NSW Government Travel Operational Guidelines

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview
The Travel Operational Guidelines (Guidelines) cover all official air and surface travel by public officials using public money. FCM Travel Solutions Pty Ltd (FCM) is the NSW Government’s approved supplier under Contract 1008 Travel Management Services. It is mandatory to book official travel with FCM under Contract 1008.

1.2 Definitions
“Domestic” means any destination within Australia. Please note Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island are to be treated as domestic travel for approval purposes.

“Overseas or international” means any destination outside of Australia including but not limited to New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

"Official travel" means where a public sector organisation or service responsible to a Minister uses public monies to pay for the air or surface travel of a public official or any other person.

“Public official” means an officer or employee of a public sector organisation or service reporting to a Minister, or any other person remunerated by and performing under the direction or auspices of such an organisation or service.

1.3 Scope/Applicability
This document outlines factors that should be addressed in the management of an agency’s travel. It is strongly recommended these Guidelines be observed by all public service departments, other public sector organisations, and services reporting to a Minister. The Guidelines should be adopted by State Owned Corporations (SOCs) and Public Trading Enterprises (PTEs) as they contains sound guidance. It is also recommended the Guidelines serve as a basis for eligible customers to follow. Agencies may adopt the Guidelines in whole or in part when forming their own agency-specific travel governance. In some instances discretion is afforded within the Guidelines to accommodate the specific business needs of an agency.

These Guidelines do not cover individuals or employees of organisations who provide services under contract to a public sector organisation or service unless specified by an agency. Where necessary, travel provisions in respect of such contract personnel should be set out in the relevant conditions of contract.
1.4 Context
These Guidelines support the NSW Government Travel and Transport Policy (the Policy), which is a three tiered policy framework that encompasses whole of government policy, these Guidelines, and subsequent agency level policies and procedures to enable the delivery of whole of government benefits in the strategic management of travel.

1.5 Responsibilities
All staff will ensure their actions reflect the following:

- **Accountability** – Travellers, travel bookers and managers with decision-making authority over travel are responsible for their decisions and actions. If required they should appropriately account for these decisions and actions.

- **Transparency** – Travel and travel decision-making processes are recorded, open and transparent so that decision making and usage stands up to scrutiny.

- **Integrity** – Decisions made regarding travel are made honestly and objectively, in line with the strategic objectives and operational priorities of the government and consistent with codes of conduct.

- **Leadership** – Government sets an example for business and the general public through the operational, environmental, safety, innovation and financial aspects of the management of travel. Managers across government are to set an example for staff through their decisions and actions and be role models for achieving government objectives.

1.5.1 NSW Procurement Board
- Responsible for developing, implementing and maintaining the Policy.
- Overview of travel related decisions e.g. procurement.

1.5.2 Procurement Leadership Group
- Oversee and approve travel related decisions relating to procurement arrangements and improvements identified by agencies.
- Responsible for developing, implementing and maintaining these Guidelines.

1.5.3 NSW Procurement
- Operational responsibility for the Policy and these Guidelines.

1.5.4 Travel Category Management Working Group
- Guide development and changes to these Guidelines.

1.5.5 Agency Head
- Ensure staff, consultants, contractors, outsourced service providers or any other person remunerated by and performing under the direction or auspices of their agency are aware of the Policy and these Guidelines.
2 Travel Bookings and Private Travel

2.1 Travel bookings

All travel bookings including air, accommodation and car hire must be made through FCM. FCM provides travel management services through a dedicated booking team via telephone, email and an online booking tool. Use of the approved supplier’s online booking tool is highly recommended to reduce transaction costs and increase efficiency.

2.2 Private travel

C1008 must not be used to book private travel, whether for public officials or any other person. There may be exceptional circumstances where private travel occurs as an adjunct to official travel by a public official (e.g. where a period of private leave is approved as set out in this Policy) or private travel by another person (such as a spouse) in conjunction with travel by public officials. Circumstances such as these are rare and are not to be encouraged.

If it is appropriate and necessary to arrange private travel as an addition to official travel, public officials may choose to use the services of the approved supplier under C1008 in a private capacity subject to conditions. In such cases, it is the responsibility of the public official to ensure that:

a) “NSW Government rates” under C1008 are not applied to the private travel
b) the private travel is paid for separately at the time of the booking from the public official’s private accounts, and
c) The private booking is made at the same time as the booking for official travel although the approved supplier’s NSWG dedicated team will not facilitate the private travel booking. Public officials will be transferred to a separate team to facilitate the private travel portion of the booking.

A government-issued credit card or other account must not be used to make a private travel booking in any circumstance even if it is intended that reimbursement will be made by the public official at a later date.

2.3 Private leave

Requests to take private leave during overseas trips, or extending private trips for official purposes, should not be encouraged. Each application should be considered on its merits via written submission to the portfolio Minister for consideration.
2.4 Minimising Travel
Options of communicating over long distances should always be explored prior to considering travel. Technologies such as teleconferencing and video conferencing are suitable alternatives.

3 Travel Approval and Records

3.1 Approval for official travel
Approval must be given prior to any official travel being undertaken.

3.1.1 Approval for official travel within Australia
Official travel within Australia, including air charter, must be approved by the Agency head or the person in charge of any other public sector organisation or service reporting to a Minister, or by a delegate exercising an appropriate delegation to cover the expenditure proposed. For the purpose of clarity, Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island are to be treated as domestic travel for approval purposes.

Ministers may approve of Agency heads or the person in charge of any other public sector organisation or service reporting to a Minister, approving their own official travel within Australia, subject to any conditions set by individual Ministers.

If there is any doubt about whether this provision applies to a public official, the Minister responsible should be consulted.

3.1.2 Approval for official travel overseas
Written approval is to be given prior to any official overseas travel being undertaken.

The portfolio Minister must approve all official overseas travel, including air charters, by public officials, including to New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. Subject to the Premier’s agreement, Ministers may delegate this function to Agency heads and the person in charge of any other public sector organisation or service reporting to the Minister.

Overseas travel as part of an approved Public Service Commission Leadership Academy activity can be approved by the Public Service Commissioner under delegation from the Premier.

Ministers should exercise the strictest economy in approving this travel and ensure that it can be funded within the budget allocation for the organisation concerned. Significant benefits to the Minister’s own administration and/or the State should be demonstrated before approval is given. Ministers are asked to maintain close scrutiny of official travel overseas in their portfolios.

Essential information to be provided to the approver in support of the proposed overseas
travel includes the objectives, scope and expected benefits of the trip, estimated cost and the destinations and organisations being visited.

3.2 **Documentation supporting official travel including travel diary**

Public officials are responsible for ensuring that they maintain all documentation with regards to the travel request, travel approval and all supporting documentation for travel expenses. This documentation must be in accordance with the requirements of the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) in regards to travel. For example, the ATO requires officers to keep a travel diary for official domestic and international travel beyond five consecutive nights for Fringe Benefits Tax substantiation requirements. Information is available from the ATO website.

3.3 **Records**

Public sector organisations or services within a Minister’s portfolio should retain a centralised record of official overseas travel. Each occasion of overseas travel, its date and duration, the officer(s) (and any companions) travelling, purpose, the cost and funding source, need to be justified and recorded by agencies for audit purposes. Any associated private leave approved by a Minister for a public official should be recorded.

4 **Class and Standard of Travel**

4.1 **Class of travel**

Economy class travel is to be used for all official travel within Australia and overseas with the following exceptions:

- Agency heads, senior executives, statutory officers and Chairpersons of NSW Government boards and committees may fly premium economy or business class to Western Australia, Northern Territory and overseas.
- An official travelling with a Minister may, if required, travel in the same class.
- An official travelling with a Government delegation may, with approval of the Agency head, travel in the same class as other delegates.
- Ministers may waive the requirement to fly economy class for medical reasons.

Public officials should request standard accommodation room types. Where available, accommodation room rates should be in line with the ATO’s reasonable amounts for overseas travel expenses and NSW Treasury’s circular for Meal, Travelling and other Allowances.

Agencies should book standard vehicle types when hiring cars unless special circumstances apply e.g. a small van is required to transport multiple people.
4.2 Domestic airfares

For all official travel, the lowest logical fare of the day must be used for all domestic flights. This is the cheapest fare available that meets the agency traveller's logistical needs.

Public officials cannot specify a desired airline they wish to use. They can only nominate their destination and desired date and time of departure to the approved supplier when booking air travel. The approved supplier will book a flight in accordance with the traveller’s specified needs, and can search 30 minutes either side of the specified time of departure for the cheapest fare.

To reduce cost, restrictive fares are to be sought where possible. If travellers know their plans aren't going to change, the use of restricted airfares for both the inbound and outbound flights should be sought. If it is likely that travellers will have to change their return flight, they should be booking a restricted fare for the outbound leg and flexible ticket for the return leg.

4.3 International airfares

Rates have been negotiated with various airlines which can only be accessed by booking air travel through the approved supplier. The cheapest of these rates is to be used where available. Choice of airline is not permitted unless a cheaper alternative is found. Travel cannot be undertaken with an airline listed as unsafe by the consultancy firm Flight Safe Limited. Where there is no alternative to an airline listed as unsafe, special permission must be sought from the portfolio Minister to use it. NSW Government’s appointed supplier under Contract 1008 Travel Management Services can assist with the processing of visas where they are required for international travel.

4.4 Airline credits (unused tickets)

The NSW Government approved supplier has in place systems to capture and manage credits arising from changes to restrictive airfares to reduce any possible wastage. Travellers are strongly encouraged to utilise credits where possible. These credits can be viewed and utilised via the online booking tool. The approved supplier also provides a report of unused credits on a monthly basis.

5 Insurance

5.1 Personal accident cover

The Treasury Managed Fund (TMF) is the NSW Government's self-insurance scheme and provides cover for loss, damage or compensation to NSW Government Agencies for the types of loss or damage set out in the TMF Statement of Cover. This includes personal accident cover for overseas official travel for NSW parliamentarians, members of the judiciary, members and directors of boards, commissions and other like groups within a
5.2 Overseas travel emergency assistance

Insurance & Care NSW (icare) has contracted Dynamiq, an overseas travel and emergency services provider, to assist staff on official overseas travel with medical or security emergencies in an unforeseen situation. Dynamiq has doctors available to assist in most capital cities throughout the world and can arrange both pre-travel advice and 24 hour emergency medical assistance including treatment and medical evacuations where necessary. It will also arrange for evacuation where civil security is threatened.

5.3 Car hire insurance

NSW Government’s approved car hire suppliers under Contract QGCP0681 are Avis, Hertz and Budget. NSW Government’s rates with these approved suppliers include insurance cover for accident damage to the rental vehicle and third party property. Agencies can pay an additional daily fee to reduce the excess payable in the event of a motor vehicle accident where the public official is the at fault driver. Please refer to the car hire contract user guide for further information.

If agencies are hiring cars from unapproved suppliers, they will need to check if the rate quoted includes insurance cover. If the rate doesn’t include insurance cover then they will be required to purchase third-party personal injury and comprehensive motor vehicle insurance.

6 Payment of Travel

6.1 Form of payment

The American Express Business Travel Account under contract 1009 Virtual Travel Card Payment is the mandated form of payment for travel bookings.

Utilising airline credits where possible for payment of air travel is strongly encouraged.

The travel industry requires payment in advance at point of sale for air travel. This is in line with the following Treasury policies:

- NSW Treasury Paper TPP 05-01 Credit Card Use – Best Practice Guide, and
- NSW Treasurer’s Direction 180.05 regarding payment in advance (PDF, 2.99MB).

A government-issued credit card or other account must not be used to make a private travel booking in any circumstance even if it is intended that reimbursement will be made by the public official at a later date.
6.2 Payment of accommodation travel expenses

Agencies are strongly encouraged to implement the payment or repayments of actual travel expenses rather than per diem payments) using the rates in the relevant industrial instrument relevant industrial instrument as an upper limit for repayments.

Benefits of paying actual expenses rather than per diems include:

- Lowering cost of the accommodation as in many cases the actual cost per night is less than paying the per diem rate.
- GST benefits – an input tax credit can be claimed on a hotel tax invoice but not on a per diem payment, therefore 10% benefit can be gained from paying accommodation actuals.
- Process saving – saving time as employees don’t have to claim money back.
- Duty of care - ability to identify traveller location at any given time according to the travel itinerary.
- Extensive travel reporting - full transparency of total travel costs.

6.3 Meal, travelling and other allowances

Claims for official travel expenses incurred by public officials should be forwarded to the officer who processes travel claims within one month. Travel expense claims should be supported by, for example, air tickets, boarding passes, receipts and approvals.

Information on meal, travelling and other allowances under the Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Award are adjusted annually. These can be accessed via the NSW Industrial Relations website. Information on domestic and overseas reasonable travelling allowances are issued annually through the Australian Taxation Office.

7 Loyalty Schemes and Upgrades

7.1 Offered upgrades

From time to time, travellers may be offered travel or accommodation upgrades during official travel within Australia or overseas. Employees should never seek or solicit an upgrade from a travel or accommodation provider in relation to official travel.

Where a travel or accommodation provider seeks to upgrade you for operational reasons, at no charge to you or your agency (for example, where an airline upgrades a traveller to business class because it has its overbooked economy class for that flight) you may accept the upgrade, but should record receipt of the upgrade in the Gifts and Benefits Register.
7.2 Airline Lounges
Agencies should decide whether to meet the cost of staff having membership of airline lounge facilities or similar services. Public officials may join and maintain membership of such lounges at their own expense irrespective of the nature and extent of their official travel.

7.3 Airline Loyalty Schemes
Public officials (including other people travelling at Government expense) may accept loyalty or frequent flyer points from any airline in respect of official travel with approval from the relevant Secretary or delegate. Benefits from airline, car or accommodation loyalty schemes or lounge memberships are not to influence travel decisions.

Where any airline loyalty points are accrued from official travel, these points must be used to pay for further official travel. Bookings for air travel using loyalty or frequent flyer points must be made through Contract 1008 Travel Management Services.

The lowest logical fare (i.e. the cheapest fare available meeting the traveller’s logistical needs) needs to be used for all domestic flights. Public officials can only specify destination, date and nominated time.

Airline loyalty points accrued from official travel must not be used for personal travel or for other personal benefits. Any outstanding points accrued from official travel must be sacrificed in writing by the membership holder to the airline(s) concerned when the public official’s employment is terminated or their appointment ends.

8 Travel Advice, Security and Protocol

8.1 Security and travel advice
Get the basics right. Officers travelling overseas should make sure their passport has at least six (6) months' validity from their planned date of return, and check that they have the right visas and vaccinations. Travellers should also register their travel plans with Smartraveller, in case of a serious emergency

Travellers should keep themselves aware of updated travel advice on the following websites:
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website: www.dfat.gov.au
8.2 Health

It is the official’s responsibility to obtain proper medical advice prior to undertaking any long distance or overseas travel.

It is recommended that public officials familiarise themselves with the Travel Health section of the DFAT website called Smart Traveller: http://smartraveller.gov.au/guide/all-travellers/health/Pages/default.aspx

8.3 Protocol

Correct protocol should be observed in connection with official visits overseas and relations with foreign governments. This information is available from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

8.4 Personnel Handbook

The NSW Personnel Handbook provides further guidance on travel within Australia and overseas. The Handbook is available on the Public Service Commission website.