

Fact Sheet: Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) Passport Card Technology Choice: Vicinity RFID

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Each day, an average of 1.1 million pedestrians and passengers enter the United States for business or pleasure. In order to facilitate cross-border travel for U.S. citizens while enhancing the security of our citizens and travelers, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) proposes to expand the use of vicinity radio frequency identification (RFID) technology at land border ports of entry. The use of this technology will be a key component of the PASS System (People, Access Security Service), announced in January 2006 by Secretaries Rice and Chertoff as part of their Joint Vision –“Secure Borders and Open Doors in the Information Age.”

The PASS System is designed to meet the specific requirements of the WHTI for U.S. citizens entering the U.S. by land and sea. The credit card-sized passport card will contain vicinity RFID, which will use a number to link to secure databases, allowing Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers to determine a traveler’s citizenship and identity when entering the U.S. land and sea ports of entry.

Facilitating and Securing Travel and Trade

Vicinity RFID technology is already being used successfully to facilitate both travel and trade at certain ports of entry on the Canadian and Mexican borders. DHS has programs currently operating on the border which use vicinity RFID technology: NEXUS, SENTRI, FAST. In addition, DHS is testing this technology in land borders through US-VISIT. Our trusted traveler programs have more than a quarter of a million participants and through the ongoing test in land borders, US-VISIT has issued more than 459,000 RF-enabled I-94s, the standard arrival and departure record issued at ports of entry. Vicinity RFID technology is also used today commercially in toll highway operations.

Vicinity RFID technology provides significant advantages.

- Vicinity RFID provides a security benefit. The speed of vicinity RFID will allow CBP officers to quickly read the identification of all travelers carrying passport cards, allowing DHS to perform terrorist watch list checks
- Multiple cards can be read at a distance and simultaneously with vicinity RFID technology, allowing an entire car full of people to be processed at once.

Protecting Personal Privacy

We constantly look for ways to protect the privacy of travelers entering the United States. Through the passport card design, personal privacy would be protected through multiple layers of security including, but not limited to, the methods discussed below.

- No personal information would be transmitted or stored on the vicinity RFID-enabled card. The technology will transmit only a number between the card and the reader which will be matched against a DHS database.
- Even though no personally identifiable information will be transmitted, DHS is taking steps to ensure that even this number cannot be intercepted during transmission to an authorized reader at a port of entry.
- All card holders would be issued a protective sleeve for the card, preventing transmission of the Vicinity RFID signal while the card is in the sleeve.
- The use of the card will be voluntary; travelers can elect to use a traditional passport if they so chose.

Creating Travel Documents for the 21st Century

In the past, fraudulent travel documents have been used by terrorists and criminals to cross borders and violate immigration laws without detection.

- The creation of the passport card would meet the demands of today’s security challenges by incorporating the latest technology advances to protect personal identity and expedite safe and secure travel across the border.

Integrating our Technologies as a Path to the Future

Vicinity RFID technology meshes with our future vision of the border in a way that meets our national security needs, our economic imperatives and the public’s trust.

- Using vicinity RFID will best accomplish these goals, harmonizing the need to protect personal information, provide DHS with adequate traveler information, while also speeding the flow of traffic and trade at the border.