

Better Border Suggestions

As the Biden Administration continues to "build our economy back better from the pandemic and mobilize a whole-of-government effort to reduce climate pollution in every sector of the economy,"¹ we request special attention for the busiest land border crossing in our country and major economic engine, the San Ysidro Land Port of Entry. Border communities were disproportionately impacted during the pandemic by twenty months of tourist visa restrictions and increased border wait times. Beyond the immediate economic impact, longer wait times also caused increased greenhouse gas emissions from idling vehicles. Increased efficiency at our border crossings will not only offer an economic growth opportunity that will benefit the entire country but will also bring public health wins and environmental advantages for nearby residents. In support of these efforts, we, the undersigned stakeholders, as elected officials, civic leaders, business leaders, NGO's and/or community members offer the outlined suggestions below regarding our land border crossings for the improvement and sustainability of the Cali Baja Mega Region.

Our region has been a uniting ground of people with shared culture and roots throughout history – from our origins in Kumeyaay land to becoming a region that was split into two countries. We are, and have always been, inextricably connected. Today, we are a bi-national metropolis – with economies that are interdependent and intertwined. Workers and production lines are shared on both sides of the border. Families live on both sides. Children play on one side and go to school on the other. We work on one side and get medical treatment on the other. Our public policies, including border enforcement, result in co-responsibility and demand principles of social equity be applied at all angles of border crossing issues. Mexico is a good partner and to enhance that relationship we should continue to improve the border crossing experience for tourists, visitors, and our bi-national community.

Today, Cali Baja is the largest integrated economic zone along the US-Mexico border. It is home to seven million inhabitants and has a regional GDP of \$250 billion and an estimated \$70 billion in cross border trade flows. The Cali Baja region comprises the two southernmost counties in California (San Diego County and Imperial County) and principal populations of Baja California (Ensenada, Mexicali, Rosarito San Quintin, Tecate, San Felipe, Valle de Guadalupe, and Tijuana).²

A large share of the region's workforce crosses the border every day. Tourist Visa restrictions during the pandemic proved that 140,000 US citizens and residents cross the border from Baja California to work or run errands each day in San Diego County alone. This includes an estimated 2,627 people working in the health sector as doctors, dentists, nurses, paramedics, caregivers, and other health-related occupations. On the other hand, more than 4,700 cross-border workers live in San Diego and Imperial counties and work in Mexico.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>

² The Cali Baja Regional Economy – Production, Employment, Trade & Investment. University of San Diego Knauss School of Business - The Ahlers Center for International Business. 2022.

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However, the dynamic described above is only functional and sustainable if permitted workers, employers, clients, visitors, students, investors, shoppers, and tourists can cross the border in an efficient manner.

In addition to the negative impacts on businesses, families, and quality of life - long border wait times affect the quality of the air we breathe. “Delays at the border result in 457 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions being released every day, equivalent to the annual emissions of 100 passenger vehicles. Due to this, air pollutants in San Ysidro are 10 times higher than in communities just 10 miles north. Asthma rates and incidence of cardiovascular ailments near the border are among the highest in the state.³

For the purposes of this document, we shall use the following definitions:

- **Bicyclist** – Traveler that uses a bicycle as a mode of transportation
- **Border Crossing Wait Time** – the time from which a person or vehicle physically stops in queue for border crossing inspection until the time said person or vehicle reaches an inspecting officer.
- **CBP** – US Customs and Border Protection
- **DFO** – CBP Director of Field Operations, San Diego
- **Efficient Wait Times** – Border crossing times of no more than 15 minutes any day, at any given time for SENTRI vehicles; 15 minutes any day, at any given time for pedestrian crossers; 30 minutes any day, at any given time for READY Lane vehicles; 45 minutes for General Lane vehicles.
- **Pedestrian** – an individual crossing the border on foot, whether a bus passenger having to de-board at the border or an individual arriving and leaving the POE on foot.
- **SYLPOE** – San Ysidro Land Port of Entry

Suggestions for Border Wait Time Efficiency

1. **Increased use of “Risk Evaluation.”** Per studies by the San Diego Association of Governments, 97% of crossers at the SYLPOE cross three or more times a week. This data demonstrates that there is a high volume of frequent crossers. To determine risk, we can begin with that basis and instead of focusing efforts on “registering” 100% of crossers, security scrutiny can be placed on the 3% we do not know. In fact, recent border restrictions against tourist visa holders proved there are over 140,000 US citizens, legal workers, and students crossing daily at San Diego County LPOE’s, demonstrating the limited risk of most daily crossings. Pedestrians and cyclists pose much less security risk than does a personal vehicle, SENTRI much less a risk than everyone else, and personal vehicles much less than commercial trucks. While this may sound elementary, pedestrian wait times are often some of the longest suffered by SYLPOE crossers.

³ The Other Crisis at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Rising Air Pollution. Justin Worland, Time Magazine. 2022.

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2. **Prioritize reduced border wait times at the US Customs and Border Protection Agency.** By prioritizing reduced border wait times agencywide, the direction will trickle down from the DFO level down to the inspection booths facing crossers daily. Secondary inspection capacity has doubled at SYLPOE in the last 5 years. If an officer is not satisfied with the results of his/her immediate interaction with crossers, secondary procedures should be implemented for trunk searches, vehicle underbelly inspections, etc., freeing up time in primary lanes. In addition to the benefits for tourism, commerce and the economy - efficient border wait times will significantly reduce the 457 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions released into our communities every day.
3. **Installation of document readers in pedestrian lanes.** Using the same technique currently used for vehicles, document readers for each pedestrian lane would allow the officers to have preloaded information of the crosser prior to the person's approach. With no vehicle to inspect and x-ray machines to assist with luggage, pedestrian wait times should consistently remain low.
4. **Implementation of "Customer Service" as standard operating procedure.** While land-port and air-port comparisons are rare, travelers coming into the US from abroad are greeted by TSA/CBP officers with "Welcome home!" signs. In contrast, frequent land crossers whom we know and depend on for our region's cultural and economic richness are greeted with signs that read, "Where are you going, and what are you bringing?" Customer Service would not only increase officer and crosser morale but assist in more efficient crossings as well.
5. In the effort to pre-vet as many crossers as possible and abide by the intent of one applying for the SENTRI/ Global Entry programs - **consistent prioritization of minimal wait time should be executed in SENTRI Lanes.**
6. **Create a rubric for time limit goals** for officer interaction with each person/vehicle at the primary lanes. Port Directors can view traffic patterns, hours of operations, and number of open lanes to assess and establish a time-per-inspection goal that will be more conducive to efficient border wait times.
7. **Establish a more efficient "chain of custody" procedure** for vehicles sent to secondary inspection. For twenty years, we have witnessed lengthy inspections on primary lanes, followed by the inspecting officer walking out and closing his/her lane gate, then the same officer will either walk the vehicle to secondary inspection or stand behind his/her booth to watch the vehicle slowly drive to secondary inspection. The same officer then walks to the front of the booth, opens the gate, prepares, and proceed with the next vehicle. With 50,000+ vehicles crossing each day, this process translates to lengthy border wait times.

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8. **Greater use of technology.** Conduct robust outreach to promote online services or the CBP app (CBP 1) to expedite procedures. Increase online offerings to allow full processing of crossers (with exception of interview requirements) online. Use GPS or similar technology to create a precise program to measure live border wait times. Passport/ID scanners should be optimized for faster recognition.

9. **Emphasis on infrastructure beyond initial brick and mortar.** The soft edges of the land port of entry, including (and especially) pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle approaches to inspection booths should be more welcoming. Current K-rail, barbed wire, and piled up combat gear do not represent a dignified image for our visitors or returning citizens, are not conducive to our quality of life, and are not welcoming. The SYLPOE is the front door to America's Finest City for US citizens returning to their country and global visitors and the infrastructure should be reflective of those values.
 - a. **Immediate** and purposeful **increase of investment**, from all levels of government, in the infrastructure of the San Ysidro and Tijuana communities immediately surrounding the LPOE.

 - b. Full use of facilities including **double stacked booths**, the re-opening of PedWest, adding segmented pedestrian lanes for our **disabled/elderly** visitors and facilitation of **bicyclists**.

 - c. Additional **crossing options** - including a dedicated pedestrian bridge between the San Diego Trolley and an upcoming Baja California light rail system and a ferry crossing between Tijuana and Imperial Beach – must be supported politically and with resources.

 - d. GSA implement regular **stakeholder engagement** to discuss, monitor and implement measures regarding cleanliness, personal safety, security, and maintenance of POE.

 - e. Invest time and resources on both sides of the border for **better signage**. Greater, clearer, and harmonized signage is needed to delineate access lanes for POE and surrounding areas. Traffic congestion caused by border crossings impedes access to commercial areas at, or near, the POE. Destinations for most crossers need to be analyzed and, accordingly, emphasized by signage.

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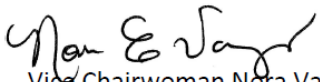
San Ysidro LPOE Stakeholders Alliance
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10. **Creation of a US Task Force** to review the balance of security with economy, impacts of border wait times, and environmental impacts on US communities. This task force should consist of personnel from DHS, Trade, State, Economy, elected and business leaders and community stakeholders and report to High Level Economic Dialogues. Annual and/or biannual meetings with the titulars of these groups could be held, then quarterly Border Liaison Mechanism meetings and monthly Port Working Group meetings used as continued work/ follow-up.

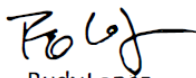
The Bush II and Obama administrations made an \$877 million investment in the largest land border reconfiguration project in US history. Given this historic investment, we must all ensure maximum utilization and efficiency of this money.


While this list is directed at the US Federal government, we all have ancillary pieces, responsibilities, and initiatives that, together with our federal governments, can make our border crossings better engines of the US/MX binational economy and strengthen the whole of North America, as reaffirmed in the new USMCA Free Trade Agreement. As a region, we are also building infrastructure to increase CBP capacity, as is the case of the new Otay Mesa Port of Entry. We welcome the mutual collaboration with the federal government at our existing ports to expedite border crossings and improve the experience for our binational community and worldwide visitors.

After 20 months of border restrictions impacting our border communities, federal investments in staffing, creating efficiency and surrounding infrastructure at our land ports of entry are a necessity to restore economic – and physical – health of our community and to ensure recent investments meet the needs of the future. as planned.

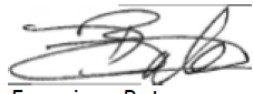

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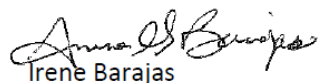

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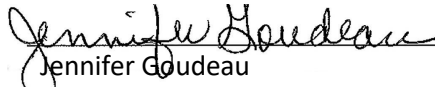

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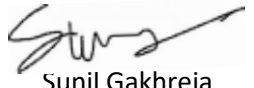

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