



## Public Policy Goals 116<sup>th</sup> Congress

One of the pillars of the Southeast Tourism Society is to serve as a unified voice on matters of legislation, public policy and the future of the tourism sector. Through the leadership of the Board of Directors' Advocacy Pillar Committee, the aim of STS's public policy agenda is to advance travel and tourism as a driving force for economic growth and job creation, a vital partner for preserving the culture and history of the Southeast, and showcasing the exceptional travel experiences of the region.

In order to ensure the tourism sector remains an engine of growth, STS advances these policy priorities in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress:

### Strong Investments in the Nation's Transportation Infrastructure

America's economic vitality, ability to compete in the global economy, and a thriving tourism sector are dependent on dynamic and efficient transportation systems. While the current transportation infrastructure has served the nation and the tourism sector well, the challenges to our transportation system are numerous. Our vital transportation infrastructure shows signs of aging. Increased congestion on our highways, railways, airports and seaports reduces our nation's economic productivity. With the rise in transportation security programs has come a need to train the frontline workers in customer service skills. Perhaps most troubling, the programs the tourism sector are directly dependent upon, such as enhancements, scenic byways, recreational trails and Federal land roads are consistently under-funded. America has built one of the greatest transportation infrastructures in the world, but much work remains to ensure that our national transportation policy connects communities, tourism, and the economy. **STS supports federal transportation priorities that allow travelers to better navigate communities, priorities investments in important transportation corridors, and ensures that tourism continues to make travel an enjoyable experience.**

## Preserve and Promote America's Cultural, Historic and Natural Resources

Each year more than two billion visits are made to the public lands that comprise the nation's natural, cultural, historical, and wildlife resources. Some of the Southeastern states' greatest tourism resources are its cultural and natural sites. One of the challenges in preserving and promoting these sites is that the management of these shared resources is the responsibility of an array of state and federal land agencies, including the National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, United States Forest Service, and United States Army Corps of Engineers. STS has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with 12 federal agencies to provide a forum for better collaboration and understanding of the travel and tourism sector. Sound national investment strategies are needed to preserve, protect, and improve all of these public resources.

- Provide sufficient appropriations for federal public lands agencies to ensure public access to the national parks, wildlife refuges, national forests, battlefields, monuments, historic sites and other public lands, enhance visitor facilities and services, and fulfill the mission to conserve critical natural, historic, and cultural resources.
- Address the National Park Service's deferred maintenance backlog, which totals nearly \$12 billion in repair costs. NPS maintains more than 75,000 assets across the country, including campgrounds, natural lands, historic trails, irrigation and electrical systems, as well as thousands of miles of roads. Of these, 41,000 – or more than half – are in need of repairs. A long term solution to managing these national resources is needed.
- Implement consistent and user-friendly electronic systems for applying and paying entrance, recreation, and permit fees, as well as purchasing entrance passes. In addition, these systems must streamline permitting and allow for the processing of single and multiple permits. Effective utilization of technology is a challenge for organizations of all size and scope but investing in technology solutions for the federal land agencies will produce immediate dividends of accountability, efficiency, and convenience, as well as facilitating visitor access to public lands venues.
- Improve coordination and cooperation with Gateway Communities. Hundreds of communities throughout the nation serve as gateways for the millions of visitors to our national parks, forests, and other federal public lands. STS supports efforts to strengthen collaborations with Gateway Communities by revitalizing the Preserve America grants program and directing the National Park Service to partner with Gateway Communities on promotional and educational programs.

- Modernize management of the National Heritage Areas Program and secure stable funding. For two decades, NPS has administered a national heritage areas program under its mission to preserve nationally significant natural and historic resources. Successful national heritage areas embody locally driven partnerships that emphasize local control of land use, and blend education, cultural conservation, resource preservation, and recreation and community revitalization. Stable and consistent funding would allow local communities to better leverage this vital program for community and economic development.

**STS supports federal investments and programs to ensure our public lands are preserved and protected for future generations and that the health and growth of gateway communities is a priority.**

## **Advance the National Travel and Tourism Strategy and Brand USA**

The National Travel and Tourism Strategy (NTTS) charts a new course toward making America a more attractive and accessible destination than ever before to international visitors. Developed in 2012 by the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the Interior, the five point plan identified concrete steps to promote the nation's iconic sights and off the beaten path destinations and achieve overarching goals. The NTTS needs to be updated with a 10-year plan that commits the U.S. to a goal of 116 million annual international visitors by 2028, representing \$445 billion in yearly travel and tourism experts.

Integral to reaching the goals of the NTTS is the international promotional efforts of Brand USA, the nation's first destination marketing organization. Brand USA was created in 2010, under the Travel Promotion Act and has been reauthorized through 2020. **Recognizing the foundational role Brand USA plays in marketing America to the world and its demonstrable impact on the U.S. economy, STS strongly supports continuing the reauthorization and funding framework for Brand USA through 2027.**

## **Lay a Strong Foundation for America's 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration That Ensures Every Community Will Have the Opportunity to Participate and Leverage the Benefits of Tourism**

In 2026, America will celebrate its 250<sup>th</sup> birthday and the public will be encouraged to connect with the nation's special places and experience its unique stories. **STS calls for making needed investments in policies and programs to ensure that all communities large and small are able to engage in the national celebration and the economic benefits of tourism are fully leveraged and shared broadly.**

## Reinforce the Connection Between Food, Culture, and Tourism

Food is an essential element in telling the story of a community. Drawing on history, culture, and local agriculture, chefs, restaurateurs, craft brewers, distillers, vintners, farmers markets, and culinary shops are illuminating the rich traditions and agricultural resources of their communities and the Southeast. By connecting with tourism, these small businesses and creative professionals are expanding their audience while helping to deliver extraordinary travel experiences. **STS supports federal policies to help these dynamic businesses grow, foster collaboration, and promote their products and communities.**

## Strengthen the Federal Voice on Tourism Issues

STS is committed to educating Members of Congress on the economic importance of travel and tourism to local communities, states, and the nation, and ensuring the interests of tourism are heard and considered in major policy debates. Additionally, STS will be working to connect interested Members of Congress with the Federal Tourism Interagency Partners to build collaborations and ensure the development of strong federal tourism policies and programs. **STS encouraged all members of the Southeast congressional delegation to join the Congressional Travel & Tourism Caucus as an excellent resource for information and collaboration on the key issues impact the tourism sector.**

## Recognize Domestic Tourism as a Key Economic Generator and Jobs Creator

The travel and tourism sector is an engine of economic growth. In 2017, direct travel spending in the U.S by domestic visitors was \$880 billion, a 5.2% increase over the previous year and comprises 85% of the U.S. travel and tourism market. With the creation of Brand USA, federal policymakers recognized that international tourism needs to be nurtured and promoted to reach its full economic impact, so too must domestic tourism. **STS is committed to working with federal policymakers to ensure the economic benefits of travel and tourism are fully leveraged and shared broadly by the states, communities, small business, and tourism workers.**