

# ARS □ CSREES □ ERS □ NASS

## *Policies and Procedures*

**Title:** Approval of Premium-Class Air Travel

**Number:** 343.1

**Date:** February 26, 2001

**Originating Office:** Financial Management Division, Travel and Relocation Services Branch, AFM/ARS

**This Replaces:** ARS 343.1 dated 11/08/99

**Distribution:** REE Offices in Headquarters, Areas, and Field Locations

This P&P states policy, approval authority, and procedures for using air accommodations above coach-class.

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## 1. Authority

- Agriculture Travel Regulation (ATR), Chapter 301, Part 3
- Federal Travel Regulation (FTR), Chapter 301, Part 10

## 2. Policy

In the FTR, the term “Premium-Class” is defined to include all classes of service above coach class (e.g., business-class and first-class).

It is USDA and REE policy to approve use of premium-class accommodations, on a case-by-case basis, and only when employees (see Glossary for definition of “employee”) meet one or more of the following criteria under the class of service being requested:

### Business-Class

**Availability.** When regularly scheduled flights between the authorized origin and destination only provide business-class accommodations and the employee certifies this on the travel voucher.

**Space.** When space is not available in coach-class on any scheduled flight in time to accomplish the purpose of the official travel, which is so urgent that it cannot be postponed.

**Medical.** When necessary to accommodate an employee’s disability, other physical impairment, or special need and the employee’s condition is substantiated in writing by a competent medical authority. If approved for the employee, business-class may also be approved for an attendant under certain medical conditions. The justification from a competent medical authority must include the following:

1. A description of the employee’s disability, medical condition or special need;
2. Approximate duration of the medical condition or special need;
3. A recommendation of a suitable means of transportation for the traveler based on their medical condition or special need.

**Security.** When such accommodations are required for security purposes or because exceptional circumstances, as determined by the Agency Administrator, make the use of business-class essential to the successful performance of the agency’s mission.

**Sanitation.** When coach-class accommodations on foreign carriers do not provide adequate sanitation or health standards, and the use of foreign flag air carrier service is approved in accordance with the Fly America Act.

**Cost Savings.** When such accommodations would result in an overall savings to the Government based on economic considerations, such as the avoidance of additional subsistence costs, overtime, or lost productive time that would be incurred while awaiting availability of coach-class accommodations.

**Frequent Traveler Benefits (FTB's).** When obtained as an accommodations upgrade through redemption of frequent traveler benefits issued under airline mileage programs. The USDA and REE has established the following order of precedence for the use of Frequent Traveler Benefits:

- Use to offset Government travel costs by obtaining free or reduced cost tickets.
- Use to offset the costs of business-class accommodations when the use of business-class has been authorized.
- Use to upgrade to business-class.

**NOTE: FTB's cannot be used to upgrade to first-class, ONLY to business-class accommodations.**

**Payment from Outside Sources.** When a non-Federal source fully pays for all travel and transportation expenses, payment or acceptance, in accordance with P&P 341.2, is not subject to the service limitations for business-class accommodations as described above.

**Excess of 14 Hours.** When travel is direct between authorized origin and destination points which are separated by several time zones, and either the origin or destination point is outside the continental United States, and the scheduled flight time is in excess of 14 hours. Use of this authority prohibits an employee from a rest stop en route or a rest period upon arrival at the temporary duty site.

## **First-Class**

**Availability.** When neither coach-class nor business-class airline accommodations are reasonably available. The term “reasonably available” means that accommodations are available on an airline that is scheduled to leave within 24 hours of the employee’s proposed departure time, or scheduled to arrive within 24 hours of the employee’s proposed arrival time.

**Medical.** When necessary to accommodate an employee’s disability, other physical impairment, or special need and the employee’s condition is substantiated in writing by a competent medical authority. May also be authorized for an attendant’s services under certain medical conditions. The justification from a competent medical authority must include the following:

1. A description of the employee’s disability, medical condition or special need;
2. Approximate duration of the medical condition or special need;

3. A recommendation of a suitable means of transportation for the traveler based on their medical condition or special need.

**Security.** When exceptional security circumstances require the use of premium-class accommodations to successfully perform the Agency's mission (i.e., endanger the employee's life or Government property).

**Payment from Outside Sources.** Acceptance of payment for first-class accommodations is allowed **only** when the use of first-class accommodations has been approved under the criteria above. First-class accommodations may not be used unless applicable REE procedures for justifying and obtaining approval for the use of first-class have been met.

**NOTE:** First-class annual reports will be prepared by the Financial Management Division, Travel and Relocation Services Branch, and submitted to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer no later than October 31 of each calendar year in accordance with the format of the Federal Travel Regulations.

### **3. Approval Authority**

Authority to approve premium-class travel is limited to one of the following USDA officials:

- **Under Secretary, REE**, will approve all first-class and business-class travel, except when FTB's are used to offset or reduce the costs of business-class accommodations.
- **The Administrators, REE**, have been delegated authority to approve the use of business-class **only** when travelers use FTB's to upgrade to business-class.
- **The Director, Financial Management Division (FMD)**, is delegated authority to approve the use of FTB's to upgrade to business-class on behalf of the Administrator, ARS.

### **4. Procedures**

#### **A. Procedures For ARS:**

##### **Traveler**

- Prepares justification and receives approval to use premium-class (e.g., business-class or first-class) accommodations before beginning a trip. The justification must explain the circumstances relating to the criteria. Attaches a medical certificate if disabled, otherwise physically impaired or a special need.

- Obtains approvals. The request first must go through the following levels of management (as applicable):
  - Research Leaders (RL's)/Location Coordinators (LC's). Review justification from traveler. Ensure reasons given for use of premium-class service meet policy guidelines. Recommend approval or disapproval. If approved, forward the request to Location Administrative Officer (LAO), for further processing. If disapproved, return request to traveler.
  - Location Administrative Officers. Review justification and ensure RL/LC has recommended approval. Coordinate processing with the Area Administrative Officer (AAO).
  - Area Budget and Fiscal Officers (ABFO's)/Area Transportation Assistants (ATA's). Review justification. Coordinate processing with AAO and Area Director (AD)/Division/Staff Director.
  - Area/Division/Staff Directors. Review justification. Recommend approval/disapproval. If approved, forward to the Director, FMD, through the Chief, Travel and Relocation Services Branch (TRSB), FMD, for processing. If disapproved, return request to traveler through proper levels of management.

#### **Travel and Relocation Services Branch (TRSB), FMD**

- Reviews justification from AD/Division/Staff Director. Ensures current policy criteria have been met.
- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class and FTB's will be used, prepares a decision memorandum for the Director, FMD, to approve on behalf of the Administrator, ARS.
- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class or first-class, except when FTB's are used for business-class, prepares a decision memorandum for the approval of the Administrator, ARS, to the Under Secretary, REE.
- If approved, informs the employee and Area Transportation Assistant (ATA).
- Maintains approved request information.

#### **Traveler**

- For first-class travel only, **after approval** is received and travel is completed, prepares a First-Class Transportation Report (Exhibit 1).

- Forwards the report to: USDA, ARS, AFM, FMD, TRSB  
5601 Sunnyside Ave., Rm. 3-2176A  
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-5114

## **B. Procedures For NASS:**

### **Traveler**

- Prepares justification and receives approval before beginning a trip. The justification must explain the circumstances relating to the criteria. Attaches a medical certificate if disabled, otherwise physically impaired or has a special need, which must include the following:
  1. A description of the employee's disability, medical condition or special need;
  2. Approximate duration of the medical condition or special need;
  3. A recommendation of a suitable means of transportation for the traveler based on their medical condition or special need.
- Obtains the approval or recommendation of the State Statistician, Headquarters Division Director, or other appropriate official.
- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class and FTB's are used to offset the costs, prepares a decision memorandum for the approval of the Administrator, NASS. Submits the request and decision memorandum to the Associate or Deputy Administrator for concurrence and forwards to the Administrator for approval.
- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class or first-class, except when FTB's are used for business class, prepares a decision memorandum from the Administrator, NASS, to the Under Secretary, REE. Submits request and decision memorandum to the Associate or Deputy Administrator.
- For first-class travel only, **after approval** is received and travel is completed, prepares a First-Class Transportation Report (Exhibit 1).
- Forwards the report to: USDA, ARS, AFM, FMD, TRSB  
5601 Sunnyside Ave., Room 3-2176A  
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-5114

## C. Procedures For ERS:

### Traveler

- Prepares justification and receives approval before beginning a trip. The justification must explain the circumstances relating to the criteria. Attaches a medical certificate if disabled, otherwise physically impaired or has a special need, from a competent medical authority which includes the following:
  1. A description of the medical condition or special need;
  2. Approximate duration of the medical condition or special need;
  3. A recommendation of a suitable means of transportation for the traveler based on their medical condition or special need.
- Obtains the approval or recommendation of the Division Director or other appropriate official.

### Division Director

- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class and FTB's will be used, prepares a decision memorandum for the approval of the Administrator, ERS.
- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class or first-class, except when FTB's are used for business class, prepares and forwards a decision memorandum from the Administrator, ERS, for the approval of the Under Secretary, REE.
- Notifies employee of approval or disapproval.

### Traveler

- For first-class only, **after approval** is received and travel is completed, prepares a First-Class Transportation Report (Exhibit 1).
- Forwards the report to:  
USDA, ARS, AFM, FMD, TRSB  
5601 Sunnyside Ave., Room 3-2176A  
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-5114



## **D. Procedures For CSREES:**

### **Traveler**

- Prepares justification and receive approval before beginning a trip. The request must explain the circumstances relating to the criteria. Attaches a medical certificate if disabled, otherwise physically impaired, or has a special need, which must include the following:
  1. Name and location of employee;
  2. A description of the medical condition or special need;
  3. The approximate duration of the medical condition or special need;
  4. A recommendation of a suitable means of transportation for the traveler based on their medical condition or special need.
  5. The difference in cost between coach-class and first-class or coach-class and business-class.
  6. Whether FTB's will be used to upgrade to business-class accommodations.
- Forwards the above information to: USDA, ARS, AFM, FMD, TRSB  
Room 552 Portals Building  
1400 Independence Ave., SW, Stop 0315  
Washington, D.C. 20250-0315

### **TRSB**

- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class and FTB's will be used, prepares and forwards a decision memorandum for the approval of the Administrator, CSREES through the applicable Deputy Administrator.
- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class or first-class, except when FTB's are being used for business-class, prepares a decision memorandum from the Administrator, CSREES, for the approval of the Under Secretary, REE. The memorandum must be reviewed by the applicable Deputy Administrator and initialed prior to approval by the Administrator, CSREES.

### **Administrator's Office**

- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class and FTB's are used to offset the additional costs, approves or disapproves the request.
- If the request is for an upgrade to business-class or first-class and FTB's are not used, forwards the decision memorandum from the Administrator, CSREES, to the Under Secretary, REE, for approval.
- Notifies the employee of approval or disapproval.

- Forwards approved request information to TRSB.

### **Traveler**

- For first-class travel only, **after approval** is received and travel is completed, prepares a First-Class Transportation Report (Exhibit 1).
- Forwards the report to :  
USDA, ARS, AFM, FMD, TRSB  
Room 552 Portals Building  
1400 Independence Ave., SW, Stop 0315  
Washington, D.C. 20250-0315

## **5. Summary of Responsibilities**

### **Under Secretary, REE**

- Approves all first-class and business-class travel when FTB's are not used.

### **CSREES, ERS, and NASS Administrators**

- Approve the use of business-class when travelers use FTB's to upgrade to business-class.

### **Director, FMD**

- Approves the use of FTB's to upgrade to business-class on behalf of the Administrator, ARS.

### **ARS Area Directors, AFM Division Directors/NASS Division Directors, State Statisticians/ERS Division Directors/CSREES Deputy Administrators**

- Approve traveler's justification for request to use premium-class travel.
- ERS Division Directors prepare decision memorandum.

### **ARS Research Leaders/Location Coordinators**

- Review justification for premium-class travel from traveler and recommend approval or disapproval.

### **ARS Area Budget and Fiscal Officers/Area Transportation Assistants**

- Review justification. Coordinate processing with AAO and Area Director (AD)/Division/Staff Director.

### **ARS Location Administrative Officers**

- Coordinate the processing of the request for premium-class travel with the AAO.

### **Travel and Relocation Services Branch (TRSB), FMD**

- Review justification and prepare decision memorandum for ARS and CSREES.

### **Traveler**

- Prepares justification for use of premium-class travel.
- NASS traveler prepares decision memorandum.
- Obtains approval from appropriate levels of management.
- Prepares a First-Class Transportation Report after travel is completed.

## **6. Glossary**

**AAO.** Area Administrative Officer.

**ABFO.** Area Budget and Fiscal Officer.

**AD.** Area Director.

**ATA.** Area Transportation Assistant.

**ATR.** Agriculture Travel Regulations.

**Business-Class.** A class of accommodations between coach and first-class.

**Disability.** A person having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or having a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment; but does not include an individual who is currently engaging in the illegal use of drugs, when the covered entity acts on the basis of such use.

**Employee.** An employee is an individual employed by an agency regardless of status or rank; or an individual employed intermittently in Government service as an expert or consultant and paid on a daily when actually-employed basis; or an individual serving without pay or at \$1 a year; or a person on invitational travel orders.

**First-Class.** The highest class of accommodations on a multiple-class commercial air carrier.

**FMD.** Financial Management Division.

**FTB.** Frequent Travel Benefits.

**FTR.** Federal Travel Regulations.

**Invitational travel.** Authorized travel of individuals either not employed or employed (under 5 U.S.C. 5703) intermittently in the Government service as consultants or experts and paid on a daily when-actually-employed basis and for individuals serving without pay or at \$1 a year when they are acting in a capacity that is directly related to, or in connection with, official activities of the Government. Travel allowances authorized for such persons are the same as those normally authorized for employees in connection with TDY.

**LAO.** Location Administrative Officer.

**LC.** Location Coordinator.

**Major Life Activities.** Functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.

**Physical or Mental Impairment.** 1) Any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organ, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin, and endocrine; or 2) Any mental or psychological disorder (e.g., mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness and specific learning disabilities). 3) The term “physical or mental impairment” includes, but is not limited to, such diseases and conditions as cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, mental retardation, emotional illness, and orthopedic, visual, speech and hearing impairments.

**Premium-Class.** Any class of accommodations above coach-class airline accommodations, e.g., business-class and first-class.

**RL.** Research Leader.

**Special Need.** Physical characteristics of a traveler not necessarily defined under disability. Such physical characteristics could include, but are not limited to, the weight or height of the traveler.

**TRSB.** Travel and Relocation Services Branch, AFM.

W. G. HORNER  
Deputy Administrator  
Administrative and Financial Management

Exhibit  
Sample First-Class Transportation Report

## Exhibit 1

### The following information must be included in the First-Class Transportation Report:

1. Name, address, grade, and position or title of traveler.
2. Origin, destination, and dates of first-class travel. If only segment(s) of the trip were first-class, indicate the travel points of the segment(s).
3. The difference in cost between first class and coach class.
4. Justification for the first-class travel.
5. Signature of traveler

### S A M P L E

#### First-Class Transportation Report

March 1, 2000

John I. Doe  
ARS, Beltsville Area  
Systematic Entomology Laboratory  
Building 046, BARC-West  
Beltsville, MD 20705

Title: Entomologist

Grade: GS-12

Travel originated in Washington, DC, on February 1, 1998, with the destination of London, England, to attend the International Entomology Conference. Due to medical conditions, I was required to travel first-class. Enclosed is documentation which explains the medical conditions for the need to travel first-class. Prior approval was obtained before the travel began. The cost of the round-trip coach travel was \$1,000; the cost of first-class was \$3,000.

/s/ John I. Doe

Enclosure