



Staff Report

TO: City Council

FROM: Gus Romo, Deputy City Manager
Darron Usher, Principal Management Analyst

DATE: November 18, 2025

SUBJECT: Discussion of Proposed Changes to the Travel Expense and Reimbursement Policy

Description: Proposed Changes to the Travel Expense and Reimbursement Policy is being brought forward at the request of City Council.

Background and Analysis:

The *Travel Expense and Reimbursement Policy* establishes guidelines for authorizing, participating in, and reimbursing travel-related expenses incurred by elected officials, appointed officials, commissioners, employees, and volunteers while conducting official City business.

The City Council adopted a comprehensive policy update on April 2, 2024, following review by the Financial and Audit Committee and City staff. Minor language updates were made in January 2025 to clarify reimbursement procedures and committee travel provisions.

In response to Council direction and ongoing administrative review, staff has completed a reorganization and modernization of the policy to ensure alignment with current City practices, legislative requirements, and internal consistency. The proposed revisions provide additional clarity on authorization procedures, travel eligibility, and departmental coordination.

Several proposed changes were made to the proposed updated policy, highlighting key areas of the document. Attachment A is the current Travel Expense and Reimbursement Policy while Attachment B is the proposed updated. Below is a list of the changes proposed for the updated policy.

Proposed Changes

Scope

When multiple Council Members attend the same event, coordination shall occur to ensure balanced representation, avoid duplication of attendance, and maintain compliance with the Ralph M. Brown Act, including the limitation that no more than two Council Members may meet or deliberate on City business outside a properly noticed public meeting. This is especially important for “lobbying” events such as trips to the State or National capital or ICSC where developers are present. This is distinguished from “educational” events such as League of California Cities and National League of Cities conferences.

Section A – Required Forms

- **Subsection 1:** Forms must now be submitted at least two weeks before scheduled travel for destinations within California and at least one month before out-of-state travel.
- **Subsection 3:** Updates the point of contact for assistance with completing travel forms to the Human Resources Department.

Section B – Authorized Expenses

- Adds clarification on ground transportation (including taxis and rideshares) and expands allowable minor incidentals consistent with IRS definitions.
- Adds the following statutory language to ensure compliance with State law: “In accordance with Government Code Section 53232.2(f), all expenses that do not fall within this reimbursement policy must be approved by the City Council in a public meeting before the expense is incurred, except as provided in Government Code Section 53232.2(d).”
- References the Finance Department’s Policies and Procedures Manual for additional guidance on authorized expenses.

Section C – Unauthorized Expenses

- Adds language specifying that personal losses incurred while on City business are not reimbursable.

Section D – Lodging and Meals

- Adds a clear distance and timing standard for overnight lodging eligibility: “Only conferences located more than 40 miles from the City qualify for overnight lodging. Additionally, if a conference includes an evening event extending past 5:00 p.m., lodging shall be considered.”

- Adds an exemption allowing overnight accommodations for board or committee members when extended participation before or after meetings is required, subject to City Manager approval.

Section E – Transportation

- **Subsection 1 (General Rules):** Clarifies that employees may use paid time off (PTO) to extend a trip, provided prior approval is obtained and all employment conditions and MOUs are satisfied.
- **Subsection 3 (City and Personal Vehicles):** Adds language allowing non-City travelers to ride in a City vehicle under limited circumstances—when travel exceeds 75 miles and alternative transportation is impractical—with prior approval and personal insurance coverage by the driver.

Fiscal Impact:

The estimated cost of preparing this staff report is \$400.

Recommended Action:

Review the proposed policy and recommend any modifications and/or approve the updated Travel Expense and Reimbursement Policy.

Attachments:

- A. Current Adopted Travel Policy
- B. Proposed Draft and Updated Policy