

US could lose \$4.3bn to airports congestion

The US economy could lose as much as US\$4.3bn in 'lost travel spends' as Americans delay or cancel air travel due to the adverse publicity surrounding long airport security queues and insufficient security staff.



So says new research from the highly respected US Travel Association (USTA), following a survey of 2,500 Americans who were originally planning trips between Memorial Day (*May 31 last month*) and Labor Day this coming September.

PASSENGERS VOTE WITH THEIR FEET

The USTA said that 'huge numbers' have told its researchers that they have either changed – or will change – their travel behaviour altogether rather than endure the inconvenience and hassle of long security lines. In turn, the USTA says this response now potentially points to billions of dollars of lost revenues over the summer season as a whole

Its survey shows that of 2,500 Americans who were originally planning air trips between Memorial Day and Labor Day, 21.8% have now decided to either travel by other means or delay or cancel their trips altogether.

In addition, 60.3% of survey respondents said they would arrive at the airport earlier to cope with expected Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screening log jams and tellingly, just 17.9% said they will not change their travel behaviour at all.



A rough still from a passengers video loaded up onto YouTube in disgust. It shows hundreds of passengers queuing to get through security at Chicago Midway Airport in the US last month. Scenes like this at Midway and other US airports were featured on nationwide television leading to some TSA leaders being forced to stand down from their posts.

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The USTA said: "All told, the lost travel spending will total \$4.3bn for the three-month summer peak season – figure that would have directly supported 37,500 additional domestic jobs."

US Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow added: "To put these figures in perspective, the problems at TSA security lines are costing our economy almost a billion and a half dollars in spending and more than 12,000 jobs every month."

AND MORE PRESSURE IS ON THE WAY

Dow noted that Airlines for America, the trade association representing most major US airlines, has projected an average of 2.51m daily plane trips during the upcoming summer months.

While it is unclear if that figure has already been influenced by 'the TSA effect or will be', Dow added: "We're looking at convincing data that says hundreds of thousands of people are potentially reconsidering whether to get on an airplane every single day."

"Given the importance of travel to both our economy and our way of life, it is not an overstatement to call that a national crisis in need of a national solution."



More misery in the same two-hour long queue for security at Chicago Midway Airport last month.

As part of a solution, Dow once again called for a 'three-legged stool' effort to try to encourage more travellers into the PreCheck passenger screening system run by the government, the private sector and travellers themselves.

We have to work on three Ps when it comes to expanding PreCheck—price, process and promotion—and it's not up to any one entity to get the job done, said Dow.

RECORD NUMBERS OF PRECHECK APPLICATIONS

It's fair to ask what travellers themselves can and should be doing to help with the security line problem. We have already seen that travellers are self-correcting, because our survey shows that a big majority are showing up earlier and TSA just had a record week for PreCheck applications.

The US Travel Association is the national, non-profit organization representing all components of the travel

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industry to and within the US that generates \$2.1 trillion in economic output and supports 15m jobs.

[See also 'TSA Security crisis' May 30. Click here:

<http://www.trbusiness.com/regional-news/the-americas/tsa-security-crisis-hits-the-us-top-20-airports/105780>].

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