



United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Office of the General Counsel

B-270687

December 26, 1995

Mr. Robert Ortega
Chief Administrative Officer
International Boundary and Water Commission
The Commons, Building C, Suite 310
4171 North Mesa Street
El Paso, TX 79902

Dear Mr. Ortega:

This responds to your October 26, 1995, letter requesting a Comptroller General's decision on the use of "Buddy Passes," which you state are free companion tickets provided by your contract travel agency at no extra cost or in some cases at a nominal fee when tickets are purchased for official travel. You ask, when your office cannot use the companion ticket for official travel, whether you may authorize employees to use the companion ticket for travel accompanied by their spouses, family members, or friends. You note that the tickets are provided directly to the agency, and, therefore, are not like the previous cases dealing with whether an employee must turn over travel bonuses to the agency.

Since the ticket that entitles the agency to the companion ticket is purchased with government funds, the companion ticket, no less than the original ticket, is the property of the agency and may be disposed of only in accordance with regulations issued by the General Services Administration (GSA). See our recent decision addressing this issue, Southwest Airlines, B-254858, Nov. 22, 1995, copy enclosed, and GSA's property management regulations and the Federal Travel Regulation, 41 C.F.R. §§ 101-25.103-2(a) and 301-1.103(b) (1995). These regulations currently do not permit the use of companion tickets for any purpose other than official travel. Id.

We noted in the Southwest Airlines decision that we would not object if GSA, consistent with the guidance in the decision, were to change its regulations to allow employees to use free companion tickets, where an appropriate agency official

determines that (1) the agency is unable to use the ticket for official travel of another employee, and (2) the approval will not result in additional cost to the government. However, unless GSA promulgates such a change to its regulations, agencies may not use companion tickets for other than official travel. Since this is a matter within GSA's discretion, you may wish to contact GSA directly.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Seymour Efros
for Robert P. Murphy
General Counsel

Enclosure

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DIGEST

An agency asks whether companion tickets ("Buddy Passes") given to the agency at no cost or for a nominal fee when tickets are purchased for official travel may be used by the employees' spouses, family, and friends if the companion ticket cannot be used for official travel. Since the ticket that entitles the agency to the companion ticket is purchased with government funds, the companion ticket, no less than the original ticket, is the property of the agency and may be disposed of only in accordance with regulations issued by the General Services Administration. Southwest Airlines, B-254858, Nov. 22, 1995; and 41 C.F.R. §§ 101-25.103-2(a) and 301-1.103(b) (1995). Although GAO would not object to changing these regulations to permit such use under specified conditions, the regulations do not now permit the use of companion tickets for any purpose other than official travel.