

# City of Bellingham Policy

**Title:** PAYING TRAVEL EXPENSES  
**Code:** FIN 18.00.01  
**Chapter:** Financial Management  
**Level of Policy:** Administrative  
**Date Issued:** November 20, 1979  
**Date Revised:** January 1, 2003  
**Revised by:** Therese Holm, Finance Director  
Christine Weinberg, Finance Officer  
**Developed by:** Lynn Carpenter, Finance Director  
**Approved By:** Mark Asmundson, Mayor

Cancel:  
See Also:

RCW 42.24, PAYMENT OF CLAIMS FOR EXPENSES, MATERIALS, PURCHASES -- ADVANCEMENTS  
BELLINGHAM CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2001-27  
ADM 10.03.06, ROUTINE PERSONAL REIMBURSEMENT - TAKE HOME VEHICLE OPTION  
ADM 10.04.01, MOTOR POOL VEHICLES AND RENTAL VEHICLES  
FIN 08.00.04, PURCHASING CARD  
PRO 001, REQUESTING AND APPROVING OVERNIGHT TRAVEL EXPENSES WITH AIR TRAVEL  
PRO 002, REQUESTING AND APPROVING OVERNIGHT TRAVEL EXPENSES WITHOUT AIR TRAVEL  
PRO 003, COMPLETING TRAVEL EXPENSE REPORT  
TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION, ADVANCE AND EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT FORM:  
PART I. APPROVAL FOR OVERNIGHT TRAVEL AND ADVANCE  
PART II. EXPENSE REPORT

## Purpose

## Scope

All employees and elected officials of the City of Bellingham, including members of City Boards and Commissions. As used below, "employee" means all persons included in "Scope".

## Policy/Conditions

### **1. City Pays Reasonable & Necessary Business Travel Expenses**

We, the City, pay for allowable business travel expenses when reasonable, necessary, and directly related to conducting business for the City of Bellingham.

The City pays the following employee travel expenses:

- Transportation by airplane, train, ship, bus, auto rental
- Meals
- Lodging
- Personal vehicle mileage when directly related to City business
- Parking expenses
- Registration fees for conventions, conferences, training and tuition
- Expenses for required educational materials which remain the property of the City
- Other incidental business expenses (copies, faxes, telephone)

### **2. City Does Not Reimburse Certain Expenses**

We will not pay or reimburse costs for:

- Liquor
- Theft, loss, or damage to personal property

- Expenses of spouse, family, or other persons not authorized to receive reimbursement under this policy
- Airline and other trip insurance
- Medical or hospital expenses not covered by medical benefits or workers compensation
- Fines for parking violations or traffic violations
- Personal telephone calls
- Personal entertainment and transportation
- Personal care services

**3. Finance Director Administers Policy**

The Finance Director develops and implements procedures for administering this policy. The Finance Director ensures compliance with policy and state law.

**4. Finance Director Authorizes Exceptions**

The Finance Director authorizes exceptions to the policy, such as emergency travel and any other exceptions not addressed in this policy.

Unless authorized as an exception, employees are responsible for payment of any incurred expense not in accordance with this policy.

**5. Department Heads Authorize Travel In Advance**

The Department Head must authorize certain travel expenses in advance:

- Overnight travel
- Less costly alternative to the state-contracted airfare (Section 8)
- Lodging when destination is less than 75 miles of the workplace (Section 10)
- Use of rental vehicle (Section 12)

**6. Mayor Authorizes Out-Of-State and Travel Exceeding Three Days**

We require Mayor approval in advance for out-of-state travel and travel exceeding three workdays.

**7. City Authorizes Use of Advance Travel Funds**

Employees may receive a travel advance when

- Travel expenses will be paid out of pocket
- Approved by Department Head

Employees must submit travel expense documentation, including repayment of excess travel advance, on or before the 15th day following the close of the authorized period, or

- City shall charge interest at a rate of 10% per annum on the advance from the date of default until settled or paid, and
- City has right to withhold unsettled advance plus interest from employee's pay.

**8. City Limits Business Air Travel Arrangements**

The City participates in the State of Washington's Air Travel Program. Participation allows the City to obtain discounted, unrestricted and refundable airfare to many cities.

Except as allowed below, we require employees to make air travel arrangements through the City's selected air travel agency, and use  
State contracted airfare, or

Lowest published fare when state rate is not available.

We allow less costly alternative to state contracted airfare when  
Employee obtains and documents quotes for state-contracted airfare and lowest published fare  
Department Head approves in advance

In the event of unused tickets, we require the Department to  
Notify Finance Department  
Absorb cost of any unused tickets or ticket changes as a result of ticket restrictions  
Use reissued tickets for City business purposes only.

We pay fares directly to the City's selected air travel agency through a travel card program; the employee is not reimbursed.

We authorize "business class" travel when  
Any single leg of the flight is longer than eight hours, and  
Mayor approves in advance.

We allow employees to make air travel arrangements outside of the selected air travel agency when  
There is a greater cost savings to the City than available through the selected air travel agency, and  
Employee obtains and documents quotes for state contracted airfare and lowest published fare, and  
Department Head approves in advance.

When the employee makes reservations outside the selected travel agency, we require  
Advance purchase of air travel by the employee and reimbursement after the completion of travel, and  
Employee to absorb the cost of any unused tickets or ticket changes as a result of ticket restrictions.

When personal air travel is combined with a City business trip, we require  
Employee to make air travel arrangements apart from the State of Washington's Air Travel Program,  
Advance purchase of air travel by the employee,  
Reimbursement for business travel portion only of the air travel at the lowest published fare after the completion of travel, and  
Employee to absorb the cost of any unused tickets or ticket changes as a result of ticket restrictions.

## **9. City Pays Per Diem for Meals**

The City pays a per diem rate of \$45 for meal expenses.  
Adjusted for partial day travel  
Includes taxes and tips  
No receipts required

For partial day travel, we pay a portion of per diem for meals eaten while on travel status at

- \$8 for breakfast
- \$14 for lunch
- \$23 for dinner

The City will not pay a portion of per diem for meals included in the conference registration.

City pays the actual cost of a meal, plus reasonable tip, when

- Documented by an itemized receipt and/or meeting itinerary, and
- Meal is scheduled as part of a meeting and has a fixed price, or
- Travel is outside the continental U.S.
  - Except lower mainland B.C. which is reimbursed at per diem rate

**10. City Pays Costs For Lodging**

We pay lodging expenses when:

- Travel destination is in excess of 75 miles, or,
- Less than 75 miles with Department Head approval.

Employees must reserve lodging at the government rate or at the least costly room rate.

When attending a conference, employee may elect to stay at the conference hotel at the lowest available room rate. We encourage use of the City's selected travel agency to obtain the lowest rate.

We allow the option of a daily commute for out of town business. We pay, however, the lesser of

- The travel expense incurred in repeated commutes, or,
- The amount that would have been allowable if employee stayed overnight.

**11. City Pays For Travel Mileage**

City pays for mileage when personal auto is used:

- At the IRS "standard mileage rate" in effect at the time of travel
- For round trip mileage from the workplace to the business destination
- To only one of two or more employees traveling in the same automobile
- Within a 300-mile radius of the City. Beyond this limit, we reimburse at the lesser of:
  - The lowest round trip airfare, or
  - Standard mileage rate

The City does not pay mileage when personal auto is used if the employee receives a flat rate reimbursement except as allowed under Policy ADM 10.03.06, ROUTINE PERSONAL REIMBURSEMENT.

**12. City Pays for Cost of Rental Vehicles**

City pays for mid-size vehicle rental when:

- Used for business purposes only
- No less costly transportation alternative exists
- Department Head approves in advance

We encourage the use of the City's travel agency to obtain the lowest rate available including state contracted or government rates.

The City does not pay for supplemental car rental insurance.

**13. Employees Conserve Travel Funds**

When feasible, employees conserve City travel funds by:

- Sharing rides
- Sharing rooms
- Using state-contracted airfare
- Using government discount rates

- Using cost saving alternatives

**14. City Does Not Pay for Personal Travel Expenses**

We do not pay any personal travel expenses that may be associated with business travel.

When personal travel is scheduled in connection with a business trip, the City pays only those expenses directly related to official City business. Any expenses related to personal travel must be clearly distinguishable and paid directly by the employee.

**15. City Requires Itemized Expense Report**

Employees must complete and certify an itemized travel expense report upon return from travel.

We require documentation supporting travel expenses including:

- Travel itinerary
- Conference registration
- Conference or meeting agenda
- Original itemized receipts
- Mileage logs

We do not require documentation for:

- Travel expenses under \$10.00 when no receipt is obtainable
- Meals paid on a per diem basis

**16. City Requires Approval of Expense Report**

We require approval of itemized expense report by:

- Department Head for department staff travel
- Mayor for Department Head travel
- Council President for Council members and Council staff travel
- Finance Director reviews Mayor's travel
- Mayor reviews Finance Director's travel
- Mayor reviews Council President's travel