MAKING THE BORDER BETTER FOR BUSES

A Submission to the Canada-US Beyond the Border Working Group (include MCPC logo)

Dear XXX,

We are writing on behalf of a bi-national coalition of bus and tourism associations to provide input into the February 4, 2011 declaration by President Obama and Prime Minister Harper on Beyond the Border: Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness.

The Motor Coach Passenger Coalition, led by Motor Coach Canada/Ontario Motor Coach Association and the American Bus Association was formed in order to address the challenges in cross-border motor coach travel. The MCPC is comprised of stakeholders from both Canada and the United States, including the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, the Frontier Duty Free Association, the Canadian Gaming Association, and the Student and Youth Travel Association, among others. These members are significant participants in the travel and tourism sectors in both countries, and as such, have a vested, collective interest in improving the border for motor coaches.

Canada and the US have enjoyed a strong tourism relationship for many years. When Canadians travel abroad, the US is their number one destination of choice. US leisure travel represents Canada’s largest inbound travel market, accounting for 63% of all inbound travellers in 2010. The majority of cross-border tourists travel by land, and bus travel accounts for a significant and rising portion of this travel. In fact, cross-border motor coach travel increased by more than 21 percent from 2009 to 2010.

**For Canadian Submission**: Motor coach travellers generate millions of dollars in economic activity, including spending on accommodation, meals, entertainment and souvenirs. In 2010, US overnight passengers entering Canada by motor coach contributed $267 million to total tourism revenue. In Canada over the last five years, American motor coach/bus passengers have contributed between $4.2 billion and $8.5 billion to the Canadian economy.

**For American Submission:** Motor coach travellers generate millions of dollars in economic activity, including spending on accommodation, meals, entertainment and souvenirs. In 2010, Canadian overnight passengers entering the US by motor coach contributed between $812 million and $1.5 billion to the American tourism sector. In the U.S. over the last five years, Canadian motor coach passengers have contributed between $4.3 billion and $8.1 billion to the American economy.

This sector makes an important contribution to the tourism industry; yet, motor coaches are confronted with an unpredictable environment when crossing the Canada-U.S. border. Inspection delays cost motor coach companies hundreds of thousands of dollars a year and result in the cancellation of trips and serious reputational damage for carriers and tour operators. When a motor coach cannot cross the border, or is significantly delayed, both countries lose out on the tourism dollars generated by motor coach passengers. For example, one Canadian motor coach company offered a trip from Southern Ontario to Buffalo to attend a dinner theatre. Delays at the border resulted in passengers being late to the show or missing out completely. As a result, the motor coach company stopped offering the trip, thus causing a loss of revenue for both the motor coach company and the Buffalo theatre.

*Barriers at the Border*

The Motor Coach Passenger Coalition has identified three operational areas where opportunity exists for policy reform in order to facilitate the crossing of a motor coach across the Canada-US border. While not all options will be appropriate for every carrier, a mix of reforms will ensure a faster, more predictable crossing for all carriers.

1. *Lack of consistent protocol regarding Advanced Passenger Information (API):* API enhances border security by providing officers with pre-arrival and departure manifest data on all passengers. This system is in place in passenger and commercial air travel between Canada and the US, as well as in commercial travel in all modalities. Currently, motor coaches may choose whether or not to submit advance passenger information prior to arrival at the border. However, there is no standard in the motor coach industry for the submission of this information and as such, motor coach carriers are subjected to random, unpredictable treatment at the border.
2. *Lack of consistent standards regarding goods declaration:* Unlike air travel, there is no consistent practice for goods declaration at the land border. Some ports may use the E311 Declaration Card, while others prefer the use of oral declarations. This varies not only by port, but often depends on the port director or even the individual border guard. This lack of consistency creates an uncertain environment for motor coach carries and can result in long delays at the border.
3. *Limited infrastructure to facilitate bus traffic across the border:* Many ports do not have in place infrastructure that allows buses to quickly and efficiently reach primary inspection facilities, resulting in long delays even prior to inspection.

*Recommendations*

Beyond the Border provides a window of opportunity to develop best practices in advance passenger information (API) collection and processing, standard practices for declarations, and lane/traffic management at ports. The MCPC believes that standard protocols, applied consistently at all ports at all times, are the first step to improving the border for motor coaches.

Implementing API would enhance border security by providing officers with pre-arrival and departure manifest data for a majority of passengers. It would also facilitate the movement of bus passengers across the border since all passenger data would be reviewed in advance of inspection at the border.

***Goal #1: Establish a common template for passenger information collection. Identify a range of feasible options for API submission.***

Implementing a consistent practice of goods declaration at the border would reduce uncertainty and delays at the border. Motor coach carriers could ensure that passengers prepare declaration information in advance if the same protocol is consistently applied at all ports at all times.

***Goal #2: Reach a consensus on the use of declarations by returning passengers.***

While not feasible at all ports, there are prospects for lane-use rationalization that would remove motor coaches from regular passenger lanes, speeding up passage for all port users.

***Goal #3: Explore options at various ports (with a focus on the most heavily trafficked border crossings) for dedicated bus lanes or bus traffic facilitation protocols during peak hours.***

We expect, as our coalition continues to work with both governments, that we will have additional recommendations and further refinements of these recommendations that will enhance and improve motor coach travel across the Canada-U.S. border. At the same time, we firmly believe that these recommendations are critical to meeting the objectives established by the President and Prime Minister to reduce, eliminate and prevent barriers to cross-border travel and to promote the safe, secure and efficient movement of people across the border.

We look forward to working with the Beyond the Border Working Group to create a detailed work plan for implementation in the near term. We would be pleased to meet with you at any time to discuss this our recommendations further.

Add MCPC Contact Information here.