

# THE NEED FOR A PASSPORT SYSTEM THAT SERVES CANADIANS

As an open trading economy the ability for British Columbians to be able to access the necessary travel documentation through a timely and efficient process is critical to our ability to prosper as an economy in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

While the Chamber acknowledges that the administration process for passports has been placed under significant recent pressure due to an unprecedented level of demand (largely driven by the introduction of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative), this has simply focused public attention on the deficiencies in the application system and the pressure this places on the applicant.

While the Chamber believes that some of this pressure can be attributed to an increase in British Columbia's profile on the global stage we cannot ignore the impact of WHTI.

Following the adoption by the US Congress of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act all travelers from Western Hemisphere countries, including US citizens and Canadians, were required to have "approved" documentation. The result of this legislation is the introduction of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

While there is significant work being undertaken as to the nature of this documentation at present the only documentation that will meet the criteria is a passport, along with niche programs such as NEXUS.

This, combined with the fact that travel across the border by air already requires compliance with WHTI with land and sea to follow in 2009, has placed significant pressures on Passport Canada.

Primary amongst the deficiencies in the current system is the fact that Canadian passports are only valid for a period of five years. This is in direct contrast to the majority of our international competitors, the majority of which have passport validity of ten years. As examples the United States, most European Union countries (including the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy), and Australia are all countries that issue passports with a lifespan of ten years. This is further exacerbated by the lack of an expedited renewal process in Canada, against in contrast to our international competitors.

The Chamber believes that the system is facing significant increases in the number of applications. In 2005-2006 Passport Canada faced unprecedented volume pressures; over 3.1 million Canadians received their passports in this fiscal year, representing an increase of 16.15% over last year. While this results in the positive fact that over 39% of Canadian citizens now hold valid passports it also means that without new processes to complement the new technology approaches the high level of passport holders will simply increase pressure in the future as these individuals go through the process of renewing.

The increase in applications outlined above sow the seeds for continued pressure on the system in the years ahead. In most other countries once you have received your passport you would not normally re-enter the system for 10 years. However given the 5 year lifespan of Canadian passports Canadians will be re-entering the system for a second time at 10 years.

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A simple way to view the pressure would be to realize that to renew the 3.1 million passports currently held by Canadians would require 6.2 million passport applications over a 10 year period. However, if we had a 10 year passport lifespan Passport Canada would only be processing 3.1 million applications. This is not only a significant cost saving but will reduce the pressure on new applications as well.

The Chamber acknowledges and welcomes initiatives by Passport Canada to introduce new systems and processes to improve the service provided to Canadians. These initiatives include the immediate verification on an individual's previous record. This change is intended to allow Passport Canada to eliminate the need to present proof of citizenship for renewal applications. This change is also intended to remove the need to obtain the signature of a guarantor, once this information has been electronically archived.

The Chamber also welcomes the initiative undertaken by Passport Canada to trial a new Passport Renewal Process. In 2005 Passport Canada introduced an approach which saw them invite qualified individuals to utilize a simplified application process. This approach saw 22,617 passports issued using the new process.

Passport Canada are in the process of assessing all the impacts of this program to determine both the programs success and the capacity of the organization to roll the program out to all passport holders.

While the Chamber agrees with a need for review of any new program to assess effectiveness both from an operational and financial perspective the need for passport renewal process is immediate.

The Chamber believes that the federal government must take a leadership role in ensuring that Passport Canada have the direction and capacity to immediately introduce a program that both extends the life of the passport while also expediting passport renewals for individuals who have already gone through the screening process required by Passport Canada.

A final area of concern for the Chamber is the ability of Canadians from outside the major urban centers to access passport offices.

Many individuals who need a passport quickly are often challenged by their ability to access either a Passport Canada office or a receiving agent, particularly in regions outside major metropolitan areas.

The need to access these locations, particularly Passport Canada Offices is highlighted by the varying process times for various application choices. As highlighted by Passport Canada website applications received by mail have a 4 week processing time, in person at a Passport Canada office takes 2 weeks, with processing times at a receiving agent being 3 weeks at a Canada Post office and 4 weeks at a Service Canada center.

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In BC individuals are able to access Passport Canada Offices in just 4 communities; Richmond, Surrey, Vancouver and Victoria. These locations are complemented by a further 5 locations for receiving agents, Courtenay, Kamloops, Kelowna, Prince George, and Terrace.

Simply put this means that unless you are located in the Lower Mainland of the Capital Regional District you are unable to access a Passport Canada office and therefore a 2 week processing time.

The future economic priorities for British Columbia will increasingly be international as we enter the Pacific Century. Without the ability of British Columbians to access a responsive passport system that is focused on the needs of the applicant, while maintaining the necessary security provisions, our ability to access these opportunities will be lost to our major competitors.

## THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Federal Government;

raise the validity date for Canadian passports to a ten-year period from the present five-year period.

mandate Passport Canada (Registration (SI 81-860)) to introduce an expedited process for individuals applying for a renewed process, on the understanding that the individual will have undergone the initial security screening process required by Passport Canada.

as part of this renewal process introduce a fee structure that provides differing fee levels that reflects the inputs and costs from both the applicant and government;

establish additional passport offices in regional centres outside major metropolitan areas where a desire and capacity exists.

Submitted by the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce