

COUNCIL POLICY MANUAL

Policy 7.4.4 Council Travel and Conference

POLICY PURPOSE:

It is the purpose of this policy to define the City's expectations of Councilmembers who travel in connection with their work responsibilities and to clarify which expenses the City will fund and which expenses are considered the personal responsibility of the traveler.

POLICY STATEMENT:

The City expects to pay all reasonable costs incurred by Councilmembers traveling on approved City business; travel is a privilege and not a right conferred by election; Councilmembers are expected to use sound fiscal stewardship when expending public funds, and to travel in the most logical and least expensive manner possible.

I. Authorization.

- A. Mayor approval (or Vice Mayor for Mayor) is required in advance of any Councilmember travel that requires a commitment of City funds. Authorization shall be sought via submittal of a Travel Authorization Request (TAR).
- B. Any denied travel shall be accompanied by the reason(s) for denial, which shall be limited to the following:
 - 1. Requesting Councilmember has insufficient funds to pay for the intended travel. (See Section II, *Council Travel Budgets*, below.)
 - 2. The purpose of the intended travel does not meet one or more of the following:
 - a. Represent the City in a Council-approved/ratified Intergovernmental Relations role.
 - b. Advocate official City positions on key legislation, policies or programs.
 - c. Attend a conference or meeting arranged by an organization of which the City is a member.
 - d. Conduct presentations at a conference or workshop with the goal of improving the efficiency and performance of government in general.

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- e. Become better informed regarding key legislation, policies or programs impacting local government.
- 3. Failure to adhere to the provisions of this Council Policy 7.4.4. (e.g., not submitting expense forms or receipts on time).

II. Travel Budgets.

- A. City Council shall establish travel budgets as part of the annual City budget process. Consistent with Council Policy 7.3.4 “Roles and Responsibilities of Mayor, Vice Mayor and Councilmembers” subsection 1.O, the Mayor shall be allocated additional travel allowance.
- B. Travel budgets for Councilmembers up for election or due to leave office in any particular year shall be prorated to ensure adequate travel funds are available for incoming Councilmembers. The percentage of travel funds allocated to outgoing/incoming Councilmembers shall be determined by staff and based on ensuring the ability of whoever is in office at the time to attend the scheduled dates of the National League of Cities (NLC) Congressional City Conference; the NLC City Summit; and the League of California Cities’ (LCC) Annual Conference and Exposition. Any unspent funds allocated to an outgoing Councilmember shall be carried over to that district’s incoming Councilmember’s budget. The Mayor’s budget will be allocated similarly.
- C. Each Councilmember will be provided with an update of their travel budget, including balance and itemization of expenses, on a monthly basis by the Executive Assistant to Mayor and Council. The Mayor (who authorizes payment of expenses) will also receive the same information on each Councilmember’s expenditures. The Executive Assistant to Mayor and Council shall send a notification to any Councilmember whose budget is close to being overdrawn, copying the Mayor, the City Manager, and the Assistant City Manager.
- D. Councilmembers shall not exceed authorized amounts budgeted for travel. All travel expenses more than a Councilmember’s approved budget shall be reimbursed to the City by the Councilmember.
- E. Mid-year increases in travel budgets are discouraged and shall generally be considered only if Councilmembers can demonstrate that additional amounts are for unforeseen expenses that could not be anticipated prior to the initial adoption of the annual travel budget.

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- F. There are two ways for a Councilmember to increase their approved travel budget:
1. The adopted travel budget can be amended on a case-by-case basis during the fiscal year by approval of the City Council at a public meeting. Councilmembers desiring an increase in their annual travel budget shall provide an estimate of the additional amount prior to actual travel or expenditure of funds. Justifications for the budget increase shall also be included with the request for additional funds. All increases in travel budgets must be approved by a majority vote of the full Council prior to actual travel or expenditure of additional funds.
 2. Councilmembers may choose at any time to relinquish a portion of their unspent travel budget to another Councilmember. Any Councilmember wishing to do so shall notify the Executive Assistant to Council and the City Manager in writing. Otherwise, the remaining balance of unspent funds at the end of the fiscal year shall return to the General Fund.
- G. Any carryover of Council travel budgets from one fiscal year to the next shall require the approval of the City Council during the annual carryover process.

III. Travel Arrangements.

- A. Travel arrangements shall be made as far in advance as possible to obtain the best possible fares and rates. Registration for conferences and training shall be made far enough in advance to take advantage of early (discounted) fees, and to avoid late registration fees. If travel arrangements must be canceled for any reason, the person who made the arrangements shall cancel them in sufficient time to prevent the City from incurring unnecessary costs when possible.
- B. Unless a Councilmember opts to book their own travel, staff shall make arrangements for City Council travel including registrations, transportation and lodging. Staff shall prepare a travel information packet for each Councilmember traveling to any of the main annual conferences: the National League of Cities (NLC) spring and fall conferences, the League of California Cities (LCC) annual fall conference, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) winter and summer conferences.

IV. Transportation.

- A. Travelers shall use whatever mode of transportation is the most logical and least expensive. If a Councilmember elects to use a mode of transportation other than the most logical and least expensive, the City shall pay only the cost of the most logical and least expensive mode.

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- B. Air Travel. Councilmembers shall not limit their air travel options by specifying an airline. The airline offering the lowest fare for a logical route shall be selected.
- C. Use of Private Vehicles. Councilmembers shall be compensated for the use of their private vehicles for approved business travel at the current Internal Revenue Service (IRS) standard mileage rate, if it is the most logical and least expensive method of transportation. The City shall pay all expenses, such as bridge tolls and parking fees, incurred as the result of a Councilmember's authorized use of a vehicle while traveling on City business. Councilmembers requesting reimbursement for the payment of such expenses shall obtain receipts and submit them with their Travel Expense Reports. To drive a City or privately owned vehicle on City business, Councilmembers must possess a valid California driver's license. A driver of a privately owned vehicle must also carry adequate liability insurance coverage, and be responsible for any damage, service, or repair to the car occurring on the trip, as these costs are included in the City's per mile cost reimbursement.
- D. Train and Other Mass Transit. Councilmembers shall be compensated for train or other mass transit fares and fees if it is the most logical and least expensive method of travel.
- E. Ground Transportation at Destination. Supplementary transportation within the destination city shall be accomplished by hotel courtesy buses, local shuttle services or public transportation, if available and logical. Taxi, rideshares, or car service may be used when no other convenient, less costly mode of transportation is available.
- F. Rental Vehicles. Rental vehicles shall be used only when no other mode of transportation is available or when alternate transportation would be more expensive or impractical and must be authorized in advance. If a rental vehicle is authorized, Councilmembers shall request the least expensive vehicle category that meets their needs. Optional insurance offered by the rental agency should be declined.

V. Lodging.

- A. The City shall pay lodging expenses for approved travel, including the evening preceding or after a meeting or business event when the Councilmember would otherwise have to travel from their residence before 6 a.m. or after 9 p.m. to reach or return from their destination.
- B. When there is not a specific lodging site associated with official City business, the City shall pay for actual lodging expenses up to the General Services Administration (GSA) maximum rate allowed by location

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(<https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>). Note that the GSA maximum rate applies to the base room rate only, and does not include taxes. Every effort shall be made to obtain lodging at or near the facility where official City business is to take place to minimize travel time and transportation costs. The lodging should also be clean, safe and appropriate for business travel. Government rates are often available and should be sought.

- C. The City shall pay only for standard single rooms at conference, government or corporate rates, unless the conference, government or corporate rate is for a double room. Additional charges arising from the registration or the sharing of a room with a spouse or guest are not reimbursable.
- D. Councilmembers shall notify the Executive Assistant to Council regarding any reservations for lodging they will not use. Any charge for an unused reservation shall be considered the Councilmember's personal expense unless failure to cancel the reservation was due to circumstances reasonably beyond the Councilmember's control.

VI. Meals.

- A. The City shall pay for a Councilmember's meals during authorized travel, including tax and tips, using the per diem amount established by the GSA for the destination location (available at: <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates> —“Meals Breakdown”), except that the City shall not pay for the following:
 - 1. Meals that the Councilmember elects to purchase from another source when the meals are included in the cost of a conference, training registration fee, or hotel stay.
 - 2. Alcoholic beverages.
- B. The City shall pay for meals during partial days of travel on a pro-rated basis, as follows:
 - 1. If the partial day includes travel before 8 a.m., the City shall pay for breakfast.
 - 2. If the partial day includes travel between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., the City shall pay for lunch.
 - 3. If the partial day includes travel after 6 p.m., the City shall pay for dinner.

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- C. Any meal reimbursement where a Councilmember is not required to travel away from home overnight shall be taxable in the amount of the meal reimbursement under Internal Revenue Code Section 162(a) (2).
- D. When Councilmembers attend a group dinner or otherwise dine together while traveling, the City shall reimburse the Councilmember paying up to the per diem amount for each attending Councilmember. The City shall charge the amounts to the individual Councilmembers' budgets.

VII. Miscellaneous Fees/Business Expenses.

- A. Gratuities/Tips. The City shall pay reasonable and customary gratuities and tips during City business travel, using the per diem amount established by the GSA for the destination location (available at: <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem->).
- B. Business Expenses. The City shall pay for goods and/or services deemed necessary for the completion of official business, such as faxes, copier and computer usage, etc.; for Internet usage at actual cost and for all business telephone calls. Cellular phones are often more cost-effective than using hotel phones directly and should be considered as a primary option. Collect calls should be avoided. Fees which include use of local calls, wireless internet access, or other such amenities shall be covered by the City. The City shall also pay for printed materials or other training materials that may be available for sale at training, conferences, etc., provided that the materials are of benefit to the City and shall remain the City's property.
- C. Baggage Fees. If the airline charges for all checked baggage, the City shall cover the cost for one checked bag only. Excess baggage charges are not reimbursable.
- D. Personal Expenses. Personal expenses shall not be paid by the City. In addition to those items identified as personal expenses throughout this policy, personal expenses include personal telephone calls, in-room movies, spas and gyms, optional recreational events in connection with a conference, laundry or dry cleaning, miscellaneous sundries, or other items of a personal nature. Personal travel shall not be mixed with business travel if it will cost the City or harm the City's interest in any way. The City shall not pay for any expenses of a spouse or other person who accompanies a Councilmember on business travel.

VIII. Payment of Expenses.

The City will pay travel expenses in advance where available and practicable at the request of the Councilmember (e.g., registration, airfare). Allowable expenses will otherwise be paid out of pocket by the Councilmember and reimbursed upon completion of travel and submittal of a Travel Expense Report (TER).

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IX. Settlement of Expenses.

- A. Within three weeks of a Councilmember's return from a business trip, a final accounting of all expenses associated with the trip shall be made by completing a Travel Expense Report (TER), and an associated Mileage Reporting Form, if applicable, attaching original receipts substantiating all reported expenses with the exception of meals, and submitting the report to the Executive Assistant to Council.
- B. If the Councilmember personally paid for allowable business trip expenses, the City shall reimburse them following the regular employee reimbursement process. Reimbursement of travel expenses received from an outside source must be forwarded to the Executive Assistant to Mayor and Council upon receipt.
- C. The Mayor's signature is required as approval of Council expense statements. The Vice Mayor approves the Mayor's expense statements.
- D. To the extent that another agency or organization pays for the travel or conference expenses of a Councilmember, the City shall not pay for those same expenses. Councilmembers shall either submit the other agency's payment to the City (in which case the City shall pay for the Councilmember's entire expenses), or refrain from claiming expenses for that portion of their expenses paid by the other agency.

X. Exceptions to the Policy.

This policy does not claim to address all contingencies and conditions. However, any exception requires Mayoral approval via a Travel Authorization Request (TAR) for anticipated/known exceptions or via a Travel Expense Report (TER) for unanticipated/unplanned expenses. Requests for exceptions should be accompanied by the traveler's written justification for the expense.

Examples of exceptions to this policy include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Unusual business expenses;
- Per diem and/or lodging expenses which exceed GSA limits;
- The purchase of one or more meals from another source even though they were included in a conference and/or seminar registration fee;
- The use of an alternate mode of transportation under the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- Travel costs in excess of budgeted amounts.

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XI. Audits.

The Department of Finance shall conduct periodic audits to ensure compliance with this policy. Audit results shall be submitted to the Mayor and City Manager.

(Adopted: Council Policy Update, RTC 14-0061 (11/25/2014); Adopted: RTC 15-0343 (5/12/2015); Amended RTC 25-0912 (11/18/2025))

Lead Department: Office of the City Manager

For reference, see also:

- 7.4.1, *Provision of Staff/Administrative Support for Councilmembers*
- 7.4.12, *City Council Appointments to Intergovernmental Agencies, Council Subcommittees, and Council or Mayor-Created Task Forces*
- 7.4.15, *Council Advocacy*
- City Charter, Section 807
- Code of Ethics and Conduct for Elected and Appointed Officials
- Administrative Policy Chapter 4, Article 5 *Travel Policy*