Safe?” June 17, 2024. <https://www.euronews.com/travel/2024/06/17/100-ml-airport-rule-to-be-removed-at-some-european-airports-will-it-make-flying-less-safe>

Modernizing Airport Customs and Borders

INTRODUCTION

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has been an innovation leader within the Department of Homeland Security and the federal government, setting a benchmark for security, traveler experience and facilitation. Over the past decade, CBP has transformed its operations through programs such as Global Entry, Biometric Entry/Exit, and Mobile Passport Control (MPC).

CBP plays a critical role in processing international visitors and returning American citizens. As the U.S. strives to regain market share in global travel, improving the overall traveler experience has become increasingly crucial amid rising demand. Improving the CBP officer experience goes hand-in-hand with improving the traveler experience, all the while ensuring the security and efficiency of the nation's borders. As CBP's most valuable asset, these officers represent a significant investment in training and expertise, equipping them to facilitate lawful trade and travel while enforcing immigration and customs laws. Their hands-on experience provides critical insights into operational challenges, emerging threats and effective strategies. The commission's recommendations aim to support CBP officers in the enforcement of our nation's laws and fulfilling CBP's border, trade, travel and national security missions.

CBP's indispensable role has become even more essential as travel volumes surge.



In fiscal year 2024, CBP processed over 140 million travelers at our nation's airports, surpassing 2019's mark of 135.7 million.¹



CBP's commitment to innovation will be crucial in managing surging traveler volume. The agency's track record of transformation over the past decade creates a strong foundation for continued improvement.

CBP's leadership in biometric technologies has revolutionized how travelers move through U.S. borders. CBP's facial recognition platform, the Traveler Verification Service (TVS), was a pivotal moment in border security. Expanding the Biometric Entry/Exit program will expedite the process for millions of international visitors and fortify national security by ensuring individuals are accurately identified.

Similarly, implementing Mobile Passport Control (MPC) was an innovative leap in simplifying the customs and immigration process. MPC allows eligible travelers to submit their travel documents, photos and customs declaration information through a free, secure app. MPC streamlines the traveler's entry into the U.S. by reducing passport control inspection time and overall wait time. The MPC program shows how leveraging technology can create a more efficient and traveler-friendly border-crossing experience.

The commission applauds CBP's ongoing discussions with airports. The agency's proactive approach continues to drive advances benefiting both the public and private

sectors, fostering economic growth and enhancing border security. The commission supports CBP's continued efforts to advance innovative programs for travelers including the proposed Seamless Border Entry (SBE) and Enhanced Passenger Processing (EPP) process.

SBE, an extension of CBP's Trusted Traveler initiatives, aims to further streamline the entry process by using facial biometrics "on the move" to verify the identities of Global Entry travelers entering the United States.

SBE marks the first time that a security agency has effectively eliminated the friction points in its processes while maintaining the highest standards of security.

SBE can become a global model for border management, alleviating the congestion of the current identity verification system. The commission encourages CBP to expand this process.

EPP continues to expand facilitation opportunities to other risk-segmented international arrival passengers. Under EPP, U.S. citizens are processed through streamlined queuing using facial capture technology instead of the traditional manual facial capture in booth processing upon arrival. This approach aims to improve operational efficiency and reduce staffing impacts as travel volumes continue to increase. In the near term, the goal is to support the development of a pilot for U.S. citizens arriving internationally at major U.S. gateways. In the medium term, the objective is to expand EPP to include lawful permanent residents, certain nationals exempt from U.S. visas and foreign nationals from Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries, further streamlining the entry process and enhancing overall border security.

The commission's recommendations aim to build on CBP's legacy of international engagement, strong partnerships and important innovations, addressing challenges posed by continued growth in international travel to the U.S. By presenting targeted solutions, the commission seeks to support CBP in its mission to further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of border processing. Both the commission and CBP share the goal of enhancing national security and driving greater economic prosperity while delivering a superior experience for all travelers.



KEY CHALLENGES

1. ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PROCESSING DELAYS

Delays and inefficiencies in processing travelers can significantly reduce traveler spending, dealing a severe blow to the U.S. economy. During peak travel seasons, airports such as JFK and LAX often experience processing delays exceeding one hour, leading to missed connections and dissatisfied travelers.²

2. BALANCING SECURITY AND EFFICIENCY

Balancing the need for efficient processing with maintaining rigorous security presents a constant challenge for CBP. The commission acknowledges that CBP continues to face emerging and growing threats to the United States.

3. TRAVELER EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION

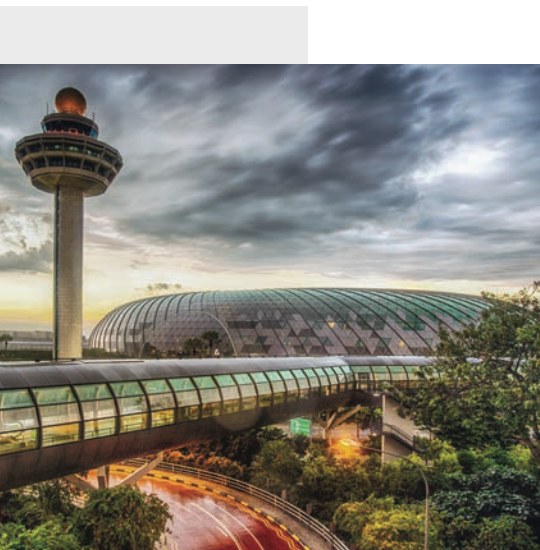
Long wait times and cumbersome processes negatively impact traveler satisfaction, potentially deterring future visits. A 2021 survey by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) found that 67% of travelers cited long wait times as a primary concern, significantly affecting their overall travel experience.³ Travelers have reported waiting up to two hours for passport control during peak times, leading to frustration and negative reviews.⁴

4. INFRASTRUCTURE LIMITATIONS

Airport infrastructure, including limited space, signage, wayfinding and baggage operations, significantly impacts international arrivals and can limit the value of CBP's innovative approaches. Under ideal circumstances, CBP may process travelers faster than bags can be delivered to the baggage carousels. Baggage operations may be affected by factors including competing baggage companies, outdated baggage systems and a limited number of carousels.

5. COMPETITIVE POSITIONING

Other countries are advancing faster in streamlining border processes, potentially making them more attractive destinations and challenging the U.S.'s position in global travel. Singapore's Changi Airport, known for its seamless



Singapore's Changi Airport is frequently rated as the best airport in the world.

immigration processes, is frequently rated as the best airport in the world, attracting a high volume of international travelers.⁵

OVERARCHING CHALLENGE: ENSURING EFFECTIVE PRIVACY AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

As CBP continues to innovate and enhance its border management capabilities, it confronts a broader challenge that impacts multiple operations: balancing the need for operational efficiency with the imperative of protecting traveler privacy. This challenge requires careful consideration as the agency moves forward with technological advancements and process improvements.

The commission recognizes that both government and industry stakeholders share the goals of ensuring traveler privacy and safety. We see these goals as complementary, not mutually exclusive. Given CBP's instrumental role in the travel process, its approach to this challenge will significantly impact the future of border security and traveler experience.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ADDRESSING CBP OFFICER STAFFING SHORTAGES

CBP is facing a critical staffing shortage that has significant implications for national security and economic efficiency.

Currently, CBP's workload staffing model shows it is already short 5,850 officers needed to facilitate trade and travel.⁶

According to a recent Department of Homeland Security Inspector General Report, "a large number of officers will reach their law enforcement retirement in 2028.⁷ At that time, and in subsequent years, retirements could rise yet neither component has a succession plan addressing possible rapid personnel changes."

RECOMMENDATION: Congress must provide funding for 2,000 additional CBP officers at airports of entry.

To enhance border security and facilitate lawful trade and travel, Congress should appropriate funding for an additional 2,000 CBP officers above the authorized staffing level, with a focus on supporting our nation's airports. Current staffing shortages at airports hinder CBP's ability to efficiently process travelers and cargo, creating delays and potential security vulnerabilities.

Increasing CBP personnel will strengthen national security, improve airport efficiency and support economic growth by ensuring the smooth flow of international travelers and goods.

Additional officers can also help extend operational hours, accommodating the growth of new international routes and improving overall service at U.S. entry points. This investment is essential to addressing the operational demands at our nation's gateway airports.

RECOMMENDATION: CBP should seek to further boost CBP officer levels with support from willing private sector partners.

Opening a new port of entry or terminal, regardless of technology improvements, will always require new officers above the authorized staffing levels. Airports across the U.S. continue to invest in new international terminals to take advantage of the economic benefits to their city and state from drawing additional travelers.

A public-private partnership approach can help provide resources to strengthen CBP staffing levels. This would require congressional appropriations and authorizing committees to work collaboratively with CBP, allowing private sector partners to provide funding for staffing above the authorized staffing levels.

However, the commission is concerned that CBP's existing Reimbursable Services Program (RSP) already places significant financial strain on U.S. airports and airlines, including for services such as overtime outside normal business hours needed to process growing international air service. At many airports, CBP officers have reached the maximum amount of overtime they can work and additional private sector funding cannot be used to increase services. Therefore, it is critical that CBP consistently review its



staffing model to ensure it reflects projected growth in international travel and that Congress authorizes and fully funds CBP staffing at adequate levels to support CBP’s staffing model.

2. ENHANCING TRAVELER PROCESSING

Inefficiencies and delays in manually processing travelers create barriers to further travel and economic growth. By harnessing advanced technologies, such as biometric screening and artificial intelligence, airports and border security agencies can significantly streamline traveler processing, enhance risk assessment and optimize resource allocation. Implementing these innovative technologies improves the overall efficiency of travel operations and contributes to a more secure and seamless travel experience for passengers.

Biometric technologies have emerged as crucial tools for enhancing efficiency, security and traveler satisfaction. Continued implementation of biometric systems, such as facial recognition, offers a transformative solution to longstanding challenges in traveler processing. These technologies streamline operations, reduce wait times and bolster security by providing rapid, accurate identification of travelers. To harness these benefits, a strategic expansion of biometric entry and exit systems is essential.

RECOMMENDATION: CBP should expand Enhanced Passenger Processing (EPP) to the top 25 airports by the end of 2026.

CBP is currently deploying “Enhanced Passenger Processing” (EPP) for U.S. citizens in partnership with airports — delivering important benefits to CBP and the traveler. EPP’s resource savings and increased efficiency should enable airports to explore the addition of more flights.

Under EPP, U.S. citizens are processed via facial comparison technology using tablets mounted on adjustable stands versus being processed at a booth. Under EPP, the biometric technology fully automates the Simplified Arrival (entry) process and the CBP officers focus on the traveler interaction. Additionally, airports provide facial comparison

BENEFITS OF ENHANCED PASSENGER PROCESSING (EPP)

First, because officers are focused on the traveler versus manual processing at a booth, this allows CBP to apply more resources to higher risk individuals and monitor for suspicious travel patterns. Second, for the traveler, EPP provides a better, more frictionless experience by processing at a tablet which can take 4-6 seconds versus at a booth which can take anywhere from 30-60 seconds.



Congress must address this lagging progress once and for all by funding the completion of CBP’s biometric air exit system, which will vastly improve CBP’s border security and immigration enforcement capabilities by knowing who is entering and exiting the country and when.

technology (hardware and software) to support EPP — similar to the Automated Passport Control (AP) self-service kiosks used to expedite the customs and immigration process. Every airport has a different demographic profile of its arriving travelers which drives the tools the airport and CBP choose to invest in, such as the number of lanes assigned to Global Entry travelers.

Significantly expanding the EPP biometric entry process at U.S. gateway airports can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of processing U.S. citizens entering the United States. This expansion will enable officers to quickly and accurately process low-risk travelers, ensuring a smoother entry experience and better allocation of resources to focus on high-risk threats.

- The commission recommends that all U.S. citizens be eligible for EPP, provided there is no impact to CBP’s border or national security missions.
- The commission recommends that CBP leverage EPP technology to include “on the move” biometric capture to improve both the traveler and officer experiences.
- The commission also recommends that CBP identify a federal funding source to pay for EPP technology and work in partnership with individual airports to identify the best way to invest those funds.

RECOMMENDATION: Congress should support the Biometric Entry/Exit Program by investing \$600 million to complete CBP’s biometric air exit system within two years and enhance the Traveler Verification Service (TVS).

The commission applauds CBP’s work to fully implement the original vision of the 9/11 Commission for 100% biometric screening of outbound U.S. air travelers, especially absent the requisite funding from Congress. Integrity in our nation’s entry-exit systems is critical to driving innovation for cross border travel. The commission strongly supports CBP’s efforts to achieve 97% biometric coverage of all departing flights, but the current pace of biometric technology deployment will delay the completion well past the 2025 goal.

While the airport and airline community are not statutorily compelled to biometrically verify the exit of travelers, they have contributed technology and operational support to assist CBP. The commission recognizes that travelers increasingly demand a biometrically enabled travel journey and the cost of data sharing and technology has dramatically declined.

The commission commends airports and airlines for supporting CBP in its biometric exit mission. Collectively, airline and airport investments in biometric technology are strengthening border security and facilitating a better boarding experience. But the aviation industry should not be forced to pay for a requirement that Congress put on CBP.

Congress originally funded CBP's biometric exit program through fees attached to the H-1B and L-1 visas. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) developed the original fee collection estimate of \$1 billion, but as of the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 just over \$380 million has been collected. CBP estimates a total collection of \$431 million by the end of fiscal year 2027. COVID impacted this with a shift to telework, which remains in many industries that were bringing in these types of workers, so the fee amounts are not expected to get back to anywhere near the original expected collections. Additionally, the authority to collect these fees ends in FY 2028 as the program was expected to operationalize biometrics across all environments by that time.

CBP's Traveler Verification Service (TVS) continues to serve as a critical backbone to CBP's biometric programs, providing proven, secure and seamless crossing experiences for travelers in the air, land and sea environments. Additionally, TVS has been leveraged to support other agencies including the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which has leveraged TVS to provide faster, more efficient identity verification at the checkpoint in partnership with airlines.

3. INCREASING INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL TO THE U.S.

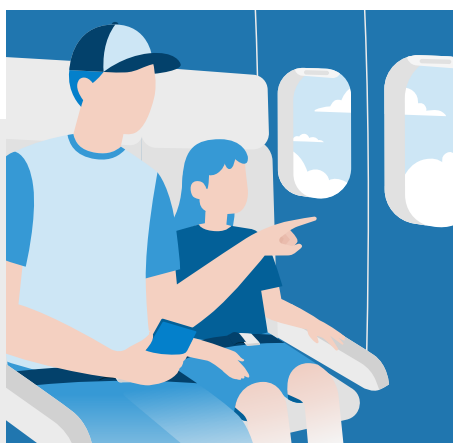
Fostering partnerships and collaboration among various stakeholders will help CBP enhance the efficiency, security and overall experience of international travel. Working



together, airports, airlines and regulatory bodies can implement innovative solutions that streamline processes, reduce barriers and ensure a seamless journey for travelers.

The following recommendations focus on expanding international collaboration programs, supporting the growth of international-to-domestic baggage data screening pilots and modernizing the visa process through transparent collaboration between the U.S. and EU.

One example is the opportunity to align Visa Waiver Program (VWP) membership with participation in Global Entry. VWP allows citizens of participating countries to travel to the U.S. for tourism or business without obtaining a visa for stays of up to 90 days. To be eligible, travelers must have a valid Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) approval prior to their departure. Similar to the Global Entry Program, VWP requires countries to meet specific security and information sharing standards. It also facilitates smoother and faster travel, boosting tourism and business exchanges between the U.S. and participating nations.



RECOMMENDATION: CBP should extend Global Entry to Visa Waiver Program countries and include Global Entry as part of future VWP negotiations.

VWP is negotiated between the U.S. and eligible partner countries to enhance international travel and strengthen security measures. These negotiations focus on aligning both parties' standards for passport security, information sharing and counterterrorism initiatives. Partner countries must meet specific requirements, including a low visa refusal rate, robust law enforcement collaboration and stringent border management. Successful negotiations result in mutually beneficial agreements that facilitate streamlined travel while maintaining high levels of security and compliance with U.S. immigration laws.

Similarly, CBP's Global Entry program agreements are negotiated through bilateral discussions between the U.S. and partner countries. These negotiations focus on ensuring mutual trust in security standards, aligning

operational procedures and protecting personal data. This would enable eligible travelers from participating nations to access streamlined customs and immigration processing. Partnerships are formalized through agreements that outline roles, responsibilities and compliance requirements.

There is little reason to separate these negotiations.

The established bilateral framework between the U.S. and each VWP country creates a solid foundation for introducing Global Entry, as both programs focus on enhancing security and efficiency for low-risk travelers.



By leveraging the VWP's existing relationships and infrastructure, the U.S. can more easily integrate Global Entry into the travel process for these countries, promoting faster customs processing and mutual benefits. This collaboration helps strengthen ties and improve travel experiences between nations.

RECOMMENDATION: CBP and the State Department should provide funding to Global Entry partner countries for capabilities that improve U.S. security such as information sharing mechanisms and recurrent vetting of trusted travelers.

The U.S. State Department issues grants to foreign countries to combat transnational crime, reduce drug trafficking and strengthen justice systems. The State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs' (INL) funding helps build institutional capacity and fosters international cooperation to address global security challenges. Many of these partnerships support CBP's border and national security missions.

To support Global Entry, partner countries must often upgrade their existing IT infrastructure to support CBP's vetting process. This is often a limiting factor in the expansion of Global Entry. Given that Global Entry supports the U.S. economy and provides significant security benefits, CBP and INL should explore grants that provide funding for current and potential Global Entry partners to upgrade their capabilities and infrastructure to meet and maintain Global Entry requirements, such as information sharing and recurrent vetting of trusted travelers.

RECOMMENDATION: CBP should re-open Preclearance applications and negotiations with willing international partners while prioritizing locations where the concerns of U.S. stakeholders can be addressed.

Preclearance allows travelers to undergo customs, immigration and aviation security procedures at their point of departure rather than upon arrival in the U.S., reducing congestion and wait times at U.S. airports of entry.⁸



Preclearance represents a unique opportunity to drive more travel to the U.S. and significantly enhance security. By expanding Preclearance to more international airports, the U.S. can improve the efficiency of its border control processes and provide a more convenient experience for travelers. Additionally, foreign airports are required by statute to provide funding for the cost of CBP officers. In this regard, Preclearance provides a valuable path toward supporting growth and international travel to the U.S. without a cost to the taxpayer.

The commission notes this is not feasible for all airports, including some domestic airports where travelers arrive. Additionally, the concerns associated with Preclearance — including the cost to airports, airlines and foreign partners; airport infrastructure limitations; armed law enforcement presence abroad; among others — provide challenges to finalizing new agreements. However, Preclearance may offer opportunities at select foreign airports where these concerns can be addressed and U.S. airports, airlines and the customs process overall could benefit.

For these reasons, the commission recommends that CBP reopen negotiations with key partners with whom it has held advanced discussions — including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Japan.

The commission also recommends that CBP reopen the Preclearance application process to enhance international traveler convenience and security. By offering additional Preclearance locations, where they are feasible, the U.S. can strengthen its global partnerships while ensuring the highest standards of border security are maintained.

In any future Preclearance negotiations, the commission recommends that CBP address concerns of all relevant U.S. stakeholders before proceeding — including concerns about additional costs to U.S. airlines, CBP's ability to adequately staff U.S. airports of entry and the opportunities for U.S. carriers to benefit from these arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION: CBP should partner with TSA, the aviation industry and international partners to expand International to Domestic Baggage Data Screening as part of One-Stop Security.



The commission commends efforts by CBP, TSA, airlines and airports to expand the International to Domestic Baggage Data Screening (I2D) pilots. As mentioned previously as part of the larger One-Stop Security initiative, I2D enables the seamless transfer of checked baggage information between international and domestic flights, reducing the need for passengers to recheck their luggage and undergo additional security screenings. By expanding I2D, the government and travel industry can enhance security effectiveness, reduce delays and improve the traveler experience.

The commission believes I2D offers a significant opportunity for systematic change for international travel. By providing advance bag image data to CBP and TSA and reducing the need for multiple security checks, this program can greatly enhance the security and efficiency of international travel — creating a more seamless travel experience and encouraging more international travelers to choose U.S. destinations.

NEED FOR CONSISTENT FRAMEWORK ON PRIVACY AND DATA SHARING

As automation technologies — for baggage data sharing, advanced passenger information and biometrics — become increasingly integrated into travel processes, privacy and data sharing requirements should be aligned with international partners. Developing a consistent framework will facilitate the secure, efficient exchange of information, enhancing security and improving the travel experience. This alignment will also address privacy concerns, ensuring that data is handled in a manner that respects individual rights while also supporting security objectives.

4. IMPROVING AIRPORT DESIGN

Inadequate infrastructure and resources currently strain the U.S. government's ability to efficiently process the growing volume of travelers. Rapid technological advancements in key CBP capabilities help reduce the need for expansive arrival halls, which were necessary during previous periods

of significant growth in travel to the U.S. Modernizing the physical and technological infrastructure of airports and ensuring adequate staffing levels will support the seamless processing of passengers and goods.

This section outlines key recommendations to support investment in clear wayfinding and signage, as well as updating airport design standards to better leverage modern technological innovations.

RECOMMENDATION: CBP should partner with the aviation and technology industry to deploy wayfinding capabilities to improve crowd flow and enhance the traveler experience.

Integrating new wayfinding technologies that go beyond simple signage represents a unique opportunity for the aviation and technology industry to partner with CBP to enhance the traveler experience and optimize efficiency at the international arrivals hall.

Wayfinding is critical for international arrivals at airports, ensuring a seamless and stress-free traveler experience, particularly for those unfamiliar with the language, culture or layout of the airport. Clear and intuitive signage helps travelers navigate customs, immigration, baggage claim and connecting flights efficiently — reducing confusion and delays. Effective wayfinding supports operational efficiency by minimizing bottlenecks and enhancing crowd flow management, while fostering a positive perception of the airport and improving passenger satisfaction and trust.

- The aviation and technology stakeholder community should partner with CBP to identify new technologies that support enhanced wayfinding and leverage CBP’s risk segmentation approach through the use of new biometric-driven tools such as EPP, MPC and Global Entry.
- CBP should invest in technologies that support enhanced wayfinding to support airport and CBP staffing efficiency and provide clear communication to the traveler upon arrival.



RECOMMENDATION: CBP should update airport technical design standards to better inform new terminal development.

Modernizing airport technical design standards is essential to integrating technological innovations and adapting to the evolving needs of the travel industry.

Massive arrival halls are becoming antiquated as biometrics and advanced data collection allow for more efficient, flexible and secure passenger processing. Several airports are investing in new international terminals to take advantage of increasing demand to visit the U.S. by international travelers.

At the same time, CBP continues to invest in technologies that require smaller footprints, such as EPP and SBE, and focuses on more person-centric vetting and risk segmentation. This requires more flexible airport infrastructure than the rigid standards of the past.

The commission recommends CBP update airport standards to facilitate the integration of new technologies and design concepts that reduce the need for large physical spaces. Design standards should be living documents that support and encourage CBP's evolution. CBP is currently developing an Airport Modernization Strategy. Incorporating that document's goals into CBP's Technical Design Standards would allow airports to build the terminals of tomorrow.

Moreover, programs that streamline international travel like Preclearance and One-Stop Security can help offset the need for new, expansive facilities and additional CBP officers, so they should inform the design of new international terminals at U.S. airports.

By enabling more security processing to occur before travelers arrive in the U.S., these programs can alleviate congestion and enhance the overall efficiency of entry procedures.



CONCLUSION

CBP has demonstrated commendable progress in embracing innovation over the past decade. Programs such as Global Entry, the Reimbursable Services Program and Mobile Passport Control have significantly improved efficiency, security and the traveler experience. However, several challenges remain that need to be addressed to fully capitalize on these advancements.

By accelerating the deployment of technology and automation, promoting partnership and collaboration, opening creative sources of funding infrastructure and resources, and aligning policy and regulation to meet the dynamics to today's international travel market, the commission hopes to support CBP in carrying out its essential mission of enhancing national security and promoting growth in travel and trade. Implementing biometric screening and AI technologies, formalizing collaboration frameworks, investing in modernized facilities and revising outdated policies are essential steps toward achieving these goals.

The policy recommendations outlined in this report provide a clear roadmap for action. Implementing them will yield significant benefits, including:

1. INCREASED ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS:

Enhancing travel efficiency could significantly boost tourism and business travel. Even a modest improvement in wait times at major U.S. airports could generate billions in additional annual visitor spending, driving economic growth across various sectors.

2. ENHANCED NATIONAL SECURITY:

Implementing advanced processing technologies and procedures can bolster overall security. For instance, adopting state-of-the-art biometric systems can swiftly and accurately identify potential threats, preventing security incidents and safeguarding the nation's borders more effectively.



3. IMPROVED TRAVELER SATISFACTION:

Streamlining processes and reducing wait times can dramatically enhance the traveler experience. This improvement not only encourages repeat visits but also strengthens America’s reputation as a welcoming destination for international travelers.

4. STRENGTHENED COMPETITIVE POSITIONING:

By adopting best practices and innovative technologies, the U.S. can improve its ranking in global travel competitiveness. This enhanced position can drive further economic growth and cement the nation’s status as a premier travel destination.

We encourage CBP and all relevant stakeholders to consider our recommendations and work collaboratively to achieve these goals. Together, we can build a future where travel is seamless, secure and beneficial for the economy and society.

Endnotes for Modernizing Airport Customs and Borders

¹U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “Traveler and Conveyance Statistics,” November 19, 2024. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/travel>

²New York Times, “Understanding the Summer Air Travel Mess,” July 1, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/01/travel/summer-travel-flight-delays-cancellations.html>

³Keeping Technologies, “IATA 2021 Global Passenger Survey Results,” November 18, 2021. <https://platform.keesingtechnologies.com/iata-2021-global-passenger-survey-results/>

⁴Travel and Leisure, “These Airports Have the Longest — and Shortest — Wait Times at Customs During the Holidays, Study Shows,” November 16, 2023. <https://www.travelandleisure.com/airports-international-wait-times-holiday-travel-data-8402124>

⁵Simple Flying, “Why Is Singapore Changi Known As The Airport That Never Sleeps?” July 11, 2024. <https://simpleflying.com/singapore-changi-airport-that-never-sleeps-guide/>

⁶National Treasury Employees Union, “CBP Office Retirement Wave Fast Approaching,” July 31, 2024. <https://www.nteu.org/media-center/news-releases/2024/08/21/officers>

⁷U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, “Intensifying Conditions at the Southwest Border Are Negatively Impacting CBP and ICE Employees’ Health and Morale,” OIG-23-24, May 2, 2023. <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2023-05/OIG-23-24-May23.pdf>

⁸U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “Preclearance,” July 10, 2024. <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/preclearance>

Strengthening Visitor Visa Policy

INTRODUCTION

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), foreign nationals possessing a valid nonimmigrant visa may be temporarily admitted to the U.S. for specific purposes and defined periods of time. The INA defines 24 major nonimmigrant visa (NIV) categories, including temporary business (B-1) and leisure (B-2) visas. In addition to the NIV system, the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) allows citizens of designated countries to be admitted to the U.S. for business or leisure for up to 90 days without a visitor visa.

This section of the report focuses on federal laws and policies related to B-1/B-2 (visitor visas) and the VWP. The focus is limited to these areas because:

- **Visitor visas comprise most of the NIVs issued each year.** In FY 2023, 74% (or 7.7 million) of the 10.4 million nonimmigrant visas issued by the U.S. were visitor visas and Border Crossing Cards (BCC).¹
- **Temporary business and leisure visitors account for most of the nonimmigrants admitted to the U.S. each year.** In FY 2023, 88% (or 59.8 million) of all nonimmigrants admitted to the U.S. were temporary visitors for business or leisure from VWP and non-VWP countries. Of those, 70% were citizens of non-VWP countries and 30% were citizens of VWP countries.²



• • • • •
Streamlining Visitor Visas is Critical to the U.S. Economy.

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS DELIVER MASSIVE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL BENEFITS

Temporary international visitors to the U.S. deliver vast economic, cultural and national security benefits. Whether visiting historic attractions, touring small towns, hiking through National Parks or attending major sporting events, international visitors grow U.S. exports by purchasing American-made goods and services during their stay. International business travelers maintain and expand U.S. trade relationships, particularly in a global economy where international meetings, conferences, and networking are essential. And international visitation strengthens diplomatic ties and promotes American values, as most visitors leave with a better opinion of American society—making them more likely to support policies that keep America safe and prosperous.³



BY THE NUMBERS:

In 2023, 66.5 million international visitors spent more than \$213 billion in the U.S. Travel exports accounted for 7% of total U.S. exports and supported 1.6 million American jobs.⁴ Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, nearly 80 million international visitors spent \$240 billion in the U.S., which made international visitor spending on American-made goods and services our nation's #1 services export.⁵ In a recent survey, more than half (55%) of international visitors to the U.S. said their first-hand experience improved their overall perception of the U.S.⁶

MITIGATING IMMIGRATION, NATIONAL SECURITY AND OTHER RISKS

Temporarily admitting international visitors to the U.S. also presents some illegal immigration, national security, public health and other risks—making the NIV process a central part of immigration control and border security. For example, each year, a small percentage of NIV applicants are refused a visa due to immigration, national security or criminal concerns. Similarly, a small percentage of nonimmigrant visa holders stay in the U.S. beyond their period of admittance.⁷

BY THE NUMBERS:

Visa Refusal and Overstay Rates

- **Visa Refusals:** In FY 2023, the worldwide B-1/B-2 refusal rate was 23%.⁸ Of those, the number of refusals due to concerns over:
 - **Intending to immigrate:** 2,219,877 (17%)
 - **Criminal activity:** 11,687 (0.09%)
 - **Terrorism:** 272 (0.002%)⁹
- **Visa Overstays:** In FY 2023, CBP calculated that the total number of nonimmigrant visa overstays was 565,155, or 1.45%, of the 39 million nonimmigrant admissions to the U.S. Of those, overstay rates were:
 - 3.2% for all non-VWP country admissions
 - 0.62% for all VWP country admissions¹⁰

THE NEED TO BALANCE SECURITY AND FACILITATION IN VISITOR VISA POLICY

There are economic and national security costs for failing to prevent dangerous individuals from entering the U.S.¹¹ However, there are also extraordinary risks to the U.S. economy and its global competitiveness if visitor visa processing is overly restrictive, inefficient and unnecessarily deters qualified foreign nationals from obtaining a visa and visiting the U.S.¹²

BY THE NUMBERS:

After the 9/11 attacks, international visits dropped significantly, resulting in a decrease in visitor spending in the U.S. of \$25 billion over a two-year period, which led to the loss of more than 227,000 American jobs.¹³ A 2004 study found that visa delays cost U.S. exporters more than \$30 billion dollars in direct and indirect revenue.¹⁴

A study by Oxford Economics estimated that visa processing delays, if left unaddressed, could lead to the loss of 5.6 million visitors and \$18.7 billion in spending in 2025 and 2026.¹⁵

These economic benefits and risks define the difficult task that federal policymakers must simultaneously achieve when it comes to visitor visa policy. To maximize the benefits of international visitation to the U.S., the visitor visa application process must be accessible, efficient and modern. To protect against the illegal immigration and national security risks of international visitation, the vetting of visitor visa applicants must be multi-dimensional, thorough and risk based.

VISION FOR A MORE SECURE, SEAMLESS AND MODERN VISITOR VISA SYSTEM

The commission believes that visitor visa policy can and must achieve greater levels of security and efficiency. Achieving these goals will be even more important as the U.S. embarks on a mega-decade of global events hosted on U.S. soil. For many of the millions of international international visitors who are expected to attend these events, the visitor visa system will serve as their gateway. It will also be a determining factor in whether the U.S. can maximize the economic benefits of these large and complex global events and successfully compete to host them in the future.

Through its work, the commission has identified several areas of progress, challenges, and opportunities towards creating a more secure, seamless and modern visitor visa system. The commission envisions a visitor visa system that:

- Strengthens security by expanding membership in the Visa Waiver Program and increasing the number of countries that have secure travel partnerships with the U.S.; and
- Leverages modern technology, stronger vetting capabilities and appropriate staffing to reduce bureaucratic delays and increase overall processing capacity for visitor visas.

VISA WAIVER PROGRAM: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) is a security-first program that strengthens international traveler vetting, identity verification and information sharing with foreign countries. The program now includes 43 countries. The DHS, with



support from the Department of State, leads negotiations with aspiring VWP countries and oversees implementation of the agreements.

To qualify for the VWP, a country must have a visitor visa refusal rate of less than 3% in the previous full fiscal year. A country must then meet all the stringent security requirements of the program, which include issuing tamper-proof electronic passports with machine readable biometric identifiers, reporting information on all lost and stolen passports to the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and sharing information on travelers who may pose a terrorist or criminal threat.¹⁶ A country must also provide the U.S. citizens with reciprocal visa-free travel.

A country may receive its VWP designation once the DHS certifies that all the program requirements have been met and determines that its admission would not compromise the law enforcement or security interests of the U.S. Once a country receives its VWP designation, its citizens may apply for an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) to visit the U.S., instead of a traditional B-1 or B-2 visa. If an applicant is approved through ESTA, he or she may travel to the U.S. for business or leisure purposes for short stays of up to three months at a time and the approval is valid for up to two years.

The VWP raises the bar globally for security standards by encouraging designated countries to create parallel requirements that inhibit the movement of terrorists, persons involved in transnational organized crime and other bad actors. Specifically, the VWP:

- **Enables recurrent screening against law enforcement and security databases:** ESTA is a powerful screening tool that allows CBP officers to assess, detect and identify threats based on real and current intelligence gathered by the U.S. and foreign partners. This individualized and recurrent vetting is conducted against multiple law enforcement and security databases, including the Terrorist Screening Database and INTERPOL's Stolen and Lost Travel Document database. The VWP also replaces the in-person interview conducted by consular officers upon application with an interview conducted by CBP law-enforcement officers upon arrival at U.S. airports of entry.
- **Strengthens information and intelligence sharing**



with foreign countries: VWP member countries are required to share with the U.S. information that would not otherwise be available. This includes robust information sharing agreements regarding potential terrorists and criminals gathered by a traveler's home government. These information sharing agreements are in addition to the U.S. government's own security screening systems.



- **Requires higher standards for identity verification:** All VWP countries must issue biometric, machine-readable, tamper resistant passports that meet internationally recognized standards. This allows CBP officers and other immigration officials to more easily detect fraudulent or forged documents which allows for easier detection of forged or fraudulent passports.
- **Mandates that DHS regularly audit VWP countries to ensure compliance with security requirements:** DHS has a vigorous review process for VWP countries, ensuring that issues identified through visits or in consultation with other U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies regarding any VWP security concerns, are addressed.

PROGRESS TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN VWP SECURITY REQUIREMENTS AND EXPAND PARTICIPATION

Since the VWP was created, Congress and DHS have continually strengthened the security benefits of the program. The commission applauds Congress, the DHS and the State Department for strengthening aspects of the VWP's security regime in recent years. For example:

- In 2015, Congress enacted the Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act, which enhanced security requirements of the VWP. Among other provisions, the Act requires DHS to set timelines for VWP countries to fully implement the program's information sharing agreements and e-passport requirements.¹⁷

- In 2022, the DHS also announced that all VWP members must participate in Enhanced Border Security Partnerships (EBSP) by 2027. The EBSP enables CBP to instantaneously run automated queries of foreign criminal databases using fingerprints collected from foreign arrivals at U.S. POEs. Several VWP countries have already implemented this new requirement.¹⁸

The commission commends the DHS and State Department for recently expanding VWP membership to countries such as Greece, Taiwan, Chile, Poland, Croatia, Israel and Romania. Each time a new country is admitted to the VWP, it raises the security standards for international travel and generates substantial economic growth for the U.S.

BY THE NUMBERS

According to an analysis by Oxford Economics, the five countries added to the VWP from 2008 to 2014 experienced a 52% gain in visitation to the U.S. over the first three years. Visits to the U.S. from South Korea increased 60% by its third year in the VWP.¹⁹

KEY CHALLENGES

Despite the progress that has been made, the commission identified several challenges to expanding participation in VWP and increasing the number of countries that have travel security agreements with the U.S.

- 1. The VWP's refusal rate requirement is a barrier to expanding U.S. security relationships with foreign countries.** Very few countries can meet the VWP's stringent visa refusal requirement of 3% or less and foreign governments have virtually no control over visa refusal rates. Therefore, without reasonable certainty of meeting the visa refusal metric, very few countries are willing to invest the substantial resources and political capital needed to achieve the VWP's security requirements. In FY 2024, only three countries (Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates and Uruguay) had refusal rates below 3%. In FY 2023, no countries had visa refusal rates below 3%. The only countries currently in advanced VWP negotiations with the U.S.

are Cyprus and Bulgaria, which are primarily driven by being the only EU countries not in the VWP. With visa refusal rates standing in the way, the U.S. has very few countries left that it can partner with to strengthen travel security through the VWP.

2. Visa refusal rates are a poor indication of immigration risk compared to visa overstay data.

When Congress first authorized the VWP in 1986, some lawmakers argued that overstay data was the best way to measure the risk of whether foreign nationals from a certain country might illegally immigrate to the U.S. However, at the time, the U.S. government's overstay data was inaccurate and incomplete. As a result, Congress chose visa refusal rates as a qualifying factor for VWP because the data set was more accurate and viewed as proxy for assessing immigration risk.²⁰ Since that time, the accuracy of CBP's overstay data has dramatically improved for both biographic and biometric exit systems. Congress gave the Secretary of Homeland Security authority to waive the visa refusal rate requirement in place of an overstay rate requirement of 10% or less, but that authority is suspended until 97% of international air departures go through CBP's biometric exit system.

3. Sparse Federal funding to incentivize non-VWP countries to invest in security improvements.

Many countries do not have the financial resources to achieve all or even some of the technological and security enhancements of the VWP. Unfortunately, the DHS does not have dedicated funding to incentivize countries to make these investments or quicken the pace of implementation.



SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION: To expand the number of countries that have strong travel security partnerships with the U.S., Congress should enact legislation authorizing a Secure Travel Partnership (STP) program that provides certain travel facilitation benefits to countries that meet the VWP security requirements, have an overstay rate of less than 5% and a visa refusal rate of less than 12%.

TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE SECURE TRAVEL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM, COUNTRIES WOULD BE REQUIRED TO:

- Issue tamper-resistant, machine-readable visa documents
- Issue e-passports with electronic chips containing biometric data
- Use Certified mechanism to validate passports at each port of entry
- Establish Security Information Sharing Agreements, with implementation of Enhanced Border Security Partnership (EBSP)
- Screen foreign nationals against the INTERPOL database before issuing a visa or admitting them
- Provide INTERPOL with information on any lost/stolen passports or visas
- Establish a three-week repatriation agreement
- Achieve a DHS Secretary Security Determination

IMMIGRATION QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE SECURE TRAVEL PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES SHOULD INCLUDE:

- Not more than 12% refusal rate in previous two fiscal years
- Not more than 5% overstay rate in previous two fiscal years

Once a country meets these security and immigration requirements, the State Department and DHS could adjust elements of the B-1/B-2 application process for citizens of STP countries.

THE FACILITATION BENEFITS OF STP MEMBERSHIP COULD INCLUDE:

- For highly qualified first-time B-1/B-2 applicants, consular officers could waive in-person interviews and biometric collection at U.S. embassies and instead have CBP conduct interviews and collect biometrics upon arrival at U.S. airports of entry.
- Approved interview-waiver applicants could receive B-1/B-2 visas with up to 10 years of validity or less as determined by the State Department and DHS. Approved interview waiver applicants could also be permitted to use ESTA for up to a two-year period, rather than receiving the full term of B-1/B-2 validity for that country.



- Countries with STP status could receive full VWP status after five years, provided security requirements remain fully implemented and visa overstays remain below 5%.

Implementing this recommendation would strengthen U.S. national security by incentivizing more countries to share intelligence and prohibit the movement of terrorists, criminals and other bad actors. Under this proposal, 24 countries would qualify to participate in the STP based on their FY 2023 visa refusal and overstay rates—compared to just three countries that meet the refusal rate requirement for VWP. These countries include strong allies and travel-trade partners of the U.S., such as India, Brazil, Bulgaria, Argentina, Uruguay, and the United Arab Emirates.



VISITOR VISA PROCESSING AND POLICY: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the State Department faced significant backlogs in NIV applications and interview appointments.²¹

While some progress has been made, significant challenges persist today. In some of the top countries for inbound travel to the U.S., visitor visa applicants still face extremely long wait times for in-person interviews that can stretch for several months or more than a year. For example, interview wait times in Mumbai, India, were 444 days as of January 10, 2025.²²

PROGRESS TO REDUCE WAIT TIMES AND INCREASE ISSUANCE

The State Department has made some progress to lower interview wait times and increase issuance of visitor visas. For example, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, appointment wait times were 31 days as of January 10, 2025, down from more than 300 days in January 2023.²³ In October 2024, the State Department announced that it had issued more than 11.5 million visas in FY 2024, including 8.5 million visitor visas, which is more than any year since 2015.

A major reason for the reduction in interview wait times and increased NIV issuance is the interview waiver authority

that was implemented by the State Department and DHS. This policy enhances national security by allowing the State Department to focus more resources on vetting first-time and potentially ineligible NIV applicants, while providing consular officers the discretion to waive interviews for low-risk applicants. According to the State Department, approximately 40 percent of NIV applicants who received a visa did not require an interview in 2023.²⁴ However, this also suggests that the State Department’s interview-based processing capacity is currently much lower compared to previous years where it issued similar numbers of NIVs, such as 2015, without the interview waiver authority.²⁵

KEY CHALLENGES

The State Department faces several challenges to improving security, efficiency and technology for visitor visa processing:

1. Visa processing capacity is constrained by requirements for in-person interviews and collection of biometrics.

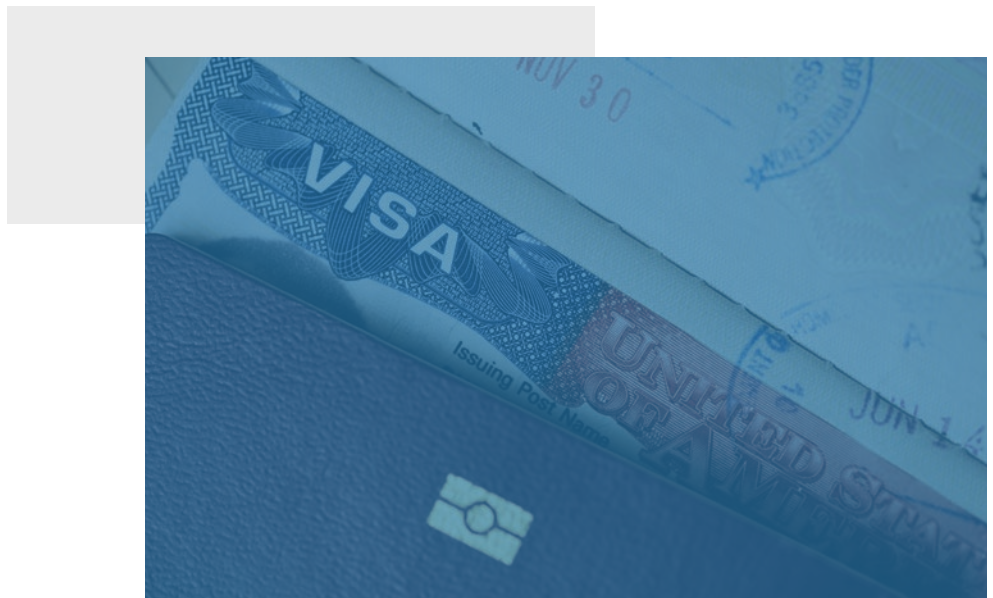
The statutory requirements for in-person interviews with consular officers and collection of biometrics create bureaucratic bottle necks that can lead to appointment wait times exceeding 200 days. These one-size-fits-all vetting policies hinder security, efficiency, and innovations in visa processing because consular officers’ time and resources are spent on low-risk applicants — rather than high-risk or first-time unknown applicants. The State Department and DHS have used emergency authority to waive in-person interviews and biometric collection for low-risk NIV applicants who have recently held an NIV in a different category (except B visas), have no immigration or criminal violations and have passed national security vetting. However, the current interview waiver authority is limited and temporary and could be revoked at any time. If this were to happen, it would dramatically increase interview wait times and reduce NIV issuance.

2. The State Department’s staffing model constrains visa processing capacity.

Inadequate staffing levels for consular sections is a major impediment to expanding nonimmigrant visa processing capacity worldwide. Because NIV interviews are conducted by entry-level foreign service officers on short-term assignments, it is difficult for the State Department to



build expertise in visa adjudication services. Further, it can be difficult for the State Department to create long-term hiring and staffing plans to meet visa processing demand with a temporary workforce that is hired based on staffing needs in other areas of the foreign service. As a result, staffing for visa adjudication is constantly turning over and can fluctuate based on the availability of federal funding, State Department policy or staffing needs across the entire foreign service. While the Consular Fellows Program was created to address some of these challenges, Consular Fellows also perform visa adjudication services on temporary assignments and often use the program as a stepping stone to the foreign service.



3. Remote videoconference interviews are prohibited.

Under current law, the State Department does not have the authority to conduct remote videoconference interviews for NIV applicants, which could create a more seamless application process and expand visa processing capacity. However, even if the State Department had the authority to conduct remote videoconference interviews, applicants would still need to visit an embassy or consulate to provide their biometrics because the Department does not have the technology or procedures to collect biometrics outside an embassy or consulate.

- 4. The State Department does not use automated risk assessment tools to optimize workflow.** Utilizing automated risk assessment tools can enhance risk assessment by focusing resources on unknown or potentially high-risk applicants and streamlining operations in the review of NIV applications. However, these tools are not being utilized by the State Department, the DHS vetting center or other agencies involved in NIV application reviews.
- 5. Consular Affairs cannot utilize certain funds collected from passport and visa processing fees, which constrains funding for consular staffing, technology and infrastructure upgrades.** Due to these funding constraints, Consular Affairs is hesitant to increase hiring and staffing simply to account for temporary spikes in visa processing demand and lacks permanent contingency plans to surge staffing when backlogs arise. Inadequate funding also leads to infrastructure constraints at U.S. consulates and embassies, such as limited windows for NIV interviews at consular posts that constrain visa processing capacity. The high costs of constructing or modernizing facilities abroad limits expansion of physical infrastructure to process visas.
- 6. Large global events, conventions, meetings and tours taking place in the U.S. can spike demand for B-1/B-2 visas or increase requests for expedited appointments and adjudication.** The mega-decade of global events hosted in the U.S. will increase demand for B-1/B-2 visas and other NIV categories. For example, the 2026 FIFA World Cup is expected to attract more than six million visitors to the U.S. According to FIFA, eight of the top 15 countries that have traveled to attend previous World Cups are non-VWP countries that will need visitor visas to attend in the U.S. The increases in applications for major global events are predictable if consular posts have the right information from partners and can appropriately respond with increased consular staffing or expanded hours of operation. But the State Department currently takes an ad hoc approach to adjusting NIV services for large global events hosted in the U.S.



Global events can spike demand for B-1/B-2 visas.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The commission makes the following recommendations to address these problems:

RECOMMENDATION: Congress should enact legislation to create a new National Vetting Service (NVS) – separate from the foreign service – that would be solely dedicated to visa adjudication.

The NVS would be a workforce that is self-funded through visa fees, receives standard consular officer training and flexible assignments so they can be deployed based on operational needs of Consular Affairs. Congress may consider making the NVS part of DHS, rather than the State Department, since visa vetting is not inherently a diplomatic function. Creating a permanent workforce to adjudicate visas would build more tenured expertise within the State Department for conducting NIV interviews and vetting applicants. The NVS would also enable the State Department or DHS to build a more stable workforce for visa adjudication that could be augmented by the temporary assignment of entry-level foreign service officers and consular fellows. The NVS could be assigned to posts based on foreign language skills, visa processing demand and negotiations with host governments on the size of the U.S. mission. The NVS workforce could be authorized to rotate on assignment to other roles in federal agencies that support visa adjudication, such as CBP or U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

- **Recommendation: Congress should enact legislation that permanently authorizes the State Department and DHS to waive in-person interviews for low-risk applicants.** This would enhance national security by allowing consular officers to focus more resources on unknown applicants or those that present a security or immigration risk. The legislation should be flexible to allow, but not require, the State Department and DHS to waive interviews for individuals who are: previous NIV holders applying for a new NIV in a different category; certain ESTA travelers

who have recently visited the U.S. and are applying for an NIV; accredited persons applying for an NIV to participate in a large global event hosted in the U.S.; and renewal applicants whose previous NIV expired not more than 48 months prior to their application that have previously traveled to the U.S., have no immigration or criminal violations, have not been previously refused an NIV and have not been flagged as a national security risk.

- **Recommendation: To prepare for major sports and global events hosted in the U.S., Congress should enact legislation authorizing the State Department and DHS to extend B-1/B-2 visa validity for vetted, lawful visa holders.** The State Department and DHS should be authorized to extend B-1/B-2 visa validity by up to two years for lawful visa holders who have never been refused a visa, have previously visited the U.S., left the country on time, have no immigration or criminal violations and no flags for national security reasons. This would reduce NIV interview backlogs and provide additional capacity to adjudicate first-time visitor visa applicants.
- **Recommendation: Congress should authorize and fund the State Department, in partnership with DHS, to develop and pilot risk-informed, rules-based vetting of NIV applicants.** Applicants may be flagged for additional review — or for interview waiver — based on a review and analysis of the vetting results. By enhancing the ability to do person by person risk assessments, the State Department can more effectively determine which applicants are best suited for interview waivers — rather than designating everyone in a specific category as potentially eligible for an interview waiver.
- **Recommendation: Congress should enact legislation to authorize the State Department to conduct remote video conference and in-person interviews.** Rather than requiring first-time NIV applicants to schedule in-person interviews at consular posts, the State Department could pilot and expand the use of videoconferencing technology to allow interviews with consular officers to be conducted remotely. For example, consular officers stationed at posts with low demand for visas could remotely interview NIV applicants using approved videoconferencing technology. Congress should also authorize and fund the State Department to conduct in-person interviews and biometric collection outside an embassy or consulate



during periods of high demand. The State Department could use locations outside the embassy or consulate to conduct group interviews or biometric collection for participants in large sporting events hosted in the U.S., tour groups, conferences or business travelers who have applied for NIVs.



- **Recommendation: The State Department should pilot and then expand the use of remote biometric capture to reduce appointment backlogs at consular posts.** The State Department should consider where it could either work with the host government or approved contractors to collect biometrics outside an embassy or consulate. Other U.S. government agencies (e.g. USCIS) utilize approved contractors to capture biometrics at applicant-convenient locations and the State Department should consider a similar approach. Remote biometric capture could also be used by NIV applicants that were interviewed by videoconference.
- **Recommendation: Congress should enact legislation to ensure visa and passport fees are immediately available to Consular Affairs.** The funds should be available to Consular Affairs for managing the visa process, including activities to reduce interview wait times, making needed technological or infrastructure upgrades, hiring more personnel or reassigning existing staff to conduct visa adjudications and supporting contracts.
- **Recommendation: Congress should enact legislation directing the State Department to develop and execute contingency plans to surge staffing for NIV interviews and adjudication at posts where average B-1/B-2 interview wait times consistently exceed 90 days.** The legislation should direct the State Department to designate staff that will be available for temporary relocation or remote processing when significant interview backlogs occur.
- **Recommendation: Congress should enact legislation authorizing the State Department, DHS and the Department of Commerce (DOC) to create a permanent framework for identifying large international events that require efficient B-1/B-2 visa processing or expedited appointments for credentialed individuals.** Partnerships between the State Department, DHS, DOC and the private sector can create efficient pathways for NIV applicants attending large international sporting events,

conventions, meetings or tours in the U.S. For example, the U.S. Commercial Service has offices around the U.S. which can identify large international events in their region that require visa services. Working with Commercial Service Officers and Consular Affairs stationed abroad, appointment blocks and expedited B-1/B-2 processing can be offered to applicants attending these events. Similarly, the State Department and DHS should be authorized to create an electronic visa system, waive in-person interviews and provide expedited appointments for credentialed participants in large sporting events, such as the Olympics and World Cup. The State Department could also reserve weeks of appointment blocks for B-1/B-2 applicants attending events such as the Consumer Electronic Show, F1, Olympics, or the World Cup.

- **Recommendation: Congress should enact legislation to authorize Consular Affairs to charge fees for expedited B-1/B-2 applications and deposit the funds in the Consular and Border Security Programs account to cover the costs of visa processing.**

Endnotes for Strengthening Visitor Visa Policy

¹ U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Worldwide NIV Workload by Visa Category FY 2023.” <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/Non-Immigrant-Statistics/NIVWorkload/FY2023%20NIVWorkloadbyVisaCategory.pdf>

² U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “U.S. Nonimmigrant Admissions: 2023,” August 2024. https://ohss.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/2024_0906_ohss_nonimmigrant_fy2023_0.pdf

³ U.S. Travel Association, “A Stealth Form of Diplomacy: Travel as a Critical Tool to Form Global Relationships,” May 11, 2022. <https://www.ustravel.org/news/stealth-form-diplomacy-travel-critical-tool-form-global-relationships>

⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration, “NTTO Releases International Travel Statistics for 2023,” May 8, 2024. <https://www.trade.gov/feature-article/ntto-releases-international-travel-statistics-2023>

⁵ U.S. Travel Association, “The State of the Travel Industry,” April 2023. https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/answersheet_2023_final.pdf

⁶ U.S. Travel Association, “A Stealth Form of Diplomacy: Travel as a Critical Tool to Form Global Relationships,” May 11, 2022. <https://www.ustravel.org/news/stealth-form-diplomacy-travel-critical-tool-form-global-relationships>

⁷ U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “Entry/Exit Overstay Report: Fiscal Year 2023 Report to Congress,” October 2024. https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/24_1011_CBP-Entry-Exit-Overstay-Report-FY23-Data.pdf; U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Visa Ineligibilities (by Grounds for Refusal Under the Immigration and Nationality Act) Fiscal Year 2023.” https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2023AnnualReport/FY2023_AR_TableXIX.pdf

⁸ U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Worldwide NIV Workload by Visa Category FY 2023.” <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/Non-Immigrant-Statistics/NIVWorkload/FY2023%20NIVWorkloadbyVisaCategory.pdf>

- ⁹ U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Visa Ineligibilities (by Grounds for Refusal Under the Immigration and Nationality Act) Fiscal Year 2023.” https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2023AnnualReport/FY2023_AR_TableXIX.pdf
- ¹⁰ U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Worldwide NIV Workload by Visa Category FY 2023.” <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/Non-Immigrant-Statistics/NIVWorkload/FY2023%20NIVWorkloadbyVisaCategory.pdf>
- ¹¹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, “The Macroeconomic Impacts of the 9/11 Attack: Evidence from Real-Time Forecasting,” August 2009. https://ohss.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-12/Macroeconomic%2520impact%25209_11%25202009.pdf
- ¹² U.S. Travel Association, “Stunning New Research Ranks United States Nearly Dead Last in Competition for Global Travelers,” January 11, 2024. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/stunning-new-research-ranks-united-states-nearly-dead-last-competition-global-travelers>; National Foreign Trade Council, “Visa Backlog Costs U.S. Exporters More than \$30 Billion Since 2002, New Study Finds,” June 2, 2024. <https://www.nftc.org/visa-backlog-costs-u-s-exporters-more-than-30-billion-since-2002-new-study-finds/>
- ¹³ Oxford Economics, “The Economic Impact of the Coronavirus Due to Travel Losses: 2020 Analysis,” March 16, 2020. https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/media_root/document/Coronavirus_2020_Impacts_WEB.pdf; U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, “The Macroeconomic Impacts of the 9/11 Attack: Evidence from Real-Time Forecasting,” August 2009. https://ohss.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-12/Macroeconomic%2520impact%25209_11%25202009.pdf
- ¹⁴ National Foreign Trade Council, “Visa Backlog Costs U.S. Exporters More than \$30 Billion Since 2002, New Study Finds,” June 2, 2024. <https://www.nftc.org/visa-backlog-costs-u-s-exporters-more-than-30-billion-since-2002-new-study-finds/>
- ¹⁵ Tourism Economics, “U.S. Travel Association Policy Priorities: Quantitative Research,” December 2023. <https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/2023-11-te-oxford-us-travel-policy-priorities.pdf>
- ¹⁶ 8 U.S. Code § 1187
- ¹⁷ P.L. 114–113
- ¹⁸ The Register, “UK signs deal to share police biometric database with US border guards,” July 4, 2022. https://www.theregister.com/2022/07/04/uk_us_border_biometric_data/
- ¹⁹ Tourism Economics, “U.S. Travel Association Policy Priorities: Quantitative Research,” December 2023. <https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/2023-11-te-oxford-us-travel-policy-priorities.pdf>
- ²⁰ U.S. Congress, House Committee on the Judiciary, Visa Waiver Permanent Program Act, report together with additional views to accompany H.R. 3767, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., H.Rept. 106-564 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000), p. 32.
- ²¹ New York Times, “A Visa Backlog Abroad is Taking a Toll Inside the U.S., Too,” April 13, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/13/travel/visa-mexico-brazil-colombia-india.html>
- ²² U.S. Department of State, “Visa Appointment Wait Times,” January 10, 2025. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/wait-times.html>
- ²³ U.S. Department of State, “Visa Appointment Wait Times,” January 10, 2025. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/wait-times.html>
- ²⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Worldwide Visa Operations: Update,” January 2, 2024. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/worldwide-visa-operations-update.html>
- ²⁵ U.S. Department of State, “Worldwide Visa Operations: Update,” January 2, 2024. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/worldwide-visa-operations-update.html>

Commission on Seamless and Secure Travel

THE COMMISSION ON SEAMLESS AND SECURE TRAVEL

The [Commission on Seamless and Secure Travel](#) was launched in January 2024. The commission aims to build a vision and recommend policies to increase U.S. competitiveness within the travel industry, improve government focus and coordination on travel issues, and facilitate growth.

Since its founding, the commission has engaged with federal agencies, industry partners at airports in the United States, and other countries during site visits to learn more about best practices, cutting-edge technologies, pain points and opportunities to improve and grow travel.



COMMISSION MEMBERS

CHAIR



Kevin McAleenan

Former Acting Secretary of Homeland Security,
Former Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection

MEMBERS



Shawn Kinder

Global Corporate Development &
Strategy Director, Ferrovial Airports



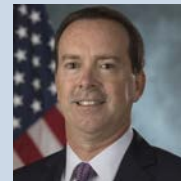
John Pistole

Former Deputy Director of the FBI,
Former Administrator, Transportation
Security Administration



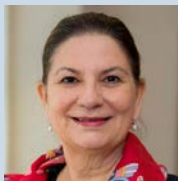
Patty Cogswell

Former Deputy Administrator,
Transportation Security Administration



John Sanders

Former Acting Commissioner & Chief Operating
Officer, U.S. Customs & Border Protection; Former
Assistant Administrator, Chief Technology Officer,
Transportation Security Administration



Martha Bárcena Coqui

Former Mexican Ambassador
to the United States



Marlon R. Smith

Managing Director of Public Infrastructure
& Communications, JLC Infrastructure

COMMISSION MEMBERS



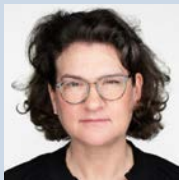
Jeff Bleich

Former American Ambassador
to Australia



Michael Huerta

Former Administrator, Federal Aviation
Administration



Lucy Chadwick

Former Director General, International,
Security & Environment Group, U.K.
Department for Transport



Seth Stodder

Former Assistant Secretary for Borders,
Immigration & Trade Policy, U.S. Department
of Homeland Security



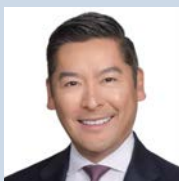
Stewart Baker

Former General Counsel, National Security Agency;
Former Assistant Secretary for Policy,
U.S. Department of Homeland Security



John Holland Kaye

Former CEO of
Heathrow Airport



Brent Tasugi

Managing Director - Transportation
& Logistics, I Squared Capital



Hon. John Katko

Former Ranking Member, Committee
on Homeland Security, U.S. House
of Representatives

COMMISSION ON
SEAMLESS & SECURE
TRAVEL

U.S. TRAVEL
ASSOCIATION*

ShowcaseAmericanTravel.org

