

# UPSHUR COUNTY TRAVEL POLICY

12/30/2010 updated

The following policy is adopted by the Upshur County Commissioners Court to be effective immediately and replaces any previous county travel policy, custom, or practice.

## GENERAL DEFINITIONS

1. **Educational Travel** means travel out-of-county for official educational seminars, conferences, and meetings. Travel expense forms must be submitted to claim reimbursement for educational travel. Items included on travel expense forms include by way of example meals, lodging, airline fares, and use of personal auto, public transportation, and conference registration fees.
2. **Actual Expense** means the actual cost of any allowable travel expense supported by proper receipts or statements.
3. **Per Diem Allowance** means the approved Upshur County per diem rate paid in lieu of actual expenses for meals and incidental expenses.
4. **Authorized Signature** means the signature of a Department Head, Elected Official, or employee authorized to approve claims for a county official or employee. This authorization must be on file in the County Auditor's office.
5. **Official County Business** means business in which a county employee or official participates in an activity recognized by the County Commissioners Court as being official business of the county.
6. **Traveling County Employee** means the county official, department head, or employee traveling on official county business who accrues expenses to be reimbursed by the county.
7. **Auditor** means County Auditor or designated staff.
8. **Treasurer** means County Treasurer or designated staff.
9. **County Official or County Employee** means any county employee or official who is authorized to travel on official county business.
10. **Travel Expense Forms** means the expense forms used to report all actual or estimated travel expenses for official county business to be submitted to the County Auditor for reimbursement.
11. **Travel Time** means the employee will be considered "on the clock" while traveling from Gilmer, Texas, to the destination site and while returning to Gilmer, Texas.

## **RESPONSIBILITY OF OFFICIALS, DEPARTMENT HEADS AND EMPLOYEES**

**County Elected Officials and Department Heads are expected to plan the out-of-county travel for themselves and their employees to achieve maximum economy and efficiency. The purpose of the travel should be the same as that travel approved in the individual departmental budgets in any particular fiscal year. All county reimbursed travel must be for OFFICIAL COUNTY BUSINESS ONLY.**

**It is the responsibility of the Elected Official or Department Head to see that all Travel Expense Forms are properly completed and signed before being sent to the County Auditor.**

**If a travel advance (Travel Advance Form) is requested, it is the responsibility of the Elected Official or Department Head to see that the Travel Advance Form is presented to the County Auditor within the time restrictions set out on the travel forms. When the person receiving the travel advance returns to the county, it is the responsibility of the Employee to see that the Travel Expense Form is properly completed, signed by the Elected Official or Department Head and sent to the County Auditor within five (5) business days.**

**Any refund due the county from the Travel Advance will be submitted to the County Treasurer and a copy of the Treasurer's receipt will be attached to Travel Expense Form when it is turned in.**

**It is the responsibility of the Elected Official or Department Head to see that all reimbursement forms to the State of Texas, or any other reimbursing agency other than the county, are promptly submitted to the reimbursing agency. When reimbursements are received they should see that those funds are deposited with the County Treasurer and copies of the receipts sent to the County Auditor.**

**It is the responsibility of the person traveling on official county business to keep all lodging invoices and vouchers to be submitted to the Auditor on the Travel Expense Form. The employee must submit supporting invoices or statements with the Travel Expense Form to receive reimbursement for actual expenses for travel and other related expenses. The traveling employee will be reimbursed for meals at the Upshur County per diem rate.**

**It is the responsibility of the traveling employee to provide copies of conference programs to support the payment of conference dues and registration fees.**

**In the event an official or employee of the county receives an overpayment (through a requested travel reimbursement advance) for travel expenses, that overpayment will immediately be reimbursed to the county upon the return of the official or employee to the county.**

**It is the responsibility of the Elected Official or Department Head prior to departure to make a request to the Commissioners Court and receive permission for all OUT OF STATE TRAVEL (except for travel by the Upshur County Sheriff's Department to obtain or deliver prisoners). Without such prior approval no reimbursement shall be allowed.**

Section 152.011 of the Texas Local Government Code gives the Commissioners Court the authority to set travel expenses and other allowances for all county officials and employees. The County Commissioners Court allows reimbursement of travel expenses for county officials and employees who travel on official county business when funds have been allocated in departmental budgets for that purpose. After any Department's travel budget expense line item has been depleted in any fiscal year, reimbursement travel expense and other allowances for that Departments' County official or employees shall only be made upon approval of the Commissioner's Court.

The traveling county employee will be reimbursed for actual expenses (see list below) incurred while traveling, provided the employee keeps and submits invoices, receipts, and all other documentation supporting the actual expenditures and this documentation is submitted to the County Auditor on the Travel Expense Form.

The traveling county employee must submit receipts, invoices and documentation for the following in order to be reimbursed:

- Airline Tickets
- Parking Garage Charges
- Lodging Statements
- Taxi Fares
- Automobile Rentals
- Conference Registration and Fees
- Automobile Expense Charges for County Vehicles

A Per Diem of \$26.00, per day, for meals/incidental expenses has been approved by the County Commissioners Court.

All other requests for reimbursement, including lodging, must have supporting documentation in order for the traveling employee to be reimbursed. If requests for reimbursement on the Travel Expense are not supported by documentation, the County Auditor will not approve the requests.

#### **MEALS**

Meals will be reimbursed at the currently approved Upshur County rate. If and when the Commissioners change these rates the County Auditor or Treasurer will notify Department Heads of the new rates.

For trips that do not require an overnight stay the employee will be eligible for 1/3 the daily per diem rate for locations within 100 miles of Gilmer and 2/3 the daily per diem rate for locations over 100 miles from Gilmer. Per 11/30/07 Commissioner's court; reimbursement will be made through payroll.

For trips that require overnight stays per diem will be at 1/3 the daily rate for the date of departure if destination is 250 miles or less from the Upshur County Courthouse and 2/3 the daily rate if destination is more than 250 miles plus the full daily rate for each day the employee is at the conference, seminar or training meeting. If the conference concludes at such a time as to require an additional night of stay the travel rate will apply to the date of return.

The County will reimburse for county employee meals only. If the traveling county employee elects to purchase meals for friends or other county officials, those expenses shall be borne by the county employee and will not be reimbursed by the county. Receipts will not be required to substantiate reimbursement for meals.

### **LODGING**

The County will reimburse the traveling county employee for the actual cost of lodging while traveling on official county business. If possible, the County employees are encouraged to book lodging at the hotel at which the Conference, seminar or training session is held. If this is not possible the traveling employee should always obtain lodging where a "conference or government rate" is offered. The county employee will obtain a lodging statement/receipt, which will be submitted with the Travel Expense Form, when the employee returns to the County.

Those items, which will be reimbursed on the hotel statement, are:

- Daily Room Charges (up to the maximum allowed)
- Necessary Hotel Taxes
- Business Telephone Calls
- Hotel Parking Fees – including valet parking

Those items, which WILL NOT be reimbursed on the hotel statements, are:

- Meals (covered by daily per diem)
- Personal expense items such as cleaning or laundry
- Alcoholic beverage charges
- Recreation Facilities use charges
- Movies and personal phone calls (each employee will be allowed one "safe arrival" personal call per trip, limited to no more than 3 minutes)

If the employee's spouse or dependents are traveling with the employee, the County will only pay the cost of a single room rate. Any additional charge for the extra person will be the employee's personal expense. If the actual lodging charges are more than the travel advance, the employee will be reimbursed for the difference upon proper submission of the Travel Expense Form. If the actual lodging charges are less than the travel advance, the employee will reimburse the county for the difference within five (5) business days after returning to the County.

Depending on travel arrangements, the county will reimburse the traveling county employee for a maximum of one-day lodging prior to the start of a conference or seminar and lodging through and including the last day of the conference or seminar. Any additional lodging will be at the expense of the county employee unless proof is presented that the additional lodging is a result of extended county business.

### **APPROVED TYPES OF TRANSPORTATION**

**COMMERCIAL AIRLINES** - Commercial airlines are normally the most economical mode of transportation, especially for out-of-state travel. Traveling county employees are encouraged to take advantage of reduced rates of advance reservation. Airline tickets

may be paid for in advance if the county employee will submit the Travel Advance Form when the County employee or Department Head determines the cost of the airline travel. The county will reimburse at the lowest available airline fare for the most direct airline route.

**TAXI AND BUS FARES** - The traveling county employee will obtain receipts for taxi or bus fares and will be reimbursed by the county for those fares related to county business. If receipts for these services are lost, a sworn statement from the traveling county employee relating to individual taxi or bus fares in relation to official county business will be accepted by the County Auditor after approval of the Elected Official or Department Head. Receipts or statements will be submitted to the County Auditor along with the Travel Expense Form, upon return to the county.

**AUTO RENTAL** - When it is more economical to rent a car than to utilize public or personal transportation and with prior Commissioner's Court approval, the traveling county employee is entitled to reimbursement for the actual cost of renting the vehicle, including fuel and oil. The County will reimburse for a full size car only up to a maximum daily rate of \$39.99. Car rental agreements, along with copies of receipts for fuel and other auto expenses must be submitted to the County Auditor on the Travel Expense Form for reimbursement. The County will not pay for rented vehicles at the destination site without prior approval of the Department Head. A receipt will be required for reimbursement.

**PERSONAL AUTOMOBILES** - The County will pay the traveling county employee the stated state rate for each mile of use of their personal automobile while traveling in state on out-of-county business. The mileage payment will be based on the most direct route from the county to destination where county business takes place plus any business miles driven while at the destination. No other automobile expense will be paid to the traveling county employee other than the fixed price per mile as approved by the Commissioners Court. All out-of-state travel on official county business will be reimbursed at commercial airline rates or price per mile, whichever is most economical. Utilize MAPQUEST to determine the distance of the most direct route.

**COUNTY OWNED AUTOS** - The County will reimburse actual expenses, such as gas, oil or other such maintenance items. Receipts are required for all these items. All employees who are assigned a County owned vehicle shall use that vehicle for out of county travel unless prior approval to use another mode of travel is obtained from the Commissioners Court.

#### **LOCAL TRANSPORTATION EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT**

Several departments in the County require their employees to travel within the county on official county business. When a county employee uses a personal automobile for this purpose, the employee may be reimbursed for use of their personal auto at the stated state rate per mile.

Before an employee may be reimbursed for local travel, there must first be a department budget allocation for local travel. This allocation will be made during the budget hearings or through a budget amendment made by the County Commissioners Court.

**When there is a departmental budget allocation, the county employee requesting reimbursement for local travel expense must complete a form for this purpose and submit the form to the County Auditor for reimbursement. The form to be used is Local Transportation Expense Reimbursement Form. A supply of these forms is available in the County Auditor's office.**

**Reimbursement for local travel is made from speedometer readings on the personal auto and a description of the purpose of the official county business. A copy of the Local Transportation Reimbursement Form can be obtained from the County Treasurer or County Auditor's offices.**

## **TRAVEL EXAMPLES TO HELP ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS**

**You are a county department head. You have budgeted for your state association conference, which will be held this year in Austin. The conference is scheduled to start on a Wednesday morning and will last through Friday. You receive a copy of your association conference program telling you the date the conference will be held and containing pre-registration information. You decide you will fly Southwest Airlines. If you make your reservation now, you will have the benefit of a reduced airfare.**

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY PAY FOR MY ADVANCE RESERVATIONS ON SOUTHWEST AIRLINES?**

**ANSWER: The County will pay for advance airline reservation fares. When the airline fare is determined, you should complete the Travel Advance Form and send the form to the County Auditor for processing. The Auditor should receive this form no later than 10<sup>th</sup> or the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month..**

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY PAY ADVANCE CONFERENCE REGISTRATION?**

**ANSWER: The County will pay advance conference registration. As in the previous question, a Travel Advance Form will be submitted to the County Auditor. You must attach a copy of the conference program to the Travel Advance form, which will show the conference registration fees, and what the fees cover. Any employee who requests and gets advance registration fees will be required to attend the conference or reimburse the County for the advance amount.**

**Two weeks before you are to depart for your conference, you decide you will need a travel advance for meals and lodging.**

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY ADVANCE MONEY FOR MEALS AND LODGING?**

**ANSWER: The County will advance you for meals and lodging. Here again, you will be required to file the Travel Advance Form to receive this advance. Advances for meals and mileage should be done at the Commissioners Meeting prior to departure. You can use the allowable Per Diem for meals and actual cost that have been verified for lodging and transportation to complete the travel form. Since you will arrive in Austin Tuesday afternoon, you may ask for a lodging advance for Tuesday evening. You are scheduled to return on Friday so you will not ask for lodging reimbursement for Friday.**

**When I arrive in Austin, I will need transportation to the conference hotel.**

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY PAY FOR MY TRANSPORTATION TO THE HOTEL?**

**ANSWER: The County will pay for your taxi fare to the hotel PROVIDED you get a receipt for your taxi fare from the cab driver. Almost all-local transportation services give receipts for their fares. If receipts for these services are lost, a sworn statement from the traveling county employee relating to the mode of transportation may be submitted.**

After you check in to your hotel, you meet with friends and decide to go to a nice restaurant for dinner. You, along with your friends, share a taxi to the restaurant.

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY PAY FOR MY PORTION OF THE TAXI FARE TO AND FROM THE RESTAURANT?**

**ANSWER:** The County will reimburse only those items, which are for official county business. Your taking a taxi to a nice restaurant for dinner is not classified as official county business.

When you get to the restaurant, you enjoy the hospitality and dinner. Your total bill for the evening was \$25.00, including tips.

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR THIS MEAL?**

**ANSWER:** The County pays a per diem for meals each day. If the cost of the meal is more than the per diem, the employee pays for the excess. The county will not pay for any other meal other than your own and will not reimburse for any alcoholic beverage cost.

After dinner, you and your friends go to a local theater for entertainment.

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT COSTS?**

**ANSWER:** The County will not reimburse you for personal entertainment. If, however, the entertainment is part of the conference registration fee, that is paid for by the county when registration fees are paid.

On Wednesday morning, you order room service for breakfast.

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR ROOM SERVICE?**

**ANSWER:** The County will reimburse you the stated per diem rate.

You call in to your office each day you are attending the conference to see if there are any problems. The phone calls are charged to your room.

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR THOSE PHONE CALLS?**

**ANSWER:** The County will reimburse you for telephone calls made that are considered official county business calls. The county will not reimburse you for calls made to your home to check on the family except for one safe arrival call per trip (limited to no more than 3 minutes).

After the conference on Friday, you decide to spend the next two days in Austin and return to Gilmer on Sunday.

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR MEALS AND LODGING AFTER THE CONFERENCE HAS ENDED?**

**ANSWER:** If your extended stay has to do with official county business, the county will reimburse you for the extra meals and lodging. Examples of official county business may be that you are an officer in your association and you are required to extend your stay for additional meetings or you will be meeting with your state Senator or Representative concerning the operation of your office or the county or you are meeting with a state agency for county purposes. If your extended stay has to do with your own personal R&R, however, the extra cost would be yours and not Upshur County's and therefore would not be reimbursed.

When checking in and out of the hotel, and riding back to the airport in the hotel limo, you give tips to the bellman and drivers.

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR TIPS?**

**ANSWER:** The County will reimburse you for reasonable tips. Since you will not likely receive a receipt supporting your tips, a sworn statement concerning the amount of the tip and what it was for will be sufficient for reimbursement. Tips for meals are included in the per diem rate and are not reimbursable.

When you return home, you must pay parking garage fees at the airport.

**QUESTION: WILL THE COUNTY REIMBURSE ME FOR AIRPORT PARKING FEES?**

**ANSWER:** The County will pay for airport parking while you are away on official county business. Keep your receipts and attach to your reimbursement request.

You are now back at work and want to be reimbursed for your travel expenses.

**QUESTION: HOW CAN I BE REIMBURSED FOR ACTUAL TRAVEL EXPENSES?**

**ANSWER:** You must file the Travel Expense Form with receipts supporting all of the requests you have made for reimbursement. You will deduct any advance travel expense funds you have received on the line provided on the form. If you have problems with your expense form, you will want to bring all your receipts and documentation to the County Auditor or Treasurer's office for assistance. Remember, the Travel Expense Form **MUST BE FILED NO LATER THAN FIVE (5) BUSINESS DAYS AFTER YOU RETURN TO THE COUNTY.**