

# ECTOR COUNTY, TEXAS

## TRAVEL POLICY

NOVEMBER 11, 2007

The following policy is revised by the Ector County Commissioners' Court on this the 11th day of November, 2007 and takes the place of any previous County travel policy adopted by the previous Ector County Commissioners' Courts.

### General Definitions

1. Educational/Administrative Travel means a travel reimbursement paid to County employees who travel out-of-County for official educational seminars, conferences, and meetings. Travel expense forms must be submitted to claim reimbursement for educational/administrative travel. Items included on travel expense forms include meals, lodging, airline fares, use of personal auto, public transportation, conference registration fees, and other allowable costs incurred.
2. Law Enforcement Travel means travel by County law enforcement and correction departments. These travel expenses are associated directly to the transporting of prisoners or probationers, investigations, etc. Receipts are required for prisoners' meals and expenses.
3. Actual Expense means the actual cost of any allowable travel expense supported by proper receipts or statements.
4. Per Diem Allowance means a fixed daily rate paid in lieu of actual expenses for meals.
5. Day trip means a work-related trip whereby the employee does not sleep or rest a sufficient amount of time before returning home.
6. Authorized Signature means the signature of a Department Head, Elected Official, or employee authorized to approve claims for a County official whose authorization is on file with the County Auditor.
7. Official County Business means business in which County employees participate which is recognized by the Ector County Commissioners' Court as being official business of the County.
8. Traveling County Employee means the County official, department head or employee traveling on official County business who incurs expenses.
9. Auditor means the Ector County Auditor and his designated staff.
10. County Official or County Employee means any Ector County employee who is authorized to travel on official County business.
11. Travel Expense Form means the expense forms used to report all actual or estimated travel expense for official County business to be submitted to the County Auditor.

12. Normal Service Area or Home County means "Ector County" for most employees under this policy. However, the normal service area for individuals whose assigned work area is outside of Ector County, will be the County or counties in which that individual is assigned to work on a routine daily basis, regardless of their residence.

The intent of this policy is that when an employee is assigned to work in an area which is not his/her normal and daily assigned work area, then expenses for meals, lodging, etc. could be allowed, but is not intended to allow for commuting expenses.

### **Travel Expense Forms**

There are three (3) Travel Expense Forms used by Ector County to report travel expenses for official County business.

**Travel Expense Form No. 1** must be completed for **all** requests for reimbursement for official County business travel. Expense from all other travel expense forms must be brought forward to this form. If a travel advance is made, this form **must** be filed in order to relieve the employee from liability to the County for travel advances received. This form is due to the County Auditor within ten (10) days after returning to Ector County.

**Travel Expense Form No. 2** must be completed for **all** requests for reimbursement for transporting prisoners and is of primary concern to the Sheriff and Probation Departments. This form may be used as a travel advance for transporting prisoners but in any case, the total of this form must be transferred to Travel Expense Form No. 1 for final request for reimbursement.

**Travel Expense Form No. 3** must be completed for ALL requests for travel advances. This form must be received by the County Auditor no later than 12 p.m. (noon) on the first and third Tuesdays of each month. Travel Expense Form No. 1 **must always** be submitted on all advance requests after returning from official County travel.

Samples of all three of the travel expense forms are attached to this policy.

### **Responsibility Of Officials, Department Heads And Employees**

County Officials and Department Heads are expected to plan their out-of-County travel to achieve maximum economy and efficiency. All County reimbursable travel must be for **official County business only**.

It is the responsibility of the County Official or Department Head to see that all Travel Expense Forms are properly completed and signed before being submitted to the County Auditor.

If a travel advance is requested, it is the responsibility of the Official or Department Head to see that the form is presented to the County Auditor within the time restrictions set out on the travel forms. When the person receiving the travel advance returns to Ector County, it is the responsibility of the Official or Department Head to see the Travel Expense Form No. 1 is properly completed and submitted to the County Auditor within ten (10) days.

Any refund due the County from the Travel Advance will be submitted to the County Treasurer and a copy of the Treasurer's receipt will be attached to Travel Expense Form No. 1 which is submitted to the County Auditor.

It is the responsibility of the County Official or Department Head to see that all reimbursement forms to the State of Texas, or any other reimbursing agency other than the County, are promptly submitted to the reimbursing agency, and when reimbursements are received, to see that those funds are deposited with the County Treasurer and copies of the Treasurer's receipts are submitted to the County Auditor.

It is the responsibility of the person traveling on official County business to submit all lodging invoices and vouchers to the County Auditor on Travel Expense Form No. 1. The traveling employee will be reimbursed for meals at the per diem amount. No receipts are required for per diem allowances. Gratuities are covered in the per diem amount. Receipts must be submitted for transported prisoners' meals and expenses; per diem rates are not allowed for prisoners.

It is the responsibility of the traveling employee to provide copies of conference programs to support the payment of conference dues and registration fees.

In the event an official or employee of the County receives an overpayment for travel expenses, that overpayment is to be reimbursed within 10 days to the County.

If the Official or Department Head specifically identified the out of state travel in his/her budget documentation, and the travel budget was approved, then the out of state travel need not be submitted again for approval. Only that out of state travel not anticipated during the budgetary process must be presented to the Commissioners' Court for approval.

### **Per Diem Allowance**

Section 152.011 of the Texas Local Government Code gives the Commissioners' Court the authority to set travel expenses and other allowances for all County officials and employees. The Ector County Commissioners' Court allows reimbursement of travel expenses for County officials and employees who travel on official County business when funds have been allocated in departmental budgets for official County business.

The traveling employee will be reimbursed for meals at the per diem amount established by the Commissioners' Court. The traveling County employee will be reimbursed for other actual expenses incurred while traveling, provided the employee keeps invoices, receipts and all other documentation supporting the actual expenditures and this documentation is submitted to the County Auditor with Travel Expense Form No. 1.

The traveling County employee must submit receipts, conference program or itinerary, invoices and documentation for the following in order to be reimbursed.

- Airline Ticket
- Parking Garage Charges
- Lodging Statements
- Taxi Fares

Automobile Rentals & Fuel Cost  
Conference Registration and Fees  
Automobile Expense Charges for County Vehicles

A per diem for all meal expenses has been approved by the Ector County Commissioners' Court as follows: (Additional gratuity will not be allowed on per diem expense claims. Per diem amount is a flat, maximum rate.)

Morning Meal (maximum)	\$ 7.00
Noon Meal (maximum)	10.00
Evening Meal (maximum)	13.00

All other requests for reimbursement, including lodging, must have supporting documentation in order for the traveling employee to be reimbursed. If requests for reimbursement on Travel Expense Form No. 1 are not supported by documentation, the County Auditor will not honor the requests for reimbursement.

Per Diem expenses are not allowable for the costs of prisoners' meals and expenses. Actual receipts must be submitted to the County Auditor with Travel Expense Form No. 1 or requests for reimbursement will not be honored.

### **Meals**

Ector County will reimburse for County employee meals only. If the traveling County employee elects to purchase meals for friends or other County officials, that decision will be at the expense of the County employee and will not be reimbursed by the County.

Ector County will not reimburse the traveling County employee for meals that are included in the conference registration fees. If the County employee chooses to eat a meal other than the one provided for in the conference registration, that meal will be the personal expense of the employee and will not be reimbursed. The intent of this policy is that Ector County will not fund the same meal twice.

Ector County does not reimburse the traveling County employee for any type of alcoholic beverage or applicable taxes, whether with a meal or not.

In compliance with Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Code, Ector County does not reimburse the traveling County employee for meals on single day trips that do not require the employee to stay overnight. Law Enforcement employees are exempt from this IRS Code when transporting prisoners.

### **Lodging**

Ector County will reimburse the traveling County employee for the actual cost of lodging while traveling on official County business. The County employee will obtain an itemized lodging statement, which will be submitted with Travel Expense Form No. 1 when the employee returns to Ector County.

Those items which will be reimbursed on the hotel statement are:

- Daily Room Charges
- Necessary Hotel Taxes
- Business Telephone Calls
- Hotel Parking Fees

Those items which will NOT be reimbursed on the hotel statement are:

- Personal expense items such as cleaning or laundry
- Alcoholic beverage charges
- Hotel Club charges
- Recreation facilities use charges
- Movies and personal phone calls

Those items which will be reimbursed at a reasonable rate, based upon a sworn statement from the traveling County employee, when a receipt is not practical or available, are:

- Tips and Gratuities to Taxi/Shuttle Drivers and Porters

The County employee may obtain a travel advance for the actual lodging cost, including tax, if the travel advance is documented by the conference registration form which specifically reflects the lodging cost. If no documentation can be provided, the maximum lodging advance will be \$50.00 per night. If the actual lodging charges are more than the travel advance, the employee will be reimbursed for the difference upon proper submission of Travel Expense Form No. 1. If the actual lodging charges are less than the travel advance, the employee will reimburse Ector County for the difference within ten (10) days after returning. No tips or gratuities may be included in a travel advance.

Depending on travel arrangements, Ector County will reimburse the traveling County employee for a maximum of one-day lodging prior to the start of a conference or seminar, lodging during the time the conference or seminar is in session, and a maximum of one-day lodging after the end of the conference or seminar. Travel requests for more than the day before or the day after the actual starting date of the conference should include documentation to support the additional days. Events such as socials and recreational activities are not considered official County business.

### **Approved Types Of Transportation**

**Commercial Airlines** - Commercial airlines are normally the most economical mode of transportation, especially for out-of-state travel. Traveling County employees are encouraged to take advantage of reduced rates and coach seating rates for advance reservations. The cost of the airline ticket based on the date of purchase will determine the allowable expense. The cost to Ector County should not be any more than if the employee traveled alone. Airline tickets may be paid for in advance if the County employee submits a requisition and has attached an invoice or itinerary. Ector County will reimburse at the lowest available airline fare for the most direct airline route, when an airline fare receipt is submitted to the County Auditor on Travel Expense Form No. 1.

**Taxi, Bus, Shuttle Fares** - The traveling County employee will obtain receipts for taxi, bus or

shuttle fares and will be reimbursed by Ector County for those fares relating to County business. If receipts for these services are lost, a sworn statement from the traveling County employee relating to individual taxi, bus or limousine fares in relation to official County business will be accepted by the County Auditor after approval of the County Official or Department Head. Receipts or statements will be submitted to the County Auditor along with Travel Expense Form No. 1 upon return to Ector County.

**Auto Rental** - When it is necessary, or when it is more economical to rent a car than to utilize public transportation, the traveling County employee on official County business is entitled to reimbursement for the actual cost of the vehicle, including motor fuel and collision damage waiver insurance. Car rental agreements, along with copies of receipts for fuel and other auto expenses must be submitted to the County Auditor on Travel Expense Form No. 1 for reimbursement to the traveling County employee. Ector County will not reimburse for car rentals classified as luxury vehicles.

**Personal Automobiles** - Ector County will pay the traveling County employee the then current State-approved mileage rate for each mile of use of personal automobile on out of County official County business. The mileage payment will be based on the most direct route, using the State of Texas Mileage Guide, from Ector County to destination where County business takes place, plus a reasonable reimbursement for business mileage traveled while at destination. No other automobile expense will be paid to the traveling County employee other than the fixed price per mile.

County employees, traveling out of state, should use commercial airlines as the means of transportation; however, depending upon the destination of the out of state travel, the use of a personal vehicle may be the most effective and cost efficient means of transportation -- for example, Hobbs, New Mexico. Use of a personal vehicle instead of a commercial airline should be justified and approved by the Official or Department Head prior to the travel.

**County Owned Autos** - Ector County will only pay actual expenses, such as gas, oil or other such maintenance items. Receipts are required for all these items.

### **Local Transportation Expense Reimbursement**

Several departments in Ector County require their employees to travel within the County on official County business. When a County employee uses a personal automobile for this purpose, the employee may be reimbursed for use of personal auto on official County business at the then current State-approved mileage rate per mile.

Before an employee may be reimbursed for local transportation, there must first be a departmental budget allocation for Local Transportation. This allocation will be made during budget hearings or through a budget amendment made by the Ector County Commissioners' Court.

When there is a departmental budget allocation, the County employee requesting reimbursement for local transportation expense must complete a form for this purpose, obtain Department Head approval, and submit to the County Auditor for reimbursement.

The form to be used is Local Transportation Expense Reimbursement Form. A supply of these forms is available in the County Auditor's Office.

Reimbursement for local transportation is made from speedometer readings on the personal auto and a description of the purpose of the official County business. Local transportation reimbursement will be based on the most direct route to and from the destination.

A copy of the Local Transportation Reimbursement Form is attached to this policy.

### **Travel Examples To Help Answer Your Questions**

You are a County department head. You have budgeted for your state association conference which will be held this year in Austin. The conference is scheduled to start on a Wednesday morning and will last through Friday.

You receive a copy of your association conference program telling you the dates the conference will be held and containing pre-registration information. You decide you will fly Southwest Airlines. If you make your reservation now, you will have the benefit of a reduced airfare.

**QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY PAY FOR MY ADVANCE RESERVATIONS ON SOUTHWEST AIRLINES?**

**ANSWER:** Ector County will pay for advance airline reservation fares. When the airline fare is determined, you should complete a requisition and send to the County Auditor for processing. This form should be received by the County Auditor no later than 12 p.m. (noon) on the first and third Tuesdays of the month.

**QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY PAY ADVANCE CONFERENCE REGISTRATION?**

**ANSWER:** Ector County will pay advance conference registration. As in the previous question, the advance requisition will be submitted to the County Auditor. You must attach a copy of the conference program to the travel expense form which will show the conference registration fees and what the fees cover.

Two weeks before you are to depart for your conference, you decide you will need a travel advance for meals and lodging.

**QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY ADVANCE MONEY FOR MEALS AND LODGING?**

**ANSWER:** Ector County will advance you for meals and lodging. Here again, you will be required to file advance Travel Expense Form No. 3 to receive this advance. You can use the maximum allowable Per Diem for meals and lodging to complete the Travel Form. Since the County has already paid your conference registration and two meals were included in the registration fee, you will not ask for travel advance for those two meals. Since you will arrive

in Austin Tuesday afternoon, you may ask for a lodging advance for Tuesday evening. You are scheduled to return on Friday evening so you will not ask for lodging reimbursement for Friday.

When I arrive in Austin, I will need transportation to the conference hotel.

QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY PAY FOR MY TRANSPORTATION TO THE HOTEL?

ANSWER: Ector County will pay for your transportation cost to the hotel PROVIDED you get a receipt for your fare. Almost all local transportation services give receipts for their fares. If receipts for these services are lost, a sworn statement from the traveling County employee relating to the mode of transportation may be submitted.

After you check in to your hotel, you meet with friends and decide to go to a nice restaurant for dinner. You, along with your friends, share a taxi to the restaurant.

QUESTION: Will Ector County pay for my portion of the taxi fare to and from the restaurant?

ANSWER: Ector County will not pay for your portion of the taxi fare. The County reimburses only those items which are for Official County Business. Your taking a taxi to a nice restaurant for dinner is not classified as Official County Business.

When you get to the restaurant, you enjoy the hospitality and dinner. Your total bill for the evening was \$25, including tips.

QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR THIS MEAL?

ANSWER: Ector County will reimburse you only the per diem rate. Ector County will not pay for any other meal other than your own and will not reimburse for any alcoholic beverage cost.

After dinner, you and your friends go to a local theater for entertainment.

QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR ENTERTAINMENT COSTS?

ANSWER: Ector County will not reimburse you for personal entertainment. If however, the entertainment is part of the conference registration fee, that is paid for by the County when registration fees are paid.

On Wednesday morning you order room service for breakfast.

QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR ROOM SERVICE?

ANSWER: Ector County will reimburse you the stated per diem rate.

You attend the conference meeting all day. Although there is a banquet, and the banquet is provided through the conference registration fee, you and some of your friends decide to go back to that excellent restaurant you visited last night.

QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR THIS MEAL?

ANSWER: Ector County will not reimburse you for your meal because the County has already paid for your meal through the registration fees. The meal is on you!

Your hotel room is furnished with snacks and soft drinks. If used, they will be charged to your room.

QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY REIMBURSE ME IF I CHARGE THESE SNACKS TO MY ROOM?

ANSWER: Ector County will not reimburse you for these snacks.

You call in to your office each day you are attending the conference to see if there are any problems. The phone calls are charged to your room.

QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR THOSE PHONE CALLS?

ANSWER: Ector County will reimburse you for telephone calls made that are considered Official County Business calls. Ector County will not reimburse you for calls made to your home or other personal business.

After the conference on Friday, you decide to spend the next two days in Austin and return to Odessa on Sunday.

QUESTION: Will Ector County reimburse me for meals and lodging after the conference has ended?

ANSWER: If your extended stay has to do with Official County Business, Ector County will reimburse you for the meals at the stated per diem meal rate and for lodging. Examples of Official County Business may be that you are an officer in your association and you are required to extend your stay for additional meetings, or you will be meeting with your state senator or representative concerning the operation of your office or Ector County, or you are meeting with a state agency for County purposes. If your extended stay has to do with your own personal R&R, however, the extra cost would be yours and not Ector County's, and therefore would not be reimbursed.

When checking in and out of the hotel, and riding back to the airport in the hotel limo, you give tips to the bellmen and drivers.

QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR TIPS?

ANSWER: Ector County will reimburse you for reasonable tips. Since you will not likely receive a receipt supporting your tips, a sworn statement concerning the

amount of the tip and what it was for will be sufficient for reimbursement. (A dollar per bag is generally a reasonable tip for each porter and driver who actually assists you.)

When you return to Odessa, you must pay parking garage fees at the airport.

QUESTION: WILL ECTOR COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR AIRPORT PARKING FEES?

ANSWER: Ector County will pay for airport parking while you are away on Official County Business. Keep your receipt and attach to reimbursement request.

You are now back at work and want to be reimbursed for your travel expense.

QUESTION: HOW CAN I BE REIMBURSED FOR ACTUAL TRAVEL EXPENSES?

ANSWER: You must now file Travel Expense Form No. 1 supporting all of the requests you have made for reimbursement. You will deduct any advance travel expense funds you have received on the line provided on Travel Expense Form No. 1. If you have problems with your Travel Expense Form, you will want to bring all of your travel receipts and documentation to the County auditors office for assistance. Remember, Travel Expense Form No. 1 MUST BE FILED NO LATER THAN 10 DAYS AFTER YOU RETURN TO ECTOR COUNTY.