

APEC Business Travel Card

The importance of the Asia Pacific Gateway to Canada's trade with Pacific Rim countries cannot be overstated. Over the last several years, significant investment has been made into the Gateway with a view to increasing trade of goods and services between Canada and APEC countries. Free Trade Agreements Negotiations are underway with South Korea and India and exploratory talks about Free Trade are taking place with Japan. With the growth of business travel between member nations of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation of which Canada is a signatory, and our free trade partners, the increasing demand for qualified personnel and the growing scarcity of skilled personnel, there is an accelerating need for travel between Canada and other APEC member nations by executives, professionals and technical specialists.

The APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) provides a three-year-cleared multiple-entry visa valid for all participating APEC economies, with the added perk of using specially-designated "fast track" immigration lanes at major international gateways. It also allows the ABTC card-holders to work in member countries for a period of time on each entry – said period of time varying from country to country. Although Canada, a member of APEC, allows ABTC visa-holders to enter and work in Canada, the Canadian government has not yet put in place the mechanisms required to allow Canadian businessmen reciprocal arrangements (i.e., hold an ABTC). We recognize that implementation of this program would come at a certain cost to the Canadian government. However, the benefits to the business community and increase in Canada's GDP would far outweigh the costs. It must also be recognized that, although it may presently appear that there would not be many business people interested in the travel card, this would increase once the card is available and as Canada negotiates more free trade agreements with APEC countries.

This situation impedes the normal conduct of business between Canada and APEC member countries with Canadian businessmen being at a significant disadvantage. There is a need for a solution to this that will ensure that qualified individuals can know in advance that they will be able to enter APEC countries, while ensuring at the same time that the need for security has been met.

The free movement of executive, professional and technical specialist personnel between Canada and other APEC member countries would be a desirable outcome. This is especially important in that APEC is reported to presently be in negotiations with the European Union for recognition of the ABTC. Given Canada's present trade negotiations with the EU and possible trade agreement, access to the EU is vital and an ABTC type of card would be of great benefit to Canadian business travellers.

Recommendation

That the federal government implement the APEC Business Travel Card for Canadian business travellers to provide them with a level playing field with business travellers from member APEC nations.

Submitted by the Vancouver Board of Trade

The International Affairs Committee supports this resolution.