

UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION  
Thirty-First Session

**United States' Comments on "Recommendations on Tourism Statistics"  
(Provisional ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/83/Rev. 1, December 27, 1999) and on  
"Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA): Methodological References"  
(Provisional ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/80, December 27, 1999)**

The United States cannot support publication of the draft manuals, "Recommendations on Tourism Statistics" and "Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA): Methodological References," in their current form.

The draft "Recommendations on Tourism Statistics" establish a definition of tourism (paragraph 1.6) and provide a set of criteria (paragraph 1.8) to guide the preparation of these statistics. The definition of tourism includes *all* of the activities of tourism, and the criteria demand comparability of the statistics over time and between countries. Thus, the tourism services from passenger vehicles owned by households and businesses should be included within the product classification, Passenger Transport Services, in the *tourism* accounts.<sup>1</sup> This recommendation would allow these important services and the tourism-related portion of investment made in these vehicles to be included in tourism accounts, which is particularly important in countries where such services are significant.

In the draft manuals on tourism accounts, transportation is identified as a major activity of tourism that must be measured. Transportation services, while essential to tourism, are provided by different modes in different countries. If we are to make comparisons of tourism demand between countries, the accounts must capture the transportation expenditures for *all* modes of transportation. Some countries rely heavily on such transportation services as rail and air; in other countries, and in particular in the United States, personal vehicular travel is a key part of tourism demand. According to the most recently published "American Travel Survey," 82 percent of leisure trips made in the United States in 1995 used personally-owned passenger vehicles.<sup>2</sup> If the tourism services furnished by owned passenger vehicles are excluded, it will be impossible to make meaningful comparisons of transportation expenditures for tourism among countries. Therefore, a comprehensive measure of passenger vehicle services that includes tourism services is needed.

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<sup>1</sup>Simply stated, expenditures on tourism services should not fall because tourists use their own cars, rather than renting them.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, "American Travel Survey," 1995. Leisure trips include long distance trips (100 miles or more from home one way) for rest and relaxation, sightseeing, outdoor recreation, entertainment, and shopping.

The TTSA's define tourism in terms of visitors traveling outside their "usual environment," or a minimum distance between 50 to 100 miles from residence one way.

Including tourism services of passenger vehicles would also address the serious problem in measuring tourism in countries, such as the United States, where a rising proportion of passenger vehicles are leased rather than purchased. Over the past 5 years, households in the United States have shifted more and more from purchases of passenger vehicles to leases. This rise has blurred the distinction between services from rentals (short-term), leasing (long-term), and ownership of passenger vehicles in the national accounts. While the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA 1993) decision to exclude the services of passenger vehicles may be appropriate for measuring a country's national accounts, in the Tourism Satellite Accounts, where the objective is to highlight travel and tourism activities, the exclusion of the tourism services of passenger vehicles ignores the major purpose of satellite accounts as stated in the SNA 1993; that is, to extend the flexibility of the national accounts framework and permit measurement and analysis beyond what can be accomplished under the central framework.

Implementation of the U.S. recommendation would be relatively simple:

- First, the definition of tourism activities for the satellite account would be expanded to include the services of passenger vehicles owned by households, businesses, and government. As is the case with any manual on the preparation of economic statistics, one needs to define the conceptual and theoretical basis for measuring a set of activities.
- Second, once the appropriate concepts of what is to be measured have been established, questions about empirical measurement can then be considered. The conceptual framework would help to determine the feasibility and desirability of estimating these services.
- Third, for countries where such services are significant, the manuals would provide guidelines to include these important services and the tourism-related portion of investment made in these vehicles. These countries could provide estimates including and excluding the services of owned passenger vehicles to show changes in the production boundary and to allow international comparisons among countries. Estimates would not be made by countries that do not have significant tourism expenditures on the services from owned passenger vehicles, or cannot readily measure these services.