



Briefing Paper

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Solving Our Border Crossing Problem In an Era of Terrorism

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POLICY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE OPERATION OF THE LAND PORTS AT THE SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA BORDER¹

One of the measures that would strengthen our enforcement capabilities is to “explore alternative inspection systems that allow for facilitation of low risk travelers while focusing on high-risk travelers...”

“...We must increase our security and improve our systems, but in doing so we must not forget what has made this nation great – our openness to new ideas and new people, and a commitment to individual freedom, shared values, innovation and the free market. If, in response to events of September 11, we engage in excess and shut out what has made America great, then we will have given the terrorists a far greater victory than they could have hoped to achieve.”

James W. Ziglar, Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, in his October 17, 2001 statement before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

I. INTRODUCTION

Among its many unfortunate consequences, the sanguinary terrorist attacks on the United States have aggravated the historic problem of long wait times at the southwest border with Mexico. Previous to September 11, wait times at the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry were already much longer on average than what is deemed reasonable by community and authorities alike.² Heightened security measures after that date have altered the normal rhythm and procedures at all border crossings, and this has been particularly disruptive to the San Diego/Tijuana economy, the largest and perhaps most dynamic binational region in North America. In the weeks and months following 9/11 estimated wait times for passenger vehicles at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa have often been upwards of 60 and even 90 minutes. This has been in stark contrast to the border with Canada, where most of the 27 ports of entry generally register no delays whatsoever. Wait times at the San Diego border are also often among the worst of the 34 southern ports of entry into the United States.³

¹ The focus of this paper is on passenger vehicle and pedestrian crossings, not on commercial traffic, although some observations and policy implications are also pertinent to the latter.

² The goal is a wait time no longer than 20 minutes for passenger vehicles. As can be seen in the Appendix, wait times have been considerably higher than that and, what’s worse, seem to continue rising. In the period from December 1999 to November 2000 the probability of a delay greater than 20 minutes at San Ysidro on a weekday was around 65%; on a weekend it was over 90%.

³ Based on random observations of daily estimates of border wait times on the U.S. Customs web site. On the morning of October 31, for example, 16 out of 27 POEs with Canada registered no wait times. Of the remaining 11, one had a 15 minute wait time, another a 10-minute wait time, and the rest registered wait times of 5 minutes or less. On that same morning the estimated wait time at San Ysidro was 80 minutes, and 50 minutes at Otay Mesa. These

Stage 1 security alerts have meant thorough inspections of every individual and vehicle that crosses into the United States. The ensuing steep climb in border crossing times has damaged the already weakened border economy, as the flow of workers and shoppers from Tijuana into San Diego is deterred. It also puts an additional damper on a tourist industry on both sides of the border already affected by fears of traveling. The situation is so serious that U.S. Rep. Bob Filner has asked California Governor Gray Davis to declare a state of emergency for California's border communities, which have experienced sharp economic losses since tightened border security slowed the flow of Mexican shoppers.⁴

It is clear that for the moment – and probably for a long time to come – security concerns have a greater tendency than before to overwhelm concerns about facilitating travel and commerce across the border. Yet, if law enforcement measures are allowed to continue slowing down the flow of law-abiding individuals and trade across the border, they will constrain much of the growth prospects of this cross-border economy.

As a public policy organization that has followed the evolution of the San Diego/Baja California region since 1991 and is committed to its economic, political and social development, San Diego Dialogue believes the war on terrorism presents this region with an opportunity to lead the way in providing the very best in border security, while eliminating negative impacts on commerce and quality of life. The lessons we have learned from our work with the inspection agencies and the community over the past decade make us confident that the present crisis can be overcome while setting the foundations for permanently overcoming the border wait problem.

Better law-enforcement and facilitation at the border **can** be simultaneously accomplished based on a comprehensive partnership between the federal agencies responsible for port of entry operations and the regional community. Together, agencies and the community can accomplish these goals if they identify the lessons about the cross-border phenomenon learnt in the past decade and apply them to solve the current crisis. Among the most important of these lessons are:

- 1. It is possible to identify very low-risk crossers at the San Diego/Tijuana border ports.** Once this is done, law-enforcement can be improved by exploring “alternative inspection systems that allow for facilitation of low risk travelers while focusing on high-risk travelers,” as INS Commissioner James Ziglar suggests.⁵
- 2. Research shows how important the border-crossing phenomenon is to the well being of the region and to its future development.** Decision-makers affecting port of entry operations have to be mindful of this fact. They should consider that the region has a stake in the way the border operates and is able and willing to make contributions for its improvement.

were the highest figures for the entire southern border, with the exception of El Paso Bridge of the Americas (60 minutes) and El Paso Paso del Norte (75 minutes).

⁴ *The San Diego Union Tribune*, October 11, 2001.

⁵ Statement before the Senate Judiciary Committee. October 17, 2001.

3. The SENTRI (dedicated commuter lane) Program has shown that transparency – good, solid information on who is showing up at the border – provides a better basis for law enforcement than trying to thoroughly inspect every vehicle and person when they appear at the ports of entry. The program is also a boon to commerce and tourism.
4. SENTRI by itself is not enough. There is the need for a comprehensive, on-going partnership between the region and the inspection agencies to accomplish timely research, monitoring, feedback and accountability.

Each of these lessons will be discussed in more detail in the following section. Then, in the final section of this paper, a series of recommendations will be made for improving port of entry operations and for building a better partnership between the agencies and the region.

II. LESSONS FOR IMPROVING PORT OF ENTRY OPERATIONS

Lesson 1: It is possible to identify very low-risk crossers at the San Diego/Tijuana border ports

In 1994 San Diego Dialogue published the results of the only full-scale survey of border crossers that has been applied in the region. *Who Crosses the Border*⁶ revealed information about the number and composition of border-crossers that has proved to have important policy implications for port of entry operations and has also been useful for understanding the importance of the border-crossing phenomenon to the regional economy and society.

Among the survey's most relevant findings is the fact that the number of people who cross the border at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa is only about a tenth of the number of total crossings registered at these ports of entry every month. If current crossings stand at an average of around 5.2 million a month,⁷ this means that the total number of crossers could be as few as 520,000. This is because frequent (4 to 19 times a month) and very frequent (20 or more times a month) crossers comprise 60% of all crossers and account for **96% of all crossings**.⁸

⁶ *Who Crosses the Border: A View of the San Diego/Tijuana Metropolitan Region*. A Report of San Diego Dialogue, April 1994.

⁷ This figure is based on data provided by the U.S. Customs Service at the time the survey was taken, in the summer of 1992. More recent statistics made available by the U.S. Department of Transportation reflect an average number of crossings at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa closer to 4.2 million a month (see Appendix 2). The paucity of reliable and consistent statistics on border crossings makes it near impossible to build a useful time series that would permit a dynamic and seasonally adjusted analysis of the phenomenon.

⁸ These and other findings from the *Who Crosses the Border* study come from a survey which is now almost ten years old. However, even though the total numbers of border crossers may have changed, there is no reason to suppose that the proportions have as well. It could even be argued that the tendency is for the proportion of frequent crossers to increase, as a consequence of growing cross-border integration. In any case, even if frequent crossers

This finding is linked to another very significant one – the fact that nearly all crossers – 96% of them – are residents of the greater San Diego/Tijuana region. Not only that, but fully 41% of the individuals who cross the border are American citizens who either travel to Mexico temporarily or are residents of that country.

In other words, around 312,000 American and Mexican citizens residing in the border region are frequent crossers and account for 96% of all crossings from Tijuana into San Diego. Only 4% of the crossings – approximately 208,000 a month, or 6,933 a day – correspond to occasional or first time crossers who might require heightened surveillance at the ports of entry.

The lesson to be learned from these figures is that if you can identify, pre-inspect and provide rapid access to low-risk frequent crossers, the number of thorough inspections needed at the ports of entry can be dramatically reduced. This means that the scarce human and material resources of the federal border-inspection agencies can be more efficiently employed by concentrating on high-risk travelers. Furthermore, it stands to reason that this type of targeted inspection is a more effective basis for law enforcement than over-extending the agencies' resources by trying to inspect every single individual and vehicle that shows up at the gates. This practice places a growing strain on the limited staff of border inspectors, despite the considerable efforts of the federal agencies to increase their personnel.⁹

Identifying and registering low-risk individuals from a universe of 312,000 frequent crossers does not seem to be an excessive task, especially when the potential benefits both to the law-enforcement effort and to the regional economy are taken into account. According to *Who Crosses the Border*, Mexican citizens holding Green Cards (which are being replaced by more secure identity documents, such as laser visas) and American citizens who cross the border at least four times a month constitute 129,000 of these frequent crossers. Both of these groups are especially low-risk and easily subject to background checks and registration.

Aided by technology, close to 300,000 low-risk frequent crossers – with appropriate, foolproof identifications – would be able to cross the border in seconds or minutes, as those who participate in the SENTRI Program already do. Besides increasing security, this scenario would represent a magnificent boost to the regional economy and would provide a bright prospect for its future development.

Lesson 2: The border-crossing phenomenon is key to the well being of the region and to its future development

Commerce and Tourism

represented only 80 or 85% of the total, incorporating them into a program like SENTRI would be sufficient to solve the border wait problem.

⁹ During the 2001 COBRO Summer Conference on Border Wait Times, Mr. Jayson Ahern, Acting Director of the Southern California Customs Management Center, said that there has been a 10% increase in people crossing the border in the last five years, while staffing levels have decreased 12% in the same period.

The *Who Crosses the Border* study found that Tijuana area residents make one and a half million trips into the San Diego area each month for the primary purpose of shopping. A conservative estimate at the time was that these trips translated into close to 3 billion dollars spent in San Diego in purchases and other expenses. That figure might now be up to approximately 5 billion dollars.¹⁰ Chula Vista is the most frequent destination for shoppers, followed by San Ysidro. Border crossers increase the size of the South Bay market by perhaps 50%, through one million shopping visits each month.

According to a recent survey sponsored by the South County Economic Development Council and performed by Crossborder Business Associates,¹¹ 78% of businesses in South County with more than 10 employees consider that over 10% of their sales come from Tijuana or Baja California customers, 48% estimate that more than 30% of their sales come from such customers, while for fully 24% of the businesses surveyed the majority of their sales – over 60% - are to Baja California customers.

Tax Revenues

Based on the *Who Crosses the Border* study and on a 1978 survey by the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, it can be assumed that purchases by Mexican citizens represent approximately 7% of total taxable sales in San Diego County¹² According to the California State Board of Equalization, taxable sales in San Diego County were \$36.2 billion in 2000, which means border-crossers last year spent approximately \$2.5 billion in San Diego County on goods subject to California sales tax. Tax revenues from these sales amount to \$200 million for all levels of government in California.

Cross-border Employment

It is estimated that 7% of the economically active population of Tijuana works in San Diego.¹³ According to *Who Crosses the Border*, 40,000 individuals make 800,000 monthly crossings to come work in the San Diego area. These workers play an important role in satisfying the demand for labor, especially in the service sector, where nearly 18,000 of them are employed. Workers from the Tijuana area are also relevant in the technical, sales and administrative occupations, as well as in precision production and craft occupations.

Importance to Tijuana

¹⁰ According to San Diego State Professor of Economics James Gerber (see following footnote), cross-border sales represent around 7% of total taxable sales in San Diego County, roughly equivalent to the \$1.5 billion figure estimated by the *Who Crosses the Border* study in 1992 and to \$2.5 billion in 2000. The ratio of total spending to taxable sales by Tijuana area residents was found in the study to be two to one, and there is no reason to suppose that this has changed significantly.

¹¹ Presented at the Town Hall meeting hosted by the San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce on October 18, 2001.

¹² Gerber, James. "The effects of the depreciation of the peso on cross-border retail sales in San Diego and Imperial Counties," San Diego Dialogue, June 1999 (www.sandiegodialogue.org).

¹³ Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), cited in San Diego Dialogue's *Cross-Border Economic Bulletin*, October 2001.

Residents of Tijuana who work in the San Diego area earn an estimated \$650 million a year in wage and salary income, a good part of which goes to enhance the Baja California economy. On the other hand, 2.6 million trips are made by U.S. residents to visit the Tijuana area each month through Otay Mesa and San Ysidro, 500,000 of which are made for work and business-related activities. Visitors to Tijuana spend at least \$2.6 billion a year in shopping, leisure and recreational activities.¹⁴

Wait Times Affect the Cross-border Economy

A San Diego Dialogue study showed that \$5 to \$7 million in additional taxable retail sales in the South Bay region could be attributed to reduced wait times at the border in the fourth quarter of 1992. This represented a 5% increase in sales above what would have been expected for that time period.

More recent evidence after the September 11 terrorist attacks reveals that increased crossing times have had a large, negative impact on sales, especially in South County, and have also affected the operation of businesses that depend on workers who come from the Tijuana area. The gravity of this situation is being conveyed to the authorities by local business owners in town hall meetings across the county, such as one hosted by the San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce on October 18, 2001. In recognition of this economic crisis the San Diego City Council on December 10, 2001 unanimously approved a state of economic emergency.

According to the South County Economic Development Council survey cited above, increased border waits have resulted in an average daily drop of 34% in car crossings and of 30% in pedestrian crossings at the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry. The survey found that almost three quarters of businesses in San Ysidro and South San Diego have experienced a fall in sales since September 11 that can be attributed to the loss of Baja California customers. Of the businesses affected, almost 90% of them have registered drops greater than 10%, while 11% have registered a decline in sales of more than 60%.

Businesses in Tijuana and the entire tourism industry in the area have also been seriously affected by the decreased flow of visitors due to longer wait times at the border, as has been recognized by community leaders and local authorities alike.

Lesson 3: The SENTRI Program works!

The Secure Electronic Network for Travelers' Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) Program is a system that identifies travelers who pose little risk to border security, verifies their low risk status through extensive record checks, and screens approved participants and their vehicles, each and every time they enter the United States. The development of SENTRI was encouraged by the *Who Crosses the Border* study, which provided evidence that the majority of border crossers were low-risk local residents who were willing to be investigated by the federal agencies in order to receive pre-clearance and who were also willing to pay a fee in order to enjoy rapid access across the border. It

¹⁴ *Who Crosses the Border*. Op.cit.

was designed by a team of law enforcement experts from the INS, U.S. Customs Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Transportation, and the United States Attorney to the Southern District of California.

When an approved international traveler approaches the border in one of the special SENTRI lanes, the system automatically identifies the vehicle and validates the identity of its occupants. This is accomplished in three ways: 1) through data maintained in a SENTRI enrollment system computer (which includes digital photographs of the vehicle's occupants); 2) from data accessed by a magnetic stripe reader and the border crosser's Port Pass Identification Number; and 3) by an inspector's visual comparison of the vehicle and its passengers with the data on a computer screen. Simultaneously, automatic digital license plate readers and computers perform queries of the vehicles and their occupants against law enforcement databases that are continuously updated. A combination of electric gates, tire shredders, traffic control lights, fixed iron bollards, and pop-up pneumatic bollards ensure physical control of the border crossers and their vehicles.

Participants in the program wait no longer than three minutes to enter the United States, even at the busiest time of day. Critical information required in the inspection process is provided to the inspector in advance of the passenger's arrival, thus reducing the inspection time from an average of 30-40 seconds to an average of 10 seconds. As soon as a vehicle arrives at the border, bollards and concrete barriers create a chute that captures the SENTRI traffic and puts it under an inspector's zone of control. At the entrance of the zone, an in-ground inductive loop and a free standing light curtain sense the vehicle and enable the SENTRI Automatic Vehicle (AVI) system. The AVI antennae interrogates an RF transmitter located on the enrolled participant's vehicle. Once alerted, a computer locates data about the vehicle and its authorized travelers and stores it for ready access and display. As a vehicle continues through the chute, a second set of AVI equipment activates and sends the information to a computer screen in the inspector's booth. Upon reaching the booth, the driver stops, reaches out the window and swipes an electronically coded PortPass card through a magnetic stripe card reader. If both the inspector and the SENTRI electronic equipment approve, the traffic light turns green, the exit gate raises, the tire shredders retract, and the traveler can drive into the United States.

With the leadership of then California Representative Lynn Schenk, the United States Congress approved, in 1994, the implementation of the SENTRI lane program at Otay Mesa, which began the following year. The success of this pilot program led to the decision to expand the service to other U.S.-Mexico land ports of entry, most notably that in El Paso, Texas, and modified versions have been implemented at the border with Canada in Buffalo and in Detroit. To the satisfaction of the San Diego/Tijuana community, the SENTRI Program began operating at the San Ysidro port of entry starting in September of 2000.

The expansion of the SENTRI Program in the region has been remarkable, although demand has far outpaced the capacity of INS to provide the service to interested border crossers. As of August of this year over 9,000 individuals and over 10,000 vehicles had

enrolled in the program. Almost half of those enrollments occurred in the course of the last twelve months, coinciding with its implementation at San Ysidro.

During its first three months of operation (October to December of 2000) SENTRI usage at San Ysidro accounted for an average of around 17,000 vehicle crossings a month; by August of this year this figure had tripled to a monthly average of approximately 50,000 vehicle crossings per month.¹⁵ This is still a very small proportion – less than 4% - of the million and a quarter vehicles that, on average, cross the border at San Ysidro every month. However, the great interest the program has generated among potential users and the long waiting list of people who want to register for it are a clear indication of how it can continue contributing to solve both facilitation and the law enforcement issues at the border.

The successful deployment of the SENTRI Program has confirmed to border authorities and community alike that dedicated commuter lanes are perhaps the best possible way of reconciling law enforcement and facilitation objectives, through the use of technology combined with a decentralized process of pre-clearing frequent users. Experience has borne out the fact that applicants to the SENTRI Program are extremely low-risk for illegal activities, since they have to go through an extensive background check and are easily identified residents of the region. Pre-clearing these individuals liberates human and infrastructure resources at the ports of entry that can then be better employed to focus law enforcement procedures on non-frequent crossers who are higher security risks.

Lesson 4: The SENTRI Program by itself is not enough

The SENTRI Program was the result of a partnership between a broad coalition of local and regional organizations with a stake in the growth and prosperity of San Diego/Tijuana and the border inspection agencies. The coalition led to the creation of an Advisory Committee to the Ports of Entry composed of local community members from both sides of the border. Local community involvement was also instrumental in getting the U.S. Customs and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services to agree that a 20-minute maximum wait time is an appropriate target for passenger vehicle border crossings.

A major step forward towards building a partnership was the recognition by federal authorities, both in Washington and in San Diego, that the region has a legitimate interest in the way the border operates, as well as knowledge and other potential resources that it could contribute towards improving port of entry operations. However, in the past few years the partnership between the region and the federal border agencies has weakened, and this has contributed to the absence of an effective response to the new deterioration of border wait times, which was occurring long before September 11. (See Appendix 1).

The Ports of Entry Advisory Council has ceased to operate, in effect eliminating the only effective forum for relating regional development and cross-border metropolitan

¹⁵ INS and U.S. Customs Report on the SENTRI Program. August 2001.

integration goals and projects to POE planning and operations. The region no longer participates in establishing shared goals for port of entry operations, nor is it being included in the monitoring of goals already established, such as the 20-minute maximum wait time standard for border crossings.

The lesson is that even an effective and far-reaching program such as SENTRI cannot by itself solve the complex issue of port of entry operation. Without a comprehensive, on-going partnership between the region and the inspection agencies, SENTRI was not implemented properly, curtailing its full potential, and wait times grew again to be intolerable, with no adequate plan in place to improve the situation. In the absence of this partnership, there was no incentive to engage in timely research and planning, or to monitor shared goals. As a result, the agencies did not receive useful feedback from the community and were not accountable to it.

III. OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING PORT OF ENTRY OPERATIONS AND BUILDING A BETTER PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA REGION AND THE BORDER INSPECTION AGENCIES

The regional community is suffering significant economic and social consequences from the slowdown in border operations since September 11 and is looking to the federal border inspection agencies for help. This is a unique opportunity for strengthening the partnership between both parties and searching for joint solutions to law enforcement and facilitation concerns. The border communities want and deserve to be heard on ways to improve border operations. They know the problems intimately because they suffer them daily, and they are ready to contribute ideas and resources in the fight against terrorism and for reducing wait times at the ports of entry.

Here are three recommendations that respond to the San Diego/Tijuana community's desire to improve port of entry operations and to build a better partnership with the border inspection agencies:

III.1 Expand on SENTRI and incorporate pedestrian frequent crossers to the Program

We are convinced that expanding the dedicated commuter lane program is one of the best and most effective investments the government can make for improving security at the border. Individuals who register for the SENTRI Program are fingerprinted and undergo background checks more rigorous than any they would be likely to face at a port of entry. They are known and easily identifiable residents of the San Diego/Tijuana metropolitan area, with families, jobs and economic interests in the region.

The SENTRI Program has been tried and shown to be effective. It is, however, expanding at a much slower rate than would be desirable for it to have a real impact on improving security and facilitation at the border. Wait times of up to six months to

register for the Program and a cost of \$129 a year are deterrents for potential users, although there is – despite this - a long waiting list to join SENTRI. This suggests that a lot of border crossers are interested in the program, and surely many more would be if the annual fee were reduced or eliminated.

The goal – to put it succinctly – should be to get **all** low-risk frequent crossers into SENTRI or a similar program for pedestrians. This would do much to solve the security and the facilitation problems at the San Diego/Tijuana border. To make participation in SENTRI more attractive, a reasonable goal would be to reduce the processing time for joining the program to a maximum of six weeks. The yearly fee should also be reduced or, alternatively, it should be made to count for five years instead of one, thereby cutting down on re-enrollment time and expenses.

The establishment of a Rapid Inspection Program for pedestrians would be as warranted and as effective as the SENTRI Program is in the case of passenger vehicle crossers. It is likely, though, that pedestrian crossers would be more reluctant to pay the fee currently charged for participating in SENTRI.

It should be noted that the INS already has Travelers' Rapid Inspection Programs in place for passengers at several U.S. airports, so that the technology and the experience exist which could permit migrating this sort of system to a land port of entry.¹⁶ Enrollment into these passenger inspection programs is, by the way, free of charge. Because of the number of pedestrian crossers and their importance to the regional economy, San Ysidro is an excellent candidate to become the first port of entry where this type of program is implemented.¹⁷

For the registered user, a SENTRI card means crossing the border in minutes or seconds, and this has held true even in these last few weeks of heightened security. For the federal border agencies the SENTRI Program means more effective law enforcement by allowing their limited human and material resources to concentrate on high-risk situations. For the bi-national community, SENTRI has the potential to facilitate regional development by making the border safer and more efficient for businesses and families.

There is no doubt that the crash enrollment program for SENTRI we are advocating will require more personnel, equipment and inter-agency cooperation. However, we are certain that the resources invested to expand the SENTRI Program will be more than compensated by the benefits of freeing part of the resources now being used for “normal” border inspections. This is particularly true today, when human and technological resources are being diverted into homeland security, including ports of

¹⁶ According to the INS website, the Passenger Accelerated Service System (INSPASS) is an automated system at airports that can significantly reduce immigration inspection processing time for authorized travelers. INSPASS combines automation with a hand geometry biometric image to validate the claimed identity of an individual. Eligible frequent travelers may enroll in the program at any INSPASS enrollment office.

¹⁷ The number of pedestrian crossings at San Ysidro in 2000 was between 7.5 and 12.2 million, according to the source consulted (see Appendix 2).

entry. We are convinced that at least part of these resources would be best employed in a program that has proven its effectiveness.

If, in addition, we take into account the contribution of an expanded SENTRI Program to the regional economy, the benefits of investing in it multiply for both private businesses and government coffers, not to mention for gains in quality of life in the region and the enhanced capacity of law enforcement agencies to accomplish their mission.

Finally, it should be considered that the SENTRI Program is probably the best platform for developing the “fully automated and integrated entry-exit data collection system” that the INS is required to deploy at the 50 largest land ports of entry by the end of 2004, according to the Data Management Improvement Act passed in 2000 (this system, by the way, is required not to harm either tourism or trade). To this effect, the same technology used to identify SENTRI users on their way into the United States could be employed to register their departure from the country.

III.2 Create a comprehensive partnership between the community and the border inspection agencies

As we have learned, even far-reaching solutions like the SENTRI Program are no substitute for an ongoing and comprehensive partnership between the principal stakeholders in port of entry operations. This partnership must cover a broad agenda that satisfies both the community’s and the agencies’ immediate and long term needs and expectations. It must also make the federal border agencies more capable of responding to legitimate concerns of the regional population and to unforeseen changes in the border, such as the one we are living today.

Here are some recommendations for strengthening this partnership between the community and the agencies:

Reestablish the Ports of Entry Advisory Council

This Council once served successfully as a forum where representative community organizations could dialogue with the federal border authorities and contribute information and ideas to help solve both short and long-term issues in port of entry operations. Today it is urgent once more to have such a forum, which could meet quarterly to discuss topics such as the following:

- Analyze options for improving port of entry infrastructure and operation, and for the possible establishment of new ports of entry.
- Relate regional development and cross-border metropolitan integration goals and projects to port of entry planning and operation.
- Analyze alternative measures for improving wait times while enhancing law-enforcement.
- Enlist the cooperation of Mexican authorities at the local level for accomplishing both law-enforcement and facilitation goals.

- Identify specific short-term problems at border crossings and clarify possible misunderstandings in the application of new procedures for inspection of border crossers (for example, what is valid and sufficient identification).
- Plan and coordinate information campaigns by government agencies and community organizations on both sides of the border to clarify to border crossers the documentation now required for entry into the United States and to explain and gain public acceptance for the anti-terrorist security measures being undertaken.

Develop a coordinated research agenda

Comprehensive, periodic and up-to-date information on the border crossing phenomenon is essential to make correct policy decisions, evaluate ongoing programs and form opinion among law-makers and the public. The current paucity and inconsistency of data affects everything from daily port management to infrastructure planning. Research should also serve to keep abreast of developments in technology and planning that could be useful for improving port of entry operations, as well as to analyze other border experiences.

The border community can contribute financially and through specific research projects to a coordinated research agenda that should include, at a minimum, the following items:

- Monitoring wait times, the number and composition of border crossers, and the evolution of the SENTRI Program.
- Updating information on the importance of border crossers to the regional economy.
- Analyzing usage patterns of the ports of entry in relation to a variety of variables, including staffing.
- Projecting traffic growth and infrastructure needs in a timely fashion.
- Identifying and coordinating the research efforts of participating agencies and community organizations.
- Identifying and assessing the applicability of new technologies to aid in the inspection of border crossers and in data collection.

Institute a public education and outreach program

A publication and outreach strategy should be established to inform elected officials, the media, and key public agencies and private sector associations about the efforts to improve port of entry operations, and to garner support for these initiatives. The border community can and should play a key role in implementing such a strategy.

III.3 Building support for a Border Partnership in Washington and Mexico City

Crises are also a time of opportunities, and this is an opportunity for a community-agency partnership to contribute in the war against terrorism while at the same time

attacking the border wait problem that has long hampered the development of the San Diego/Tijuana region.

The fight against terrorism should not exclude the regional community, which is also its potential target. Ways must be found to respond simultaneously to both security and facilitation concerns at the border. We have shown that these two goals are not necessarily at odds with each other and that, in fact, you can have better law enforcement if you do better facilitation, as is the case with the SENTRI Program. Further, we have suggested that SENTRI is also an ideal platform for developing an automated and integrated entry-exit data collection system, as well as other security systems, which will need to be deployed in the years to come to guarantee the safety of the nation's borders.

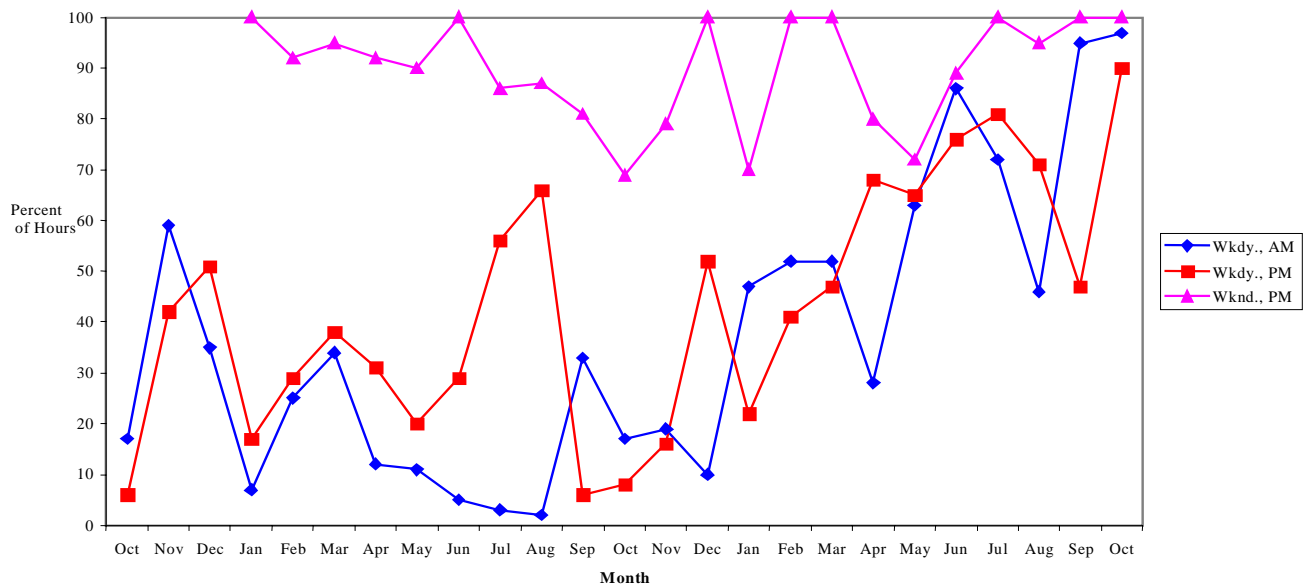
It is not a minor point that the strategy we are advocating is consonant with the strengthening of our relationship with Mexico, since it is also in the interest of our southern neighbor that legal crossings of individuals and merchandise into the United States be expedited while security is preserved. Both federal governments – and Canada's as well - are presently engaged in conversations aimed at promoting security in the entire NAFTA region through joint measures like information-sharing on migrants and the establishment of coordinated inspection procedures. We believe that the Mexican federal government and the government of the State of Baja California have a role to play in the expansion of programs like SENTRI, including providing information pursuant to the pre-inspection of frequent crossers who reside in Mexico.

The binational border region of San Diego/Tijuana is unique in all of North America for the size of its population, its social and economic integration and its development potential. It has been a national leader in establishing a rapid commuter lane system that responds to both security and facilitation interests. Now it should also serve as an example of how a committed partnership between border agencies and the binational community could benefit both national security and regional prosperity.

Appendix 1: Recent Evolution of Border Wait Times for Passenger Vehicles

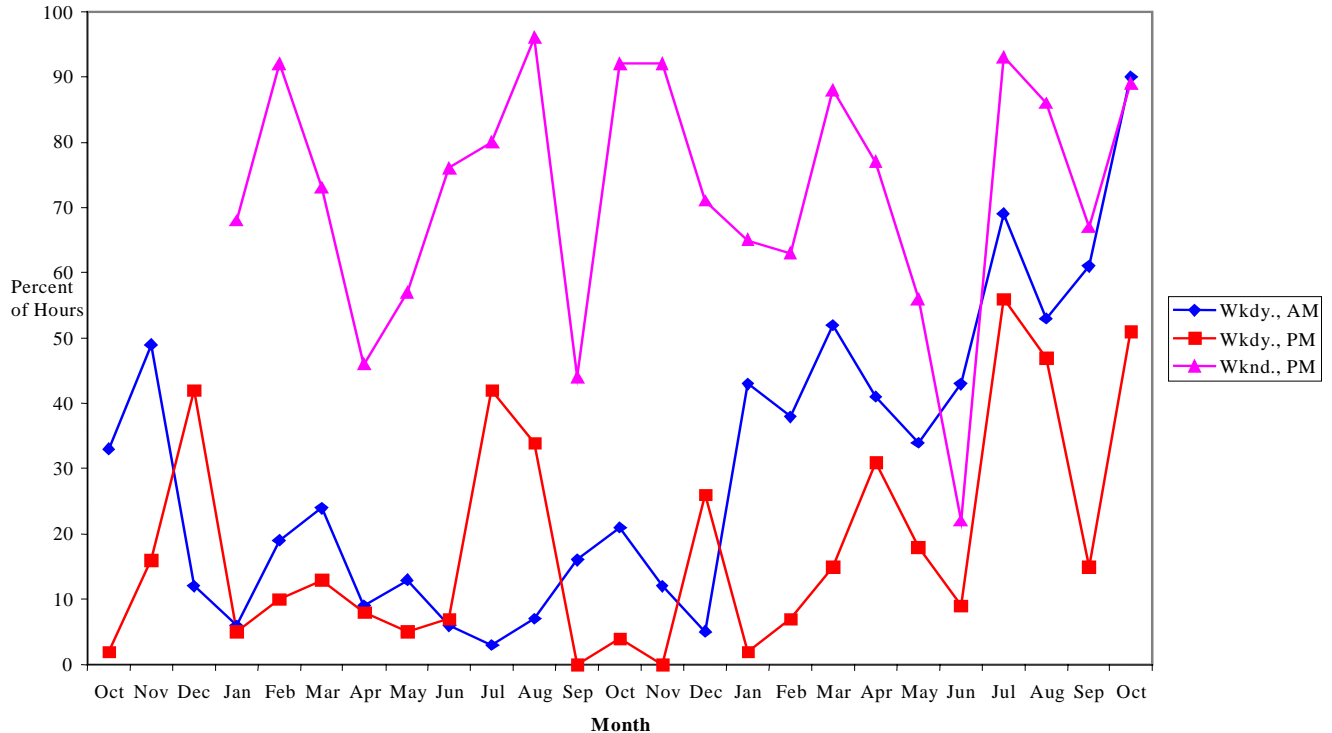
Using U.S. Customs Reports on total number of passenger vehicles processed in an hourly basis and correlating them to estimated number of cars waiting for inspection, San Diego Dialogue was able to generate a series of **Border Wait Time Bulletins** which were published in the monthly Reports from 1998 through January of 2001.¹⁸ Over a two-year period, extending from October 1998 to October 2000, these reports show a tendency for wait times to increase significantly at Otay Mesa and especially at San Ysidro. This tendency is true both of weekday mornings and weekdays afternoons, as can be seen in the following charts, which show the percentage of hours for which the estimated wait time exceeds the standard of 20 minutes determined by the border authorities:

Figure 1. Trends in Hours with Delays of 20 Minutes or More, San Ysidro October 1998 – October 2000



¹⁸ The **Border Wait Time Bulletins** were prepared by Dr. James H. Banks of the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department of San Diego State University.

**Figure 2. Trends in Hours with Delays of 20 Minutes or More, Otay Mesa
October 1998 – October 2000**



As the preceding figures show, the probability of delays longer than 20 minutes remained mostly in a range of between 5% and 40% during the period from October 1998 to December of 1999. In 2000, however, the probability of wait times longer than 20 minutes climbed to an average of around 40% at Otay Mesa and over 60% at San Ysidro. The probability of long wait times during the weekends remained very high during the entire period at both ports of entry, particularly affecting tourism and cross-border shopping. Wait times were consistently and significantly longer at the San Ysidro port of entry than at Otay Mesa.

In the following Table we take a closer look at the wait time phenomenon during the period of December 1999 through November 2000, a time period for which there also exists data for wait times greater than 30 minutes. Besides the general tendency of wait times to grow during this period, this Table also shows how wait times greater than 30 minutes had become alarmingly common at both Otay Mesa and San Ysidro, particularly on weekends, by November 2000.

**PERCENTAGE OF HOURS WITH WAIT TIMES GREATER THAN 20 AND 30 MINUTES
AT SAN YSIDRO AND OTAY MESA: DEC 1999 – NOV 2000**

	SAN YSIDRO						OTAY MESA					
	Weekdays a.m.		Weekdays p.m.		Weekend p.m.		Weekdays a.m.		Weekdays p.m.		Weekend p.m.	
	>20 min	>30 min	>20 min	>30 min	>20 min	>30 min	>20 min	>30 min	>20 min	>30 min	>20 min	>30 min
Dec-99	13%	1%	53%	38%	100%	67%	5%	0%	26%	16%	78%	21%
Jan-00	47%	29%	38%	12%	70%	60%	43%	15%	2%	0%	65%	35%
Feb-00	62%	29%	49%	19%	100%	74%	38%	15%	7%	0%	63%	50%
Mar-00	65%	12%	60%	30%	100%	94%	52%	5%	15%	5%	88%	50%
Apr-00	33%	5%	73%	30%	80%	60%	41%	5%	31%	10%	77%	50%
May-00	63%	8%	65%	28%	72%	44%	34%	13%	18%	0%	56%	17%
Jun-00	86%	31%	76%	44%	89%	56%	43%	3%	9%	0%	22%	0%
Jul-00	72%	31%	81%	63%	100%	100%	69%	24%	69%	24%	93%	63%
Aug-00	46%	23%	71%	56%	100%	95%	53%	8%	47%	12%	86%	76%
Sep-00	95%	69%	47%	25%	100%	95%	61%	18%	15%	2%	67%	38%
Oct-00	97%	71%	90%	59%	100%	95%	90%	68%	51%	25%	89%	68%
Nov-00	87%	59%	83%	65%	96%	88%	81%	60%	79%	49%	96%	58%
Average	64%	31%	66%	39%	92%	77%	51%	20%	31%	12%	73%	44%

Source: *Border Wait Time Bulletin*, in San Diego Dialogue Report, various numbers.
Based on data supplied by Metro Networks of San Diego and the U.S. Customs Service.

Appendix 2: Border Crossing Statistics

The U.S. Department of Transportation, citing U.S. Customs Service sources, provides a figure of 31 million passengers in personal vehicles and 7.5 million pedestrians crossing into the United States at San Ysidro during 2000. These figures vary significantly from others provided directly to San Diego Dialogue by the INS, which are equivalent, respectively, to 31.9 million and 12.2 million crossings. An informal gathering of statistics provided to San Diego Dialogue by the Customs Service also shows important differences with the previous sources cited.

The preceding situation shows the deficiencies in data gathering at the border and underlines the urgency of a coordinated effort to overcome them. Statistics on border crossings and border crossers should not only be improved to provide information and support for policy decisions, they should also be made available so as to educate the public as well as their elected officials.

Because they are the only publicly available statistics on border crossings that we are aware of, we present below those provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation for the years 1997 to 2000:

Table 1. CROSSINGS INTO THE UNITED STATES THROUGH THE SAN YSIDRO AND OTAY MESA PORTS OF ENTRY: 1997-2000

	2000	1999	1998	1997
Otay Mesa, CA				
- Pedestrian crossings	648,756	684,047	619,158	621,517
- Passengers on buses	845,775	312,342	235,288	196,190
- Passengers in personal vehicles	10,659,498	9,856,055	9,518,925	8,362,058
Total Otay Mesa	12,154,029	10,852,444	10,373,371	9,179,765
San Ysidro, CA				
- Pedestrian crossings	7,542,450	7,558,174	6,909,382	7,046,923
- Passengers on buses	783,762	854,098	890,614	873,411
- Passengers in personal vehicles	31,025,343	33,593,034	31,844,311	29,069,523
Total San Ysidro	39,351,555	42,005,306	39,644,307	36,989,857
Otay Mesa + San Ysidro				
- Pedestrian crossings	8,191,206	8,242,221	7,528,540	7,668,440
- Passengers on buses	1,629,537	1,166,440	1,125,902	1,069,601
- Passengers in personal vehicles	41,684,841	43,449,089	41,363,236	37,431,581
Total Otay & San Ysidro	51,505,584	52,857,750	50,017,678	46,169,622

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, based on data from U.S. Customs Service, Mission Support Services, Office of Field Operations, Operations Management Database.

The vast majority of crossings – over 80% of them - are done in personal vehicles, whereas only 3% of all crossers come by bus and an insignificant proportion by train.¹⁹ The remaining 16% of crossings are made by pedestrians. It should be noted, however, that at San Ysidro over 19% of the crossings are made by pedestrians, whereas at Otay Mesa this proportion is only around 5 percent. This means that San Ysidro has a pedestrian influx of over 7.5 million a year, which is equivalent to 20,664 people on average crossing that port of entry by foot every day of the year. By contrast, at Otay Mesa the pedestrian crossings average out to 1,777 a day.

Although it still represents little over a third of the San Ysidro figure, the amount of passengers in personal vehicles that crossed the border at Otay Mesa increased by more than 27% from 1997 to 2000, an average annual growth rate of over 8.4%. In San Ysidro this same indicator remained relatively stable, which might mean that part of the traffic that would normally cross at San Ysidro is preferring the Otay Mesa port of entry because of the shorter wait times usually registered there. Shorter wait times in Otay Mesa are prompted in part by the use of the SENTRI Program, which has been in effect

¹⁹ There were only 408 train passengers accounted for in 2000.

in that port of entry since 1995, while it was only implemented in San Ysidro late last year.

As far as vehicle crossings are concerned, the total for 2000 was almost 19.8 million, of which 18.9 million (95.7%) were personal vehicles. The number of truck crossings in 2000 was 688,340, all of them at Otay Mesa. At the same time, there were almost 150,000 bus crossings, two thirds of them at San Ysidro and the rest at Otay Mesa.

Despite the relatively few truck and bus crossings at the San Diego/Tijuana border, it is interesting to note the significant increase in the number of these crossings at Otay Mesa. As can be seen in Table 2, truck crossings increased over 21% from 1997 to 2000, an annual growth rate of more than 6.6 percent. In the same period, bus crossings – which could be associated to personnel transfer as well as to tourism – grew more than two and a half times at Otay Mesa, although they still represent a modest amount.

Table 2. VEHICLE CROSSINGS INTO THE UNITED STATES THROUGH THE SAN YSIDRO AND OTAY MESA PORTS OF ENTRY: 1997-2000

	2000	1999	1998	1997
Otay Mesa, CA				
- Personal vehicles	4,845,348	4,480,026	4,326,786	3,800,936
- Buses	47,683	46,142	26,978	18,586
- Trucks	688,340	646,587	606,384	567,715
San Ysidro, CA				
- Personal vehicles	14,106,704	15,269,561	14,474,686	13,213,420
- Buses	101,244	108,025	107,563	96,208

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, based on data from U.S. Customs Service, Mission Support Services, Office of Field Operations, Operations Management Database.



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