

# [Tourism/Travel/Hospitality] Action Plan

List of Committee Members

## Pandemic Impact

### **Brief summary of how the pandemic initially impacted your industry/sector**

This pandemic has been a tremendous change for this industry. It has forced us to make changes that were never foreseen. In a matter of months we went from running successful businesses to being completely shut down. Our businesses have been impacted, our employees have been impacted and most importantly our lives. Just like everyone else, we are looking for ways to move forward while ensuring safety. Unfortunately, for this sector it is much more complicated because our businesses consist of big crowds, travel and many attractions that require additional focus. From hotels to amusement parks, the pandemic has forced all of us to pause. While we aren't ready to jump back in, we are ready to take steps to prepare for full recovery and resilience.

## Current state of industry

### **Highlight major themes in your industry/sector within the region**

### **Identify key challenges and opportunities facing your industry/sector across the region in order to strengthen regional recovery and resilience**

The first area we are going to focus on is regional marketing. We believe that if we launch a regional marketing campaign, it will have a great impact on the growth and development of our industry. This campaign will consist of merging Norfolk and Virginia Beach destination management organizations (DMOs) using a slogan such as : "Together at Last". During this difficult time, it makes sense to uplift each other so one well funded DMO would benefit us globally. It gives us the opportunity to present all of Hampton Roads' attractions together rather than individually. This will give us a bigger brand voice and more media outreach. The overall goal is to develop a multicultural campaign to reflect the diversity and the values of our region to grow visitation and expand customer base. The main concern with this idea is how do we go about funding. We have thought of many ways to possibly fund this campaign such as : hotel bed tax and restaurant tax from all cities, collecting a percentage of overall DMO budget annually, Go Virginia - \$5 million to start it up, regional tourism tax or a percentage of what cities collect for regional marketing and free HRT programs. Another challenge facing this campaign is ensuring every city benefits from this. How can we market so that each city gains from what they are giving? Will those cities that are going to benefit more, pay more? However, this campaign could assist small businesses that were affected by the pandemic. In this campaign we could support local businesses by promoting eat local and shop local. This campaign would not only be a benefit to us but to the growth of the entire Hampton Roads community. It could lead to an expansion in tourism, increase in population and economic growth.

Secondly, we discussed Hospitality workforce development. Our next objective is to increase the hospitality workforce. Currently, thousands of jobs exist in the hospitality industry. Outside of top-of-mind frontline staff we offer jobs such as : theme park tour operators, sports management and technology providers. In addition, post-covid will create new career opportunities as consumer expectations evolve for hospitality-related experiences. The challenge faced is recruiting workforce talent and reducing turnover rate. One of the ideas that we came up with as a solution is to expand Hospitality Program offerings. We plan to do this with leading local regional academic institutions for upper management level training. The idea is to start recruiting for our industry at high school level and then offering internships and job shadowing with programs like ProStart. We would propose a two year or four year high-level management degree programs at institutions like TCC or NSU. Another example would be using a Colonial Williamsburg Foundation partnership with College of William and Mary. This would be a program that combines school and living workplace. While we want to focus on technical/vocational jobs, local programs already exist for those types of line level training. So partnering with universities is a better opportunity for collaboration within our industry. Especially because many universities already have programs in accounting, marketing, information technology,etc. The success metrics for this idea include enrollment lift and decrease in job vacancies. This could also help us track the location of graduates from the program. We can use that information to review long-term salary. We could use it to answer questions like : Did students stay in this industry or leave for higher pay? Should we look at wage improvements? Moreover, we want to increase our current employees and future employees loyalty so this program would act as an incentive. This means offering short-term certification as an employee benefit to align with future job opportunities. We have also thought about adding an overall stronger benefits package such as tuition reimbursement and commuter benefits. On the other hand, we also have to look at remote working due to COVID-19 and for this industry this will be difficult due to most jobs being hands on. The solution to that would be additional steps for employee safety and possibly an increase in salary for essential workers. The general goal is to expand our personnel and make post-covid easier on our employees. In order to thrive, we must recover and retain our workforce.

Next, we decided to look for transportation improvements for tourism success. Our plan is to offer free HRT rides to both employees and tourists. The big idea is zero fare transportation by having a free public transportation partnership with HRT. We got this idea from an experiment done in Kansa City. Kansas City is now the first major U.S city that provides free bus services to citizens. To begin with, this would have a positive impact on our workforce. Employees no longer have to worry about getting back and forth to work. It will also help with potential employees eliminating jobs in our industry due to travel distant or how far they will have to drive. We also believe this will have a long lasting effect on our customers. It makes riding more

affordable, more attractive and more convenient thus making their visit with us more enjoyable. It allows guests to see the beauty in our cities instead of driving through them all day, getting lost and relying on their gps. It gives them a chance to actually connect with our beautiful scenery. Furthermore, it will help save our community. Imagine people taking busses instead of driving cars. This could serve as a way to meet climate goals, reduce air pollution, and alleviate congestion. Cities and transit agencies can also save money on creating and repairing fare collection systems. By doing this, we would put out an amazing image for our industry. The finance options we are looking at are TOT tax 1% for May 2021 or an investment from HRT's average revenue. In summary this would be a powerful strategy to use in our recovery process. We would be assisting our employees, customers and community therefore, benefiting our industry's growth and image. We are creating a hassle-free solution to transportation.

Lastly, we decided to focus on economic development and place making through tourism development. A thoughtful tourism development enhances a community by differentiating it from other destinations using its cultural, natural, historical, human, educational and technology resources. In order for our region to succeed in the future, economic developers, city planners and tourist stakeholders must take responsibility for being more attractive to residents, investors and visitors. This could be done by creating more entertainment and walking districts. The attractions that we currently have could host more events. We could also focus on sports as an opportunity for tourism. In addition we could move forward with the idea of an Arena. Legislation has been passed to create Hampton Roads Arena Authority. The idea that we came up with to support and drive the arena authority to a successful conclusion would be selling benefit to major sports teams. This would bring instant recognition to the Hampton Roads area and corporate sponsorship revenues. This arena would be a multi-use venue where we would compete against each other for meetings, sports, events and concerts. Another suggestion would be funding the Capital Trail expansion from Jamestown to Virginia Beach. As for funding, we could use regional tourism tax. These ideas will help us continue the growth of this area.

## The future

### **What might a new normal (post-COVID) for your industry/sector look like?**

The new normal for this industry looks like a new beginning. Post-Covid we will be doing things totally different. Of course, additional safety measures will be taken into consideration in our places of business. However, even more steps have to be taken behind the scenes. This pandemic has forced us to rethink, rebrand and relaunch. A new journey awaits us and we are doing everything to prepare for the future.

## Imagery

List a few types of images that the committee thinks best represent your industry/sector in the 757

- Together at last - collaboration within cities
- Regional marketing
- Safe and Clean project for our airports and hotels
- 757 Transportation - free public transportation
- Support local
- Sports attractions

## Resources

List the best place for others to find important information about your industry/sector as the 757 region continues to recover and move towards a more resilient economic future