



**No passport for flights to U.S.? Expect to be grounded**

Subject: Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative  
Opinion-Editorial for London Free Press  
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December 2006 - If you are traveling by air to the U.S. after January 23<sup>rd</sup> you had better be prepared with your passport or Air Nexus card.

The first phase of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) is set to begin later this month. The much-talked-about move by the U.S. government will eventually see everyone entering the United States requiring standard documentation.

Air travelers are the first to be impacted by WHTI. Phase II will affect those traveling by land and sea. The implementation of this phase has been delayed until June 1, 2009 or until three months after the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security have jointly certified that specific security criteria for travel documents have been established.

In a recent seminar arranged by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Ambassador to Canada, David Wilkins, explained that WHTI is not meant to impede travel but to enhance security.

The U.S. Commercial Service states that border officials currently contend with 8000 different birth certificates (U.S. and Canadian) and 1000 different forms of driver licenses and other identity documents. Their figures state that in 2005 over 75,000 fraudulent documents were seized by U.S. border officials. It's little wonder they are concerned.

According to Ambassador Wilkins, the standardizing of documentation will help reduce processing time and facilitate travel between the two countries.

Still, tourism operators in London and right across Canada are concerned that WHTI will negatively impact their American bookings. In addition, many local businesses benefit from casual day travelers and tours such as school groups or sports teams and operators on the U.S. side of the border are equally concerned.

The U.S. Commercial Service assured Chambers of Commerce that the land and sea border rules will address these issues. Draft rules are expected to be released in late spring with a period for comments. The London Chamber will provide feedback in conjunction with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The draft rules for land and sea will include a list of acceptable documentation. According to the U.S. Commercial Service, this list is expected to include a Nexus card (identification used primarily by the frequent traveler). In the meantime, however, it is sound advice for all travelers to obtain passports.

Issues of affordability and convenience of the passport for Americans have also been raised by operators in Ontario. It is hoped the development of a U.S. passport card will answer these concerns. Applications will be available in late spring with production of the cards to start this summer.

In the meantime, figures show that 25% more U.S. citizens obtained passports in 2006 than in the previous year. That number is expected to rise even more in 2007, hopefully mitigating the effects on travel to London and South West Ontario.

*No passport for flights to U.S.? Expect to be grounded continued*

As we enter a new era of travel between our two countries, it will be essential that accurate information be available to all residents. Several online resources provide up-to-date information from the U.S. government including [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) and [Ottawa.usembassy.gov](http://Ottawa.usembassy.gov).

And as the rollout of WHTI continues, the London Chamber and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce will endeavor to provide ongoing updates to our members and will continue to advocate on behalf of the business community for a smooth transition. In the mean time – better buckle for some expected turbulence.