



EBTC INFORMATION BULLETIN

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SUBJECT: Canadian Opinions on Passport Alternatives

SOURCE: National Post

Despite American plans to require all visitors to show passports by 2009, Canadians are only mildly interested in alternative travel documents they could use to enter the United States.

And they're wary of encoding their personal information on radio frequency identification (RDFI) chips embedded in travel documents, even if that would help them cross the border more quickly.

Canadian air travellers to the U.S. have had to show passports since January 2007.

The Bush administration planned to extend that requirement to those crossing the border by land or sea this summer, but in December Congress forced a delay until at least the summer of 2009.

The looming U.S. requirement has prompted a search for alternatives such as enhanced drivers' licences, which would incorporate RDFI technology and require additional documentation to obtain.

But according to a Harris/Decima study done for the Canadian Border Services Agency and Passport Canada, most Canadians aren't particularly interested. Sixty per cent say they would be more likely to use the current passport when travelling to the U.S. even if alternative documents were available.

A total of 24% say they would use one of the alternative documents in addition to or instead of the current passport. More than half of Canadians -- 55% -- currently have passports, the study says, and one in three plan to get one.

Forty-three per cent of Canadians travelled to the U.S. in the past year, and three-quarters say they are likely to travel outside the country in the next year or two.

The study, which polled 904 Canadians and consulted others in focus groups last August and September, asked respondents to evaluate several alternatives to passports, including enhanced drivers' licences, and passport cards and passport booklets with embedded RDFI chips.

The study found that fewer than half of Canadians are likely to apply for any of the tested alternative documents. And the number declines sharply as the cost rises.

Enhanced drivers' licences attracted the greatest interest, with 48% saying they would be likely to use such a document.

Their main attraction is convenience, since most people already carry a drivers' licence in their wallets. But only 36% are willing to pay even \$30 for them. That falls to just 10% if the fee rises to \$70.

Even among those who express interest in enhanced drivers' licences, 45% still say they would be more likely to use a passport instead of an alternative document.

There is even less enthusiasm for wallet-sized passport cards, with 38% expressing interest, or passport booklets with RDFI cards, which attract just 29%.

At the bottom of the list are NEXUS cards, an existing trusted-traveller alternative to passports, with fewer than one in five showing any interest.

The study found that only one per cent of Canadians have a NEXUS card, and just three in 10 had even heard of the program, which expedites border clearance for low-risk, pre-approved travellers. Some in focus groups even expressed the view that developing alternative documents is a bad idea.

"The feeling was that the passport is the recognized international travel document, and that this should continue to be the standard to enter a foreign country," the study says.

The research found there's a sense of attachment to the Canadian passport, and that most people believe Passport Canada has "adequately dealt" with the increased demand for them.

Canadians have limited confidence in the RDFI technology that would be included in all the proposed alternative documents.

Only six per cent say they are very confident in the technology, with a further one in three saying they are confident.

But more than half are not confident, the study says. Concern centres on two key areas: What information is stored and who has access to it. There is also some concern about how long information will be stored.

"Comfort and confidence with this technology will likely increase if Canadians knew and understood fully how the technology will be used, and the associated security features for the proposed documents," says the study, which has a margin of error of 3.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.