Coronavirus Alters Outlook for U.S. Hotel Sector as Investors Cautious, Face Significant Short-Term Headwinds; New Federal Stimulus Package Delivers Lifeline to Severely Impacted Sector

Growing health crisis pauses economic growth. The rapid and unanticipated spread of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) has significantly disrupted everyday life. Interruptions to global supply chains and the closure of many businesses nationally will curb consumer spending and lead to higher unemployment in the short term, weighing on GDP in the second quarter and possibly longer. Past pandemics such as SARS and H1N1 “swine flu” suggest that the coronavirus could take up to six months to stabilize unless the known facts drastically change. The leisure and hospitality sector will be disproportionately affected as many of the precautions being taken directly impact travel and hotel use. In response to these costs, multiple arms of the federal government are enacting new policies to bolster the economy, highlighted by a major new stimulus package.

Landmark fiscal stimulus bill to bolster hospitality sector. Congress has passed the $2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the largest federal aid package ever approved. The legislation offers a number of initiatives aimed at shoring up the economy, including loan programs for both large and small businesses, corporate tax relief, expanded unemployment benefits, and direct payments to individuals. About $425 billion has been allocated to the Federal Reserve to support struggling businesses, with an additional $75 billion set aside specifically for the industries most impacted by the virus. Hotels of a certain size can also seek fiscal aid through a new SBA program to help them meet immediate payroll, healthcare, and mortgage obligations.

Executive Summary

• Actions undertaken to temper the spread of COVID-19 are interrupting daily routines and creating significant challenges for hoteliers. Widespread travel cancellations hit airport-adjoining and urban-centered hotels the hardest. Properties along interstates and in smaller metros fared better, but over the coming weeks all types of properties will face declines in occupancy and revenue.

• A landmark fiscal stimulus program aims to bolster the economy through short-term disruptions. The package will provide $850 billion in aid to small businesses and direct payments of up to $1,200 per person to many individuals.

• Financial market volatility and a rapid decrease in government Treasury yields prompted the Federal Reserve to take decisive action to ease the strain on the economy. The FOMC cut the federal funds rate 150 basis points and re-instituting measures of quantitative easing.

• Short-term ambiguity may slow some investors’ decision-making while long-term fundamentals remain sound. Less bidding activity may allow more private buyers to make trades.

• Uncertainty has prompted more caution on behalf of hospitality lenders. Liquidity is more limited and underwriting criteria have tightened.

Job Market Well Positioned to Weather Shock

Hotel RevPAR Improved
Substantially Over the Past Cycle

Sources: Marcus & Millichap Research Services; Bureau of Labor Statistics; STR, Inc.

* Through February
Performance Metrics Retract From Record Levels as Individuals Cautioned to Stay at Home to Halt the Spread of the Coronavirus

Current health threats to alter 2020 hotel outlook. Over the past decade, the U.S. hospitality sector has experienced unprecedented growth. The nation’s average RevPAR improved 64 percent between the end of the last downturn and the beginning of 2020, while occupancy achieved a record high of 66.3 percent in 2018 and 2019. The global rise of the coronavirus has halted that trend. Measures undertaken to temper its spread will have a substantial economic impact and create significant challenges for hoteliers this year. However, long-term demand trends remain positive. When normal activities resume, they will create an immediate need for lodging, even as a segment of the population continues to travel today out of necessity.

Virus containment adds downward pressure to both hotel demand and supply. Multiple measures have been taken to slow coronavirus transmission, which are having a disproportionately large impact on the hospitality sector. Beyond explicit restrictions to international travel, most reasons for taking leisure or business trips have been closed, canceled or suspended. Several states and municipalities have either required or encouraged individuals to stay at home unless they are providing an essential service, severely limiting hotel room demand across the country. In the four weeks since the coronavirus made material landfall in the U.S., national hotel occupancy has fallen 34 percentage points to a trailing seven-day average of 30.3 percent on March 21. This time last year, occupancy was at nearly 70 percent. RevPAR has dropped a comparable amount, down to roughly a third of its value from 12 months prior. Several hoteliers have already begun to suspend operations and furlough employees until conditions improve. New fiscal stimulus aims to help recently unemployed hospitality workers by providing direct payments of up to $1,200 per person. Companies that are suddenly in higher demand, such as grocers, have begun to work with hotel companies to meet short-term staffing needs. Additional upside may come from the supply side. The same precautions that have stymied travel are also limiting the availability of labor and raw materials for hotel construction. At the start of the year, the total number of hotel room nights was expected to grow by more than 2 percent. That pace is unlikely to be realized. Properties currently under construction will face delays and projects set to be break ground may be reconsidered. A slowdown in development would be a potential tailwind for an eventual recovery.

Current headwinds to hotel performance are temporary. While present restrictions are impeding the hotel sector, the industry will recover. Such was the case after both the events of September 11, 2001, and the 2008 financial crisis. It may take some time, however. Following both economic shocks, the national average ADR took about twice as long to return to pre-shock levels as it did to bottom out. The pace of recovery could be different this time, though. Much will depend on the duration of the pandemic and how extensively it affects the broader economy. A key consideration will be the effectiveness of new fiscal and monetary policies, with the Federal Reserve acting much more rapidly and decisively than during the last downturn. If unemployment remains fairly low and the number of coronavirus cases abates quickly, people may immediately want to travel again, spurred by cabin fever and rescheduled events. Room-night sales lost in the second and third quarters could be partially recovered in late 2020 to help restore hotels to normal operations.
**Hotel Performance Will Vary Based on Location and Environment**

**Urban**

Urban hotels feel brunt of COVID-19. Hotels near the center of large urban areas are some of the most exposed to the economic costs of the coronavirus, including bans on international travel and public gatherings. During the week that ended March 21, the average urban hotel occupancy rate fell to 17.8 percent, down 58.4 percentage points compared with the same week a year ago. The average RevPAR dropped 85.1 percent. Nationally, occupancy declined 39.2 percentage points to 30.3 percent and RevPAR dropped 69.5 percent. Business closures in urban centers will delay hotel recovery.

**Suburban**

Less central hotels report smaller declines in performance metrics. Suburban hotels have not been as substantially impacted as properties in other locations, but fundamentals still decreased nationwide. For the week ended March 21, the average occupancy rate fell 36.6 percentage points year over year to 33.6 percent, while RevPAR declined 65 percent. While event cancellations and travel bans certainly affect suburban assets, local demand drivers play a more prominent role and should help these properties recover once the number of coronavirus cases begins to dissipate.

**Small Town**

Small-town hospitality demonstrates resilience. So far, hotels in smaller cities and towns have been less impacted compared with other locations, with RevPAR for the week ended March 21 down 54.3 percent year over year, less than the national rate of decline. Weekly occupancy, at 32.3 percent, fell 25 percentage points. Business at these hotels is driven less by large events and international travel and more by local attributes such as natural attractions and visitors coming to see family and friends. The direct health impact of the virus may also be less severe in many smaller towns.

**Interstate**

Hotels along major roadways continue to service travelers, creating potential floor to losses. Hospitality properties that cater primarily to road travelers have fared better than other hotels so far. RePAR for the week of March 21 fell 44.7 percent, the smallest margin among location types. Occupancy decreased 21.8 percentage points to 37.8 percent. While individuals are avoiding airports, some are still traveling by road, either by choice or necessity. This trend could help roadside lodgings maintain a minimum level of activity and recover more quickly once the health threat abates.

**Airport**

Travel restrictions severely impact airport hotels. Some of the first actions taken to stymie the global spread of the coronavirus were bans on international travel, which has negatively impacted the airline industry at large. Airport-adjacent hotels were not immune, as the average RevPAR for these types of hotels for the week ended March 21 dropped 67.1 percent annually, with occupancy also down 44.7 percentage points to 33.7 percent. While the long-term benefits of being near an airport are clear, until travel restrictions are lifted these hotels will continue to face challenges.

**Resort Destination**

Travel restrictions hinder resorts but may provide a potential future silver lining. Declines in international tourism have negatively impacted domestic resorts. The average RevPAR for the week ended March 21 decreased 73.5 percent from a year ago, while occupancy dropped 52.9 percentage points to 26.2 percent. However, American residents who were saving to take a vacation overseas may instead decide to visit a U.S. resort, which could help build up demand for those sites when concerns about the coronavirus start to abate.

Sources: Marcus & Millichap Research Services, STR, Inc.
Short-Term Macroeconomic Uncertainties Put Downward Pressure On Sales Volume as Long-Term Prospects Remain Sound

Economic turbulence tempers transaction velocity as investors reassess needs. The speed and severity of which the new coronavirus has harmed both people's health and the overall economy were unexpected and have clouded investor sentiment in the first quarter of 2020. Hotel operators are being acutely challenged, causing buyers and sellers to realign their expectations. Transactions initiated weeks or months ago are still going through, but investment decisions being made today require adjustments to previously understood pricing and cap rate trends. Many institutions are slowing their activity to await further information, lessening the competition for listings among private buyers who may be able to pursue previously unavailable opportunities. Investors considering value-add strategies may now take the current disruption to business as an opening to complete renovations and reposition assets for when normal travel patterns resume. Buyers may also shift what types of assets they are acquiring, possibly looking toward options offering lower service levels or located outside primary markets. These properties historically had higher initial returns than hotels in core areas and may be less exposed to the impact of the coronavirus. While rapidly changing circumstances encourage vigilance, buyers and sellers should also be looking to the horizon. Ultimately, a hotel investment is a multiyear endeavor. The hospitality sector is highly resistant and has recovered from downturns in the past. The 2008 financial crisis birthed the most prosperous decade of hotel performance in recent memory, and there are no signs that suggest the sector will not also rebound once the current threat abates.

Hospitality investors may shift inward from coasts. Over the past year, a greater share of all transactions took place in the Upper Midwest, while a smaller percentage was completed in the Northeast and Florida. The shift away from some coastal gateway markets may reflect, in part, the search for yield. Midwest properties changed hands in 2019 with cap rates 50 to 150 basis points above the same measure in coastal regions. Assets delivering yields above the national average, as well as favorable demographic and travel trends, are also drawing a sizable portion of deal flow to the Southwest region. In recent years these areas have posted some of the highest levels of job creation and in-migration in the country, supporting added travel. Warm climates and comparatively lower nightly rates also aid in the demand for rooms. While fewer people will stay in hotels over the next several weeks, these trends will hold true in the long term. During the intervening period, some investors may also find opportunities in primary coastal areas that are being currently undervalued.

Coronavirus to interfere with overseas transactions. Foreign investment into U.S. hospitality assets has been a driving factor for transaction activity over the past several years. Buyers from the United Arab Emirates, South Korea, and the United Kingdom led non-domestic sales volume in 2019. Higher rates of return than available at home, paired with reduced hedging costs facilitated by lower interest rates, motivated trades. It is likely however, given travel restrictions and substantial operational hurdles, that investment from buyers outside the U.S. will diminish for the next several months. Once the number of coronavirus cases falls, however, buyers may again reenter the domestic hospitality market. Hotel cap rates will continue to exceed alternative rates of return, providing the same arbitrage opportunities that existed before the current health crisis.

*Sales $2.5 million and greater
**Sales $1 million and greater
*Estimate through March 18
Sources: Marcus & Millichap Research Services, CoStar Group, Inc.; Moody’s Analytics; Real Capital Analytics
Fed Works to Preserve Availability of Credit, Encouraging Lenders to Support Businesses and Households Amid Current Turbulence

Fed takes rapid, dramatic action to bolster economy amid rising health concerns. Disruptions caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus have prompted greater volatility in the financial markets and pushed yields on government bonds to record lows. To help offset the economic costs associated with the virus, the Federal Reserve has enacted several new policies. Between unscheduled announcements made on March 3 and March 15, the overnight lending rate has been lowered a total of 150 basis points, reducing the benchmark to a target range of 0.00 percent to 0.25 percent. The Fed previously maintained this range from December 2008 to December 2015. The FOMC also reinstated quantitative easing, agreeing to the open-ended purchase of Treasurys, multiple types of asset-backed securities, corporate bonds, and commercial paper. These and other policy changes are meant to help reduce credit spreads and encourage lending to households and businesses during a time of turbulence. The committee has also taken steps to reduce the friction foreign central banks face when borrowing dollars in order to ensure sufficient dollar liquidity internationally. These monetary policies will receive a boost from the CARES Act recently approved by Congress. The federal aid package will help bolster the economy with direct payments to individuals and new loan programs for businesses both small and large.

Some capital available; financiers tighten underwriting standards. The negative impact of the COVID-19 threat on hotel operations has prompted more caution on behalf of lenders. Amid financial market volatility and uncertainty over the pandemic’s progression, many large-scale lenders have temporarily paused hospitality loan activity. Smaller lenders, such as regional and local banks, are engaging on a case-by-case basis, while government sponsored agencies are stepping up their involvement. Lenders with loans guaranteed under the Small Business Administration’s 7(A) and 504 programs will receive six months of principle and interest payments directly from the SBA. The Paycheck Protection Program, part of the fiscal stimulus package, empowers the SBA to also offer loans to hotels with 500 employees or fewer, equal to 2.5 times their monthly payroll expense, in order to help meet employee wage and healthcare costs as well mortgage obligations. For private lenders, however, underwriting standards have tightened. Loan-to-value ratios are down by about 5 percent to 10 percent across the board. Financiers have also widened their spreads and instituted index floors to preserve margins. Given the magnitude of recent Fed rate cuts, however, some borrowers may find they are able to obtain lower interest rates compared with a few weeks ago, which may open up new opportunities. While exact terms and conditions will vary based on specific asset characteristics, hotels along interstates or in smaller markets with local demand drivers, as well as buyers with more available capital, are being more favorably considered.

Current yield environment favors hospitality investors. Hotel investments continue to offer a substantial premium relative to government bonds, especially given the recent decline in U.S. Treasury yields to historical lows. The 10-year Treasury broke below the 1 percent threshold for the first time ever in March, and while it has oscillated above and below that benchmark since, the average cap rate on recent hotel trades lies well above in the high-8 percent band. The spread between these two measures has rarely been wider over the past decade, and despite the short-term challenges, the long-term outlook for hotels remains positive.
Coronavirus Impact on the Top 25 U.S. Hospitality Markets

- **Atlanta:** The cancellation of prominent gatherings in the city, such as the NCAA's Men's Basketball Final Four, will weigh on hotel performance for the spring season. Other coronavirus precautions, such as statewide school closures, are limiting general travel. If disruptions to supply chains delay or sideline some construction projects, existing hotels could benefit in the longer term.

- **Boston:** Area hotels may face a stigma as some of the nation's earliest coronavirus cases are tied to a corporate event held at a local hotel. Subsequent event cancellations, nonessential business closures, and quarantines will weigh on short-term hotel performance. If the number of COVID-19 cases begin to subside by the summer, Boston's hotel sector could see recovered demand during the popular July Fourth holiday.

- **Chicago:** A statewide restriction on activity outside the home solidified the downward impact that event cancellations and store closures will have on hotel occupancies over the next several weeks. Nevertheless, as a major economic hub in the Midwest, a certain amount of essential travel to the market may be needed, supporting some level of hotel room demand.

- **Dallas/Fort Worth:** Restrictions on large gatherings has prohibited several entertainment and corporate events from occurring, reducing leisure and business travel to the Metroplex. Any interruption to construction activity because of the coronavirus could be a potential benefit for existing hotels as the market's inventory was set to expand by more than 6 percent over the next couple of years.

- **Denver:** In line with actions taken in many other major U.S. markets, limitations on public gatherings in Denver are leading to the cancellation of professional and social events. The closure of several ski lodges will also limit travel to the metro's many nearby natural attractions. These same features could, however, support a more rapid recovery once the number of coronavirus cases in the country begins to diminish.

- **Detroit:** Michigan's statewide closure of nonessential businesses and ban on large gatherings, paired with the suspension or delay of professional sporting seasons and adoption of work-from-home policies by many employers, will temporarily reduce the number of leisure and business travelers to the market. If health concerns abate before the end of the area's lake season, pent-up demand from cabin fever could spur a fast recovery in visitation.

- **Las Vegas:** Following the cancellation of multiple entertainment events and conferences, and amid growing health concerns, hoteliers and casino operators have temporarily closed their venues. All non-essential retail businesses have also been ordered to shut down, with the exception of restaurants offering takeout or delivery.

- **Los Angeles:** International travel restrictions, a statewide “shelter-in-place” order, and delays to film premiers and production will substantially dampen demand for hotel rooms in Los Angeles County for the next several weeks. Occupancy should increase once retail businesses are allowed to reopen and the entertainment industry resumes normal operations.

- **Houston:** Many of the same precautions being taken elsewhere are also being applied in Houston, negatively affecting hotel performance. However, recent volatility in the energy markets due to a breakdown in OPEC+ relations will likely pose a larger impact to fundamentals in the long term. RevPAR fell more than 12 percent following the 2014 downturn in oil prices.

- **Miami-Dade:** The suspension of all major outbound cruises, the termination of major events such as the Ultra Music Festival, and closure of bar and restaurant dine-in services will drive hotel room occupancies and revenue down in the months ahead. Less-wary travelers nevertheless visited the market's beaches and other party attractions, although that source of business is also now diminishing.

- **Minneapolis-St. Paul:** The cancellation of NCAA athletic events, including the wrestling championship that was scheduled to be held at U.S. Bank Stadium, will weigh on hotel room demand even as warming weather draws some visitors. The potential for a strong summer recovery remains if the number of coronavirus cases falls in time for people to take advantage of the market's lake season.

- **Nashville:** While the average RevPAR for Nashville hotels was up year over year in the first week of March, the cancellation of major music events will likely weigh on hotel performance in Music City in the coming weeks. Once everyday routines normalize and in-progress corporate investment in the market resumes, hotels will likely see a notable recovery in business travel demand.
Coronavirus Impact on the Top 25 U.S. Hospitality Markets

- **New Orleans:** Restrictions on international travel and the suspension of major cruise operations are tempering the demand for hotel rooms. Hotels in the city that had recently concluded their popular Mardi Gras season must now contend with a sharp drop in occupancy as individuals are advised to avoid close contact with others and stay home if possible.

- **New York:** Hotels in the market will face substantial challenges in the weeks ahead. The metro has quickly risen to hold the most coronavirus cases in the country, prompting a restriction on nonessential travel and the closure of schools, bars, and other retail venues. A ban on international travel is also limiting room demand, although long-term, local hotels will continue to be some of the most sought after in the country.

- **Norfolk/Virginia Beach:** The new coronavirus had a delayed impact on the Virginia Beach area as many individuals continued to make the trek to the popular spring break destination in early March. That trend came to an abrupt halt during the week ended March 21, when local hotel fundamentals fell in line with national metrics. The features that make the metro a popular vacation destination remain intact, but hotels will have to weather the short-term interruption to demand.

- **Philadelphia:** A monthlong ban on large events will undoubtedly have a moderating effect on local hotel demand, while the closure of the area’s universities will reduce room-night sales from those visiting the schools. A pause to business travel will add to this effect. The potential for a fast recovery remains, however, particularly if normal travel patterns resume for the metro’s popular July Fourth celebrations.

- **Phoenix:** The early termination of the MLB spring training season likely impacted hotels’ March performance, which will be further impaired by restrictions on travel and public gatherings. Multiple nonessential retail businesses across the Valley are also temporarily closed. A warm climate and outdoor features may nevertheless continue to draw a small number of visitors in the coming weeks.

- **Orange County:** A statewide restriction on nonessential travel outside the home has prompted the temporary closure of most forms of local retail business. This includes the area’s many internationally known theme parks such as Disneyland. These measures will notably curb hotel room occupancy for the duration of the lockdown, but pent-up demand for thrill rides and beaches could drive a recovery later this year.

- **Orlando:** As in California, major theme park operators such as Disney closed the doors on their Orlando properties in March. Combined with other event cancellations and international travel restrictions, the market’s hotel room demand drivers will fall in the short term. At the same time, pent-up demand for these venues could spur a fast recovery once the coronavirus threat stabilizes.

- **St. Louis:** While the market faces less exposure to the disruptions caused by restrictions on international travel, the closure of nonessential businesses will negatively impact hotel demand drivers for the next several weeks. A pause on business travel as companies encourage employees to work from home will also impact the fundamentals of local hotels.

- **San Diego:** Even before statewide limits on nonessential travel were enacted, many upcoming San Diego entertainment and business events had been canceled, impacting hotel fundamentals. The driver of the city’s busiest hospitality weekend, the San Diego Comic-Con International, has yet to be delayed, and if it occurs, would be a substantial boon for local operations.

- **San Francisco:** A “shelter-in-place” policy enacted on March 17, advising residents to work from home or not at all unless they are providing essential services, effectively closes most retail commercial activity in the market. This policy, combined with restrictions on international travel and the cancellation of numerous events, placed significant challenges in the near-term path of Bay Area hotels.

- **Seattle-Tacoma:** As one of the nation’s first cites exposed to the coronavirus, travel to the market for business or pleasure has notably declined. Work-from-home policies rapidly enacted by the area’s major employers also stymied business travel. Negative reputation effects as a “hot spot” will likely temper hotel room demand in the coming weeks.

- **Tampa-St. Petersburg:** In the early weeks of March, local hotels continued to show high occupancy, likely aided by the Gasparilla Music Festival. A statewide executive order to close all fitness centers and restaurant/bar dine-in service, along with the suspension of cruise operations, will severely hamper hotel room demand in the metro over the next several weeks, however.

- **Washington, D.C.:** Coronavirus concerns led to the closure of most major entertainment and tourist attractions in Washington, D.C., which when paired with less business and conference activity will pull down on hotel operations for the next several weeks. As the seat of government and a growing tech hub, the long-term demand for hotels remains favorable.
Rapid Global Expansion of Coronavirus

December 2019

12/31: 10-Year Treasury rate 1.92 percent at close.

January 2020

1/7: Virus identified as COVID-19 (Coronavirus).
1/8: CDC issues a health advisory.
1/11: First death attributed to COVID-19 in Wuhan, China.
1/13: First confirmed case outside of China in Thailand.
1/17: CDC implements screening at U.S. airports.
1/21: U.S. reports first confirmed case.
1/27: 50 million people quarantined in 17 China cities, numerous factories closed.
1/30: First U.S. domestic transmission reported.
1/31: President Trump declares a public health emergency.
1/31: 10-Year Treasury rate 1.52 percent at close.

February 2020

2/12: Major events begin to be canceled.
2/24: White House requests $2.5 billion to fight COVID-19.
2/25: CDC announces spread of disease is inevitable: “Americans must prepare for disruptions to daily life.”
2/29: First death due in the U.S. due to coronavirus occurs. 10-Year Treasury rate 1.01 percent at close.

March 2020

3/3: 10-year government bond yield falls below 1 percent.
3/3: Fed cuts fed funds rate 50 basis points.
3/6: President Trump signs $8.3 billion medical aid package.
3/12: Bans on large public gatherings go into effect, sporting events canceled, schools begin to close.
3/13: President Trump declares national emergency, freeing up to $50 billion in federal resources.
3/15: Fed cuts fed funds rate 100 basis points to 0 percent lower bound, renews “quantitative easing.”
3/16: News breaks of potential federal aid package to support U.S. households and businesses.
3/17: 10-Year Treasury rate 1.26 percent at close.
3/19: State governments begin restricting nonessential movement, causing certain businesses to close.
3/25: Dow Jones reports largest single-day gain since 1993.
3/25: Senate passes $2 trillion fiscal stimulus bill, goes before House of Representatives.
3/26: 10-Year Treasury rate at 0.83 percent at close.