



Policy Resolution 2022-04

Foreign Visitor Preclearance

A. **BACKGROUND**

1. The U.S. Department of Commerce estimates that 79.3 million foreign visitors entered the country during 2019. The vast majority of these travelers arrived in the United States by plane.
2. Tourism is a significant revenue source for western states and territories, many of which count international travelers as major contributors to state and local economies and look to international tourism to drive local employment.
3. As a result of utilizing technology such as Automated Passport Control and biometrics equipment, average wait times at airport passport and immigration processing areas have declined in recent years, but still frequently exceed 60 minutes.
4. Foreign visitor preclearance allows international travelers to be screened by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers prior to boarding an international flight. This preclearance allows passengers to bypass U.S. customs stations upon arrival at an American airport.
5. The Transportation Security Administration requires passenger and property screening at foreign preclearance airports to conform with U.S. aviation security screening standards.
6. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely altered social, economic, and political life around the world, including by requiring additional safety precautions and health screenings when traveling. These COVID-19 health screenings are distinct from the screenings conducted by CBP and, under current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, airlines are responsible for confirming a passenger's COVID-19 vaccination status, negative test results, and checking other related public health documentation.
7. Preclearance arrangements between the U.S. and Canada began in 1952. Since that time, CBP has established over 600 American law enforcement officers and agricultural specialists at sixteen preclearance airports in six countries: Ireland, Canada, Aruba, The Bahamas, Bermuda and United Arab Emirates. CBP also staffs a pre-inspection facility for passenger/vehicle ferry traffic to the U.S. in Victoria, Canada.
8. Despite announcements in 2015 and 2016 to possibly expand the preclearance program to 21 new airports in 18 countries, CBP has only concluded agreements with Stockholm, Sweden (signed November 4, 2016), Punta Cana, Dominican Republic (signed December 1, 2016), and Brussels, Belgium (signed September 28, 2020).

9. In 2020, CBP opened the preclearance application process to international airports for the first time since 2016 and announced that it was in the final stages of multi-year negotiations with Bogota, Colombia and Amsterdam, Netherlands, reinvigorating efforts to expand preclearance. It also announced plans to streamline the application process and accept new airports on a rolling basis.
10. CBP precleared more than 22 million passengers in 2019, representing over 16 percent of all commercial air travelers to the U.S.
11. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has supported preclearance as both a security imperative – enabling CBP to identify and stop potential terror threats before they reach U.S. soil – and a strong economic opportunity.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. In recognition of the economic and national security benefits provided by foreign visitor preclearance and its role in reducing excessive wait times, Western Governors support CBP's use of preclearance at American immigration and processing areas.
2. Western Governors support the efforts of DHS and CBP to increase the number of international airports and countries at which foreign visitor preclearance is used. Such expansion will streamline international travel and will further protect the safety and security of American citizens as well as international visitors.
3. Preclearance also allows smaller airports with few or no full-time CBP personnel to accept direct international flights from preclearance-approved foreign airports. Western Governors recognize the benefit this provides small or rural airports in accepting international travelers more efficiently.
4. In recognition of the benefits provided by foreign visitor preclearance, and in order to expand its use, DHS should work to complete the negotiation process with foreign countries and add new preclearance-approved international airports as soon as possible.
5. Additionally, DHS and CBP should work with western states and territories to help identify optimal international foreign visitor preclearance airports for future consideration and should work with western state and territory tourism directors and airport managers to expand international travel opportunities in western states and territories. DHS and CBP should also communicate effectively about additional requirements necessary for entry to western territories that may have local inspection agencies.
6. Western Governors recognize that the COVID-19 global pandemic has resulted in the need to expand safety protocols for all aspects of life, including travel. Western Governors expect CBP to be compliant with any guidance from the CDC related to COVID-19 safety precautions and expect that all individuals that undergo the foreign visitor preclearance process have complied with required health screenings pursuant to federal and state laws.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

This resolution will expire in December 2024. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.