SUBMISSION

Task Force on Service to Canadians

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CAC CANADIAN AIRPORTS COUNCIL   CONSEIL DES AÉROPORTS DU CANADA

CANADIAN AIRPORTS COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

Canadians' resilience over the past two years of public health restrictions has been nothing short of incredible, and stands as a testament to the hard work and resolve of so many who worked to find a path ahead despite unprecedented strains. But the transition back to a more normal rhythm of life has put enormous pressure on some government departments, sectors and services that were dramatically underused during the height of restrictions.

For the last several months, Canada's tourism and aviation sectors have been at the centre of many of those pressure points as Canadians' pent up appetite for travel has created surging demand on all manner of related services.

These challenges have important implications on communities across the country, where airports serve as the engines of local communities and as our local gateways to the world. However, they have brought into focus the needs of airports and related government departments and agencies and provided an opportunity to have thoughtful and substantive discussions on Canada's aviation ecosystem and its future.

To that end, the Canadian Airports Council — the voice of Canada's airports — is pleased to share a selection of clear, practical recommendations to inform the task force's work of solving government services-related challenges.

CONSIDERATIONS

Trusted Traveler

We strongly support the Trusted Traveler Pilot (TTP) program, which launched at Vancouver International Airport in August and will be expanded to Toronto Pearson Airport next month. This is a hugely positive development to improve pre-board screening wait times and congestion, which the sector has supported for some time. We deeply encourage the lessons learned from the pilot program be assessed as quickly as possible, so that a full program can be launched nation-wide in early 2023.

eTAs and Visas

Canada's Electronic Travel Authorizations (eTAs) have been an excellent, newer tool for allowing low-risk, known international travellers transiting through Canadian airports to be assessed in advance. The program offers streamlined client service to a group of travellers who are already highly mobile and shown to be low-risk and strengthens Canada's international relationships with countries seeking greater mobility for their citizens but may not be eligible for a visa exemption. Growing the program is a highly effective way to manage passenger volumes though efficient, digital processing to reduce on-site administrative burden of individual security checks and focusing officer screening on high-risk travellers. Expanding the eTA program also aligns with IRCC's transformation agenda by taking advantage of digital tools and reduce touchpoints, and to identify and facilitate low-risk travellers from any nationality. With the right investments in IT infrastructure, the backbone of the eTA program can be used to harmonize and streamline a number of Canadian-recognized global security agreements using this same tool. This would further reduce strain on front-line screening officers at airports by allowing those transiting through Canadian airports without visas to move quickly on-site thanks to advanced assessment online before departure.

NEXUS

Canada's NEXUS enrollment centres have been closed since March 2020, despite the fact they have been reopened in the United States since April 2022.

While designed as a joint program to expedite low-risk residents traveling across the Canada-U.S. border, NEXUS pass-holders are overwhelmingly Canadian (roughly 80 percent). Keeping friction between our two borders low

is essential to Canada's economy, given the U.S. remains the top destination for close to three quarters of our country's exports.

The current total backlog of NEXUS applications stands at well over 340,000. Resolving outstanding disagreements between our two governments on this program, reopening Canadian applications centres, and tackling the application backlog will surely reduce the day-to-day operational pressure on front-line Canadian border officials handling screening, and further encourage cross-border travel by Canadians business leaders who are seeking to generate opportunity in the United States.

Further, the NEXUS program is also a valuable tool in creating an eligible pool for a Canadian Trusted Traveler program for aviation security screening. It is also instrumental to the government's border modernization efforts and lays the groundwork for a risk based approach to border enforcement.

Border Modernization

Assessing and processing travelers at the border has largely been a labour intensive type of government service delivery. But digital tools — many of which have been adopted in other jurisdictions, or are partially adopted here in Canada — offer a clear opportunity to improve efficiency and experience for everyday Canadians encountering government services.

We strongly encourage the federal government to adopt biometrics to speed up the check-in process for travelers, and push for comprehensive use of other digital tools such as E-Gates which are currently only partially in use. This would dovetail with much-needed modernization of the Customs Act, adoption of facial confirmation technology, and implementing a "Goods to Declare/Nothing to Declare" exit process that aligns with the United Kingdom and European Union.

Designated Screening Authority (DSA)

Given the massive impact the pandemic has had on the aviation sector, we urge the federal government to make every effort to support the transition of CATSA from a Crown Corporation to the Designated Screening Authority (DSA) as per the *Security Screening Services Commercialization Act* on terms and conditions that set the new entity on a financially sustainable path for improved traveller experience.

Government Workforce & Service Standards

We strongly encourage the government to make firm commitments to ensure their workforce in the travel sector is staffed to meet demand and provide globally competitive service standards.
For pre-board security screening a standard of screening 90% of travellers in 10 minutes or less, measured hourly should be established with a border processing standard of 90% of travellers completed in 20 minutes.

Service standards for other processes like the processing of Restricted Area Identity Cards (RAIC) and Transportation Security Clearances should be implemented to ensure that staff in the sector can get to work faster.

Digitize process for student visas

International students are critical for Canada's economy, and for addressing the country's persistent labour shortage. But there are roadblocks making that harder than necessary for people coming to Canada for their education.

The ArriveCAN application has been launched and enhanced by the federal government, and its advanced customs declaration function has a direct and measurable impact on reducing wait-times at airports. In parallel, starting in August of this year, thousands of international students arriving in Canada have had to spend up to five hours processing paperwork upon arrival at Canadian airports.

The same rationale and technological approach used via the ArriveCAN application should be applied to streamline the arrival of international students, reducing the pressure on service staff at airports by having processing handled electronically, off the premises.

CONCLUSION

We are grateful for the opportunity to share these considerations and recommendations, and stand ready to assist the Task Force on Services to Canadians with any further input, counsel or information it may require to inform its work. On behalf of our sector, best wishes on the steps ahead.