TRAVEL

Dts Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet

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Understanding the DTS Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet

Navigating the complexities of government travel can be a daunting task, especially when your itinerary doesn't fit the standard point-to-point model. For military personnel and government civilians, the Defense Travel System (DTS) is the primary tool for authorizing, booking, and reimbursing official travel. However, when your travel involves multiple stops, side trips, or a route that is more efficient than the standard government fare, you will encounter a critical document: the **DTS Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet**. This article serves as a comprehensive guide to understanding, completing, and leveraging this worksheet to ensure you are reimbursed fairly and in full compliance with the Joint Travel Regulations (JTR).

What is a Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet?

At its core, a Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet is a formal document used within the DTS environment to compare the cost of a traveler's actual itinerary against the cost of a standard, government-procured city-pair fare. The "constructed fare" is a special airfare built by combining multiple segments to match a traveler's unique itinerary, which may deviate from a direct route. The worksheet ensures that the government does not pay more for this customized routing than it would for the most direct and economical standard fare available.

The primary purpose of the worksheet is to justify the use of a constructed fare over a standard city-pair fare. When a traveler needs to make stops for official business, attend a conference en route to their final destination, or return from a different location than they departed from, they cannot simply book a direct flight. Instead, a travel agent or the traveler themselves must build a fare that covers all the necessary segments. The worksheet then presents a side-by-side comparison, verifying that the total cost of the constructed itinerary is equal to or less than the cost of a standard round-trip or one-way city-pair fare between the original point of origin and the final destination.

Why is the Worksheet Necessary?

The necessity of the Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet stems directly from the Fly America Act and the City Pair Program (CPP). The CPP is a contract between the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) and commercial airlines that provides deeply discounted, government-specific fares on thousands of routes. These city-pair fares are typically the most cost-effective option for government travelers.

However, the CPP is designed for direct, point-to-point travel. When a traveler's journey does not align with a simple out-and-back route, the constructed fare becomes a viable alternative. The worksheet acts as a safeguard against "creative routing" that might inflate travel costs. By mandating this comparison, the JTR ensures that the government is always choosing the most economical method of air transportation, even when the traveler's schedule is complex. If the constructed fare is higher than the city-pair alternative, the traveler is reimbursed only up to the cost of the standard fare, unless authorized by a more senior official.

Key Components of the Worksheet

A properly completed DTS Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet includes several essential data points. Understanding each component is crucial for accurate completion and faster approval.

Traveler Information and Itinerary

The top section of the worksheet captures basic identifying information, including the traveler's name, organizational unit, and travel order number. This is followed by a detailed breakdown of the actual itinerary, including dates, flight numbers, departure and arrival cities, and the cost of each segment. This section must match the travel authorization in DTS exactly.

City Pair Fare Calculation

The next critical section calculates the cost of the standard city-pair fare. For a round trip, this compares the cost of a direct flight from the official government point of origin to the official government destination. For example, if a traveler departs from Washington, D.C., and their final destination is San Diego, the city-pair cost would be the lowest available contract fare between DCA (or IAD) and SAN for those specific travel dates. This figure represents the "ceiling" for reimbursement.

Constructed Fare Calculation

This is where the actual, multi-segment itinerary is priced out. The worksheet lists every leg of the journey, the fare for each leg, and the total cost of the constructed itinerary. This total is then compared directly to the city-pair cost calculated in the previous section.

Justification and Approval

Finally, the worksheet includes a space for a narrative justification. This is where the traveler or their approving official explains the necessity of the non-standard routing. Common justifications include "TDY en route," "attendance at a multiple-day training conference," or "emergency leave followed by official travel." The approving official's signature (digital or physical) certifies that the constructed travel is the most advantageous to the government considering cost and mission requirements.

Step-by-Step Guide to Completing the Worksheet

Completing the Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet does not have to be intimidating. By following a structured approach, you can ensure accuracy and compliance.

1. Plan Your Itinerary Carefully: Before entering anything into DTS, map out your exact travel dates and locations. Ensure you have approval from your supervisor for any official stops or deviations from your primary duty location.
2. Obtain Fare Quotes: Work with your organization's travel management center or use approved travel booking tools to obtain two sets of quotes. First, get a quote for the standard city-pair fare for your origin and final destination. Second, get a quote for the constructed itinerary that includes all your official stops.
3. Complete the Worksheet Form (DD Form 1610 or DTS Equivalent): Most organizations utilize an electronic version of the DD Form 1610 or a built-in DTS module. Input the traveler information, the city-pair cost, and the constructed fare cost.
4. Calculate the Difference: The worksheet will automatically calculate the difference between the two fares. If the constructed fare is higher, the difference may not be reimbursed without additional authorization (a waiver). If it is lower, the constructed fare is clearly the superior option.
5. Write a Clear Justification: Be specific. Instead of writing "official business," write "Multiple official site visits are required in three different cities between origin and final destination to complete the audit." A strong justification increases the likelihood of quick approval.
6. Attach to Your Authorization: In DTS, the completed worksheet must be attached as a document to your travel authorization. It will then be reviewed by the approving official alongside your itinerary.

Common Scenarios Requiring This Worksheet

Several common travel scenarios will almost always necessitate the use of a Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet. Recognizing these situations ahead of time will save you significant effort.

- TDY En Route: You are traveling from Home Station to a permanent duty station, but you must stop at a third location for temporary duty (TDY) before arriving at your final destination.
- Multiple Official Destinations: Your TDY requires you to visit Kansas City, Denver, and Phoenix sequentially before returning home. There is no direct city-pair fare covering this triangle.
- Round Trip to Different Airports: You fly from Los Angeles to San Francisco for a meeting, but your return flight must be from Oakland because you are meeting a colleague. Your origin and destination airports do not match.
- Emergency Travel Combined with Official Travel: You are on leave, but a crisis occurs, and you must travel directly from your leave location to an official duty station rather than returning to your home station first.

Potential Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Even experienced travelers can make mistakes on the Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet. Being aware of common errors will help you avoid delays and potential denial of reimbursement.

Incorrect City Pair Selection

A frequent mistake is using the wrong origin or destination when calculating the city-pair fare. The city-pair comparison must always be between your official point of origin (usually your home station or the airport closest to your residence) and your official final destination. Using an intermediate stop as the destination for the comparison is incorrect and will result in an inaccurate cost comparison.

Incomplete Justification

A weak or vague justification is a surefire way to have your worksheet kicked back for revision. "Operational necessity" is too general. Instead, tie your justification directly to the mission. For example: "Routing through Dallas is cost-advantageous because the cost of the constructed fare ($1,200) is $400 less than the city-pair fare ($1,600), and it allows for a mandatory 24-hour equipment inspection en route."

Failing to Include All Segments

Forgetting to include a ground transportation segment, a layover, or a connecting flight on the constructed side can invalidate the comparison. Every leg of the journey must be accounted for and priced out. If you drive a rental car between two work sites, the cost of that segment must be included in the constructed fare total.

Best Practices for Approving Officials

For those in a supervisory or approving role, reviewing the Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet requires a critical eye.

Verify the Comparison: Ensure the city-pair cost used for comparison is correct for the specific dates of travel. City-pair fares can change based on demand and contract periods. A quote pulled from the wrong date is invalid.

Assess the Justification: Does the justification clearly demonstrate that the routing is in the best interest of the government? A well-written justification is the cornerstone of a compliant authorization.

Check for Waivers: If the constructed fare is higher, ensure that any required waiver or higher-level approval has been obtained before approving the authorization. Allowing an authorization without proper waiver documentation creates a liability for the organization.

The Role of the Worksheet in Modern Government Travel

In the evolving landscape of government travel, where flexibility and mission focus are paramount, the Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet remains a vital tool. It bridges the gap between the rigid structure of the City Pair Program and the dynamic, real-world needs of the military and civil service. By embracing the worksheet as a planning tool rather than just an administrative hurdle, travelers and approving officials can unlock more efficient and strategic travel options.

The worksheet empowers travelers to take ownership of their itineraries by requiring them to demonstrate fiscal responsibility. It also provides a clear, auditable trail that satisfies regulatory requirements under the JTR. For organizations, consistent and accurate use of the worksheet reduces the risk of improper payments and audit findings. It is a clear example of how a procedural requirement can drive better financial outcomes while supporting operational flexibility.

Conclusion

The DTS Constructed Travel Comparison Worksheet is far more than a bureaucratic formality. It is a critical instrument for ensuring that government travel is both mission-effective and cost-efficient. By understanding its purpose, mastering its components, and adhering to best practices, travelers can navigate complex itineraries with confidence, secure in the knowledge that they will be reimbursed correctly while upholding the principles of fiscal stewardship. Whether you are preparing for a multi-stop TDY or a complex return from a remote location, taking the time to correctly complete this worksheet is an investment in a smooth and stress-free travel experience. Remember, a well-documented constructed travel comparison is your best defense against audit findings and your strongest justification for the travel that your mission demands.

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