

## Travel Coordinator Quarterly Meeting ~ May 21, 2104: Questions and Answers

The following provides a summary of the questions and answers (Q&A) addressed by a panel of speakers: Ray Asbell, Department of Human Resources (CalHR), and Eleanor Alvarez, State Controller's Office (SCO) on May 21, 2014. Bill Amaral, Department of General Services (DGS), was the panel moderator.

*Note: This Q&A information is not intended to supersede or create policy. Please refer to policies/regulations from SCO, CalHR, DGS, etc., for current information.*

### 1) What is the role of the CalHR in determining hotel rates?

Hotel rates are one of the items negotiated between the CalHR and each bargaining unit (BU). Prior to the negotiation with each BU, CalHR reviews current federal government rates and conducts market surveys; however, the final rates are ultimately agreed upon during the negotiation process with each BU. *The rates changed recently due to agreements with most bargaining units except for three units: BU 2, 10 and 13. At this time, BU 13 has a tentative agreement that has yet to be ratified by members. For CalHR, It is important to gage the true cost that employees are paying out of pocket but it may not come to fruition at the table. There is always room for improvement and further negotiations.*

### 2) Will CalHR offer training on travel?

Currently, the State Training Center is in the beginning stages of recreating itself since its closure. Although it is focused on offering the essential training, it is growing and offering more classes. At this point, CalHR does foresee some type of training on travel being offered, however, it has yet to be discussed.

### 3) How do CalHR and CalATERS rules co-exist?

Open discussions are held between the two agencies with the goal of making the system better.

### 4) Please provide clarification regarding the policy for keeping meal receipts for reimbursement.

The request of meal receipts is tied to what is in the memorandum of understanding (MOU), what are in the rules, and a department's past practice. Generally speaking, the MOUs read that the receipts should be kept by the employee, and that an audit can be conducted by many different parties: the employer or Bureau of State Audits, or even the newspaper since it is a public record. If the past practice was to have employees submit their receipts, continue to do so. If the past practice was not to request receipts and you are planning to change that, it is a good idea to meet and confer with the labor staff, prior to implementation of a policy

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memo to avoid grievances. CalHR wants employees to be reimbursed for their actual cost, and technically it goes back to a department's past practices.

**5) When breakfast is offered by the hotel, however the employee wants to claim breakfast, how do I enforce the rule?**

The meal rule is found in the MOU, and the term reads that employees may **not** claim meals provided by the state, meals included in hotel expenses or conference fees, meals included in transportation costs such as airline tickets, or meals that are otherwise provided. Snacks and continental breakfasts such as rolls, juice, and coffee are not considered to be meals. It is a broad term, but you can make the interpretation that it is offered with the room rate and/or tied to the cost and being provided; and in essence, if the employee claims it, it can be considered double dipping.

However, there are circumstances where the traveler has a dietary restriction or an early morning business meeting that they must attend. Justifications stating the reason why the employee could not eat the meal should suffice. Be cognizant of HIPAA issues; something as simple as "I have a medical condition" is fine and fair. Basically, the justification is what you need and what you should ask for.

Note: Be aware that sometimes only certain hotel rates shown online qualify for the breakfast. Also, avoid keeping a list of hotels including their amenities because this is subject to change at any time.

**6) What if an employee's doctor's notice included with the Travel Expense Claim is over more than a year old, and the employee continues to stay at the hotel where the room rate covers the meal, and claims the breakfast. Is there a time limit for justifications?**

We are all gatekeepers but you want to consider how much time you are willing to put into this given the diminished returns. You may want to talk to your administrative staff and your labor office to make sure they are aware of it and decide whether they need to get clarification from CalHR.

**7) Why is there business breakfast, lunch, and dinner?**

In some instances, the cost of business-related meal expenses may be allowed. It must be clearly shown that it was impractical to conduct the state's business during working hours and that the meal took place in conditions beyond the employee's control. The employee provides justification on the Travel Expense Claim. The statement must include the purpose or goal of each business-related meal and the unusual conditions that justify payment. Refer to the provisions of a memorandum of understanding; also see SAM Chapter 7, Section 0727.

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**8) When does the “trip time” begin for a traveler?**

There are many variables to consider; research the Fair Labor Standards Act regarding work week groups and bargaining unit agreements.

**9) Is tipping for a taxi trip considered an incidental?**

If the employee is on travel status, the employee receives a limited amount to cover incidentals which is all that is allowed to cover the expense.

Note: There is no provision that allows for the tipping of taxis whether a traveler is on or is not on travel status.

**10) Santa Clara’s lodging rate decreased from \$140 to \$125. Why is the lodging rate so low in such a high profile area?**

This is a result of collective bargaining as a result of negotiations and it’s the best that could be done at the time. These rates are ultimately agreed upon by both CalHR and the unions. If absolutely necessary, a traveler can always consider submitting an Excess Lodging Rate Request/Approval Form (255C).

**11) Do we accept the justification from the travelers that because other state bargaining units have higher rates (BU 2), they did not find lodging for \$84.00, and three hotel rates were not provided?**

The submittal of an [Excess Lodging Rate Approval Request \(STD 255C\)](#) (PDF) form is required for lodging rates that exceed the delegated reimbursement rates. The traveler’s justification must demonstrate a “Good Faith” effort to obtain lodging at or below the state rate for the travel destination by documenting a minimum of three lodging quotes.

**12) Will lodging receipts from third-party vendors, i.e., Expedia, Hotels.com, still be required?**

Once the Management Memo #14-03 policy is fully implemented, the state will no longer be using third party vendors to make hotel arrangements. All travel (air, car and hotel) bookings, unless there is an approved exception in place, must be made through Concur Travel, the authorized booking tool, and/or CALTRAVELSTORE.

**13) What’s the reimbursement rule on resort fees?**

It must first be determined if it is actual and necessary and if there are other alternatives in the area. A justification for this type of fee would include a cost comparison of all of the hotels in the area supporting why this is the only alternative.

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**14) Have gas receipt requirements changed?**

No, there are no changes from a policy perspective. Gas receipts under \$10 are not required.

**15) What is used as justification for headquarters for an employee: the position number or actual location of the employee?**

The rule of thumb is three out of five days where the employee works. The predominant number of days that are spent at a location is, de facto, the headquarters.

**16) A new chairperson is going to work out of an office in Oakland. Will the state be required to pay travel expenses when the chairperson travels to Sacramento?**

Yes, if travel is necessary to conduct state business.

**17) How do volunteers, who often do not have a credit card, book their trips through Concur? Will they be reimbursed for their travel?**

Volunteers can be booked through the "Guest Traveler" function. Volunteers who are authorized by the state and are on official state business are reimbursed for their travel via a Travel Expense Claim STD. 262.

**18) Please discuss the difference between an accountable and non-accountable plan.**

An accountable plan is a proper accounting of what has actually transpired as far as an actual cost. This type of plan has receipts; documents time and place; and requires that any excess must be returned in a timely manner.

A non accountable plan is a plan which does not meet all the requirements for an Accountable Plan.

**19) What is considered an unallowable travel cost?**

To define an unallowable travel cost, the question to ask is whether the unallowable travel expense was necessary to conduct state business.

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**20) In regards to “boot allowance” purchases, are internet receipts acceptable instead of an original receipts?**

To determine what is acceptable, it is recommended that you review the MOU to verify whether it specifically addresses what is required to be reimbursed for an allowance, and also talk to your department’s labor relations staff to discuss past practice for this type of allowance.

**21) Can an employee receive a transit subsidy for two commuter programs, i.e., van pool driver and public transit programs?**

Nothing prohibits it, and employees do use more than one program. A manner to determine if both programs are being used, i.e., van pool and public transit, program, is to ask for a detailed log to be submitted with the van pool reimbursement request.

**22) Can student assistants receive a transit subsidy?**

Student assistants can receive a transit subsidy if they are acting as an agent for the state; the non-represented rules would apply.

**23) Can an employee be reimbursed via a transit voucher program if he/she turns down a parking space in a parking garage and chooses to walk to work?**

No, there is not a provision for this type of reimbursement via the transit voucher program.

**24) Do vanpool drivers pay for a van pool or do they get a free ride plus \$100 reimbursement?**

Yes, a vanpool driver pays for his/her ridership. The driver receives \$100 reimbursement as an incentive for taking on the responsibility of transporting riders safely to and from work and to offset their alternative transportation costs. The driver is not eligible and does not receive any other commute subsidy, i.e., riders receive a 75% up to \$65 maximum monthly subsidy to offset alternative transportation costs.

**25) What is the Bay Area Commuter Benefits Program?**

The Senate Bill 1339 authorizes the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to jointly adopt a regional commute benefit program to promote the use of alternative commute modes such as transit, ridesharing, bicycling, and walking; and it was signed into code in 2012.

This program requires employers with 50 or more full-time employees in the Bay Area to register and offer commuter benefits, four different options, to their

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employees by September 30, 2014. The CalHR is acting as the employer to register all state employees in the bay area. Contact the CalHR for further information.

**26) Is the Bargaining Unit 10 Personnel Management Liaisons (PML) expected to be released?**

The PML will be released once the Bargaining Unit (BU) 10 agreement approval process is complete. Note: On 5.21.2014, CalHR reached a new tentative agreement with Bargaining Unit 10. However, BU 10 membership has not ratified the agreement.

**27) What are the guidelines to issue travel advances? Can we provide an advance for a one-day trip, gas for rental car, and parking?**

Departments may issue a revolving fund check for a travel advance to an employee for travel expenses while conducting official state business. Refer to SAM 8116.

**28) Will SCO offer CalATERS Global training?**

Training classes for CalATERS Global are currently being developed. The training class schedule will be released when finalized.

**29) Will CalATERS Global help to make the filing of claims easier?**

The CalATERS Global is designed to make it easier with its enhancements which the original CalATERS did not offer. For example, for the accounting office, it features a menu of every claim available to the work pool, and it identifies who currently has the claim

**30) Is the SCO CalATERS system updated with the DGS changes?**

All contracts activated at this time are updated in CalATERS.

**31) We are currently not on CalATERS and there are no plans to be a part of this system. Will CalATERS ever be absolutely mandatory or will there always be an exemption?**

CalATERS is a mandated system per Government Code 19822.3. There are no new exemptions being accepted.

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- 32) In regards to taxable items, when we are creating a claim, the employees cannot see that they are being taxed nor do they know what they are being taxed on (i.e., meals/lodging reimbursed for travel less than 50 miles from home/headquarters; meals/lodging reimbursed for trips of less than 24 hours is taxable income) since the box does not appear. This results in many calls from travelers. Is there a way they could see what they are being taxed on?**

Tax reporting is an accounting function. In the paper world, this is a no indication of taxing on the 262. This is separate accounting paperwork, 676P.

- 33) Is there a way that expenses that are taxable can possibly have a pop-up box or hover text to alert the traveler?**

This is a good idea but technically complicated.

- 34) How does SCO audit a TEC?**

The SCO has their own internal and confidential process.

- 35) For travel less than 50 miles with an overnight stay, why is parking, mileage and toll fees taxable in CalATERS Global**

This is currently in review.

- 36) Looking at travel as sort of an “end-to-end” process, could training, specifically for travel coordinators, be offered together by all three control agencies [CalHR, State Controller’s Office (SCO) and Department of General Services (DGS)] as opposed to going to separate training at each agency?**

The DGS STP has a partnership meeting every two months with the control agencies and this will be discussed at the next partnership meeting.

- 37) Are DGS changes in compliance with CalHR rules?**

The DGS changes, using the DGS travel booking tool, do not impact CalHR rules. The change affects the booking process, but the reimbursement process remains the same.

- 38) Will Concur replace SWABIZ?**

Concur has a direct connection to SWABIZ. The use of the SWABIZ website for state travel reservations will be discontinued for departments once implementation and training is complete. The Statewide Travel Program will work with you throughout the transition period and will assist in any way possible to get your travelers up-to-speed on the new system.

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**39) Is it the role of the travel agents to notify the traveler when an Excess Lodging Rate Request/Approval Form (255C) is required?**

No, it is not the role of the travel agent to notify the traveler. The travel agent's role is to book travel as quickly and efficiently as possible. Given the 21 different union agreements, it is the traveler's responsibility to know the rules and whether or not a 255C is required, and to know the approval process within their agencies. An agency/department approval is required for lodging rates above state rate, up to \$150. CalHR approval is required for lodging rates over \$150. All forms must be submitted 10 days prior to the trip taking place. If it is less than ten days, a specific justification must accompany the 255C. After-the-fact requests will not be approved.

**40) With the Management Memo #14-03 mandate, will the State Controller's Office deny reimbursement if the hotel bookings are not done through the authorized channel?**

This will be addressed once all departments are transitioned and DGS has had an opportunity to meet and confer with the unions and to develop a process and guidelines with CalHR and SCO. The implementation period will occur between May 1, 2014 and December 31, 2015. There will be extensive communication regarding this policy between now and the end of the implementation period; and there will also be a grace period. Note: The Management Memo #14-03 allows for exceptions for special circumstances for health and safety.

**41) Travelers feel insecure providing their personal credit card to the Concur Travel profile. Is it safe to add personal credit card to the Concur Travel profile?**

Yes, the credit card information stored in Concur is protected by the same state-of-the-art encryption and security used by most major financial institutions. It's safe, secure and effective. The credit card only guarantees the hotel reservation, and it is charged once the traveler arrives and checks out of the hotel.

**42) What if the traveler does not have a credit card?**

There are options available that can be addressed when the DGS Statewide Travel Program staff meets individually with each department and will be part of a department's transition plan.

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**43) Is there a rule that we must purchase refundable tickets?**

There is no rule requiring the purchase of refundable tickets over non-refundable fares. The *Best Practices Guide* has information on utilizing non-refundable flights for cost savings but is provided only as a resource. Non-refundable fares are 40% to 60% lower than the comparable refundable fares. The non-refundable fare option will provide a significant savings if they meet the business need of the department. The analysis of business need versus cost will still be conducted at the department/agency level and each department/agency will set the policy for the use of refundable versus non-refundable fares.

**44) In the Concur and SWABIZ migration, will “Business Select” be an option in Concur?**

No, “Business Select” is not an option and is “grayed-out” in Concur.

**45) Why does CALTRAVELSTORE allow the “Business Select” airfare?**

“Business Select” airfare is not allowable for state employees because it is considered a first-class airfare. Unless an exception is noted for your department, agents will not book this fare type.

**46) When is preboarding available?**

Priority preboarding is available for those who have a specific seating need to accommodate their disability and/or need assistance in boarding the aircraft or stowing an assistive device.

**47) Can the Excess Lodging Rate Request/Approval STD 255C and the State Controller’s Office Short-Term Vehicle Justification Forms be incorporated into Concur? If so, when?**

No, currently the forms can not be incorporated into Concur. The STP is currently exploring options with Concur but this is a programming issue. The forms are currently posted on the CALTRAVELSTORE website under Helpful Travel Links and verbiage is posted on Concur to remind travelers when the forms are necessary.

**48) If an employee needs a rental car delivered to the headquarters office within a 2-3 hour time period for a quick site visit, can the employee call Enterprise directly?**

No, the employee must book through Concur Travel and then call Enterprise to request delivery of the vehicle.

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**49) When a traveler returns a car to an Enterprise rental car location, and an incorrect charge is noted on the receipt, can the correction be made at the Enterprise location to avoid the dispute process?**

Yes, if you checked the receipt and noticed a wrong charge, inform the Enterprise staff of the error in order to have a correction made; however, if they do not make the correction, have the staff make a note on the receipt that you were being charged too much, to maintain a record. When you receive your statement, you have two weeks to dispute the charge. Note: The STP will discuss the immediate correction of the charge with Enterprise.

**50) Is a prepaid fuel receipt accepted?**

No, this is not an allowable practice.

**51) Employees send in a justification form for refueling at Enterprise because rates are cheaper than outside vendors. Is this a valid reason?**

No, this not a valid reason for not refueling the vehicle. The “market rate fuel” prices provided in the contract are an average of the fueling stations in the area. The fuel price advertised at the rental locations is for the pre-pay option which is not allowable for the state. Note: The refueling policy states that the traveler must return the vehicle with the same level of fuel that the vehicle had when it was picked up.

**52) Is a GPS tracking device allowable in a rental vehicle?**

From a policy perspective, there is no provision or regulations to allow the reservation. At this point, no departmental justification for this type of expense has been approved.

**53) Enterprise is allowing GPS tracking device and putting it on the direct bill. Is this an acceptable expense?**

No, this is not an allowable expense. You should dispute the expense if it is on your Enterprise receipt or report, and inform travelers that this is not allowable expense. The Statewide Travel Program is working with Enterprise on a continual basis to assure they inform their new/current Enterprise employees of this non-allowable expense and it should not be offered to state travelers.

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- 54) Currently for conferences with hotel room blocks, the travelers contact hotels directly using a specific code or instructions to secure the lodging rate reservations. Once the departments are fully transitioned, what happens with this process?**

For conference hotel room blocks, travelers will continue to book their reservation outside of Concur using the process specified.

- 55) Are commissioners that travel to Sacramento from around the state required to use Concur for their reservations?**

If travel is being booked and paid through the department, commissioners or their travel arrangers must book travel via Concur and/or CALTRAVELSTORE.