

EASTERN BORDER TRANSPORTATION COALITION
“CHANGING TIMES & CROSS BORDER TRANSPORTATION”
Workshop - October 3, 2007

The workshop began with an introduction on its purpose. This was an extension of past workshops, and it is important that the various border agencies and organizations come together to discuss common issues and to develop an understanding of each others responsibilities.

Session #1: Changing Economic, Trade and Security Conditions and Their Effects on Borders

This session began with an outline of Canadian global trade, and Ontario's GPS efforts. Trade has been growing even though Canadian population has not been, and the general trend for many of the indices was growth from 1992 to 2000, then a short decline, and then growth again back to the 2000 level.

The general picture of exports/imports showed that the US/CA partnership was still the strongest, and that trade with other countries (even China) was very modest. However, it was pointed out that the US/CA trade was basically at parity when it came to exports and imports, while trade with others was more on a 20-80 basis.

The movement of commodities (especially the automotive industry) was outlined, as well as the need for Canada to purchase high tech machinery from the US when it came time to retool. This led to a discussion on the strength of the loonie, and while Canadian firms may not yet be buying machinery, they are moving to buy US firms and assets.

The movement of people, categorized by day trips (highest) and over-night stays, was presented. Both movements of commodities and people were then translated to vehicles (primarily cars and trucks). Ontario-Michigan represented 42% of truck traffic (two way), while Quebec-New York was 22%. There was discussion of truck traffic moving within Canada, and then into the US, as it was noted that 10% of the Ontario-US traffic originated in Quebec.

There was discussion on the potential of rail to move commodities (while overall very small, in general such a shift could have an impact on additional growth), and the impact of casino development on each side of the border.

The National Roadside Survey hopefully will have data coming out by the end of this year, at least at the federal level. In general, combined with the discussion thus far, the group began to appreciate the need for producing a strong data base. This sentiment might be summarized as: In order to plan and justify border infrastructure investment, there is a need for a strong data base to describe the number and type of traffic, and where they are going – both during the trip and the final destination.

On specifics of developing a broader, overall data base, discussion began to look at existing and proposed efforts. Examples included US federal efforts for data

warehousing and the possibility of entering information based on license plate capture to match with manifest data to get origin/destination and commodity data, and DHS/CBP efforts with the US Freight Motor Carrier agency on data base work they are doing on their ACE program. The word “interoperability” was used to describe this type of effort. Overall, the basic benefits of agencies talking together were identified, as well as the problems/roadblocks associated with “outsiders” wanting access to files (who can have access, to what, and to what extent – “read only”), and how will they use the data.

The understanding of what data is out there and how it can be used, continued with the explanation of the array of data collected through GPS efforts. It was interesting for some in the group as they realized that this effort is based on the trucking companies desires to know where their trucks were, and to collect data for regulatory and tax purposes, plus delivery information, truck safety (e.g., amount of hard braking), driver behavior, as well as truck efficiency (fuel mileage). It was noted that there is some bias toward larger trucks since the larger fleets were more involved. Government agencies do not get specific detail on a truck or a driver; the data is aggregated.

While the GPS coverage is almost border-wide, the GIS coding of routes is less extensive. For its own purposes and the purpose of demonstration, Ontario has coded a variety of routes, but primarily the more major routes. It would be possible for another agency to do any necessary coding for a given project study area to gain the necessary detail. The discussion pointed out that this ability could effectively display routes with congestion and air quality impacts, and that this would both remove guesswork and allow for quantification of project benefits.

Some of the initial “Bluetooth” efforts are able to describe congestion at a crossing, and to break down that congestion by segments of the cross border trip. It was agreed that such activity should not be used to blame any particular agency, but could provide valuable feedback to compare against allocated resources. It could allow for a more directed solution to address delay. The discussion highlighted the uses of data for before/after project analysis, and the enhanced ability to target improvements – either operational or capital in nature.

Next, the data was presented at a location-specific level, in the context of SEMCOG which encompasses a seven-county area in Southeast Michigan, and includes the Detroit-Windsor crossings. Some of the proposed border crossing projects are very expensive and benefit others. Bridge and tunnel ends are in downtown areas so improvements to these facilities can have a great impact on the local highway system and the population.

At this level, forecasting became more important for both traffic and other location-based characteristics. SEMCOG’s Regional Development Forecasts looks at such items as population and employment, and SEMCOG looks at both the impact of the auto industry on border crossings, and the impact of the crossings on the industry. For SEMCOG the question is: What is the auto industry going to do?

There has been a major reduction in auto manufacturing employment, but there has not been a similar reduction in truck traffic. Analysis needs to identify why this might be: Has there been an increase in productivity? Or is the number of trucks somehow masked by the fact that they are lighter (more carrying less)? Reduction in manufacturing employment and general out-migration has meant a percentage increase in older population brackets, and identifies a possible labor shortage should manufacturing return – unless this older employment pool can be enticed back into the labor market.

The phrase “Enhancing Assets” was used – it refers to making investments at the border. A key point was possible impact that any one project has not only on that specific crossing, but on other crossings during construction. The group discussed how the GPS efforts could identify these impacts.

Bourgeau also described some of the specific projects in the area: The first was the proposed companion to the Ambassador Bridge and whether this might require air quality analysis and environmental approval because of its potentially regional significance. The second was the Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) and issues about the sources and amounts of public dollars being invested for the improvements necessary.

At this point, the data presentation was put into the context of an issue-based discussion. Working outward from Vermont to New England in general, to Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor, border crossings and travel patterns broadened from a local to a greater regional scale. Bottlenecks are not just at the border, but along routes to and from the border. Often, the cross border traffic is not stopping at the crossing location or even within the state the crossing is located in, but is through traffic.

This traffic is so dispersed that the I-95 coalition has an interest in border discussions, and bottlenecks as far south as Maryland could have impacts on border issues. The I-95 corridor encompassed every port on the eastern seaboard, and issues related to these ports such as intermodal needs and double-stacked trains versus trucks, could shape border policy by changing how commodities travel to the border crossings (possibly changing which crossing the commodities travel to).

As to ITS and technology, regardless of which end an agency may focus on – tourism: autos; commercial: trucks - there is a need to examine the system as a whole and to collect and distribute system condition information to the whole of the traveling public.

Section #2: EBTC Guide to Border Projects

Each year, EBTC looks to complete a tool to help the border program and policy people, and people that use the facilities. In 2004-05, a policy white paper was prepared, and in 2005-06, a “Truckers Guide” was developed. This new guide – officially entitled “Consultation and Approval Guide for Infrastructure Projects At or Near the Canada/US Border” - came out of discussion at last year’s workshop.

In general, the Guide was meant to inform people about the extent of agencies involved. As such, the Guide was meant to be a reference document with links provided for the

responsible agencies. For those working on border issues, the Guide could also serve as an informational document that they could provide to other policy makers.

The Guide was drafted over the summer and the specific agencies were contacted to review their sections. The Guide is 38 pages, but even at that length, not everything is included, nor was everything meant to be included. The Guide should do just that – guide people to the proper agency.

In keeping with the workshop's spirit of cooperation, Denis Laplante offered to translate the Guide into French so that it could be posted on the EBTC website in both languages in a timely fashion.

Session #3: Review of Current Border Projects

The Detroit-Windsor crossing – Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) - was presented, and data similar to that presented earlier was used to describe the border traffic volumes, and explain the component pieces – crossing+plaza+route locations. There needs to be interchange improvements and connectivity, there are various alternatives and component land use options, and there are access road alternatives in Canada. There was tremendous public outreach by the study team to include residents and manufacturers. The bottom line was that whatever the final outcome, it needed to work “end to end”.

The schedule is moving at “break neck speed” with a completion date of 2013 (DEIS public hearing - Winter 2008; Record of Decision - November 2008), though the project still lacks final cost estimates, people and industry will be displaced, and the additional complexity of the other crossings – especially the privately owned Ambassador Bridge – and other proposed approach work. As to the displacement, alternatives looked at the differing impacts on people and businesses.

There was also discussion on how a lead agency is identified for such a project and how the choice of a lead agency can affect the overall process (the more open, public process associated with a state DOT having the lead).

At the Champlain-Lacolle crossing, even as construction was winding down, there were still several necessary ongoing processes and activities identified. A specific example of this was continued communications which in one instance took the form of a brochure developed for truckers. The brochure was distributed just before the commercial facility opened at Champlain, and was geared for truckers heading south on A15. The brochure helped reduce potential confusion and indecision due to the new configuration, which could have led to traffic tie-ups and possible accidents. At the same time, it helped to ease truck traffic onto the new road and into the new circulation pattern of the CBP facility, thereby providing a more seamless transition for truckers.

At a weight inspection station constructed in Quebec for trucks heading north on A15, some changes had to be made to the geometrics to make the facility work better. For both the new access southbound for Champlain and northbound for the weight inspection

facility, the issue of signage came up – what type, how much. Discussion at this point returned to the use of ITS information, and the collection and sharing of data.

This session concluded with a background and status report on the Calais/St. Stephen bridge crossing, interspersed with anecdotes showing the potential for complexity in matters that otherwise seem mundane; e.g., the impact on the movement of equipment from one side of the border to the other so as not to mix the dirt.

Session #4: Review of Current Border Programs

This session provided an overview of GSA projects, citing where they were in the process (e.g., design construction), along with associated costs, and overviews of ACE, FAST and WHTI. For ACE – and e-Manifest – the program has morphed from a commercial activity to one of security and compliance. This has caused an increase in the complexity. Compliance has three components: the carrier, the driver and the truck. There is an issue as to which other government agencies will have access to the data collected, as well as to what level of data detail and how it can be used.

For FAST, one issue of interest has become the designation of the FAST card as WHTI compliant, thus reducing the need (and the cost) for a driver to have a passport. For DHS/CBP, the target for WHTI is still the original January 1, 2008 date. Work continues, especially with Washington State and Vermont, on development of enhanced drivers licenses.

The final presentation was entitled “Coordinated Clearance” and it emphasized three main points: A return to perimeter security (allowing a reduction in enhanced US/Canada security), integrity entry/exit tracking, and the need to coordinate the processes within the US and Canada to streamline requirements, increase efficiency and effectiveness, and reduce cost both for border agencies and for the traveling public – both freight and tourism.

Wrap Up Session

The wrap-up provided a summary of the day’s presentations, and described the themes that seemed to emerge. From these themes, EBTC could identify potential work for the coming year that would produce a useful product for its members and the associated border agencies and organizations exemplified by those in attendance at this workshop.

In general, along with collecting and analyzing trend data and its components, there was a desire for more forecasting related to these trends, and development of outlook based on the various components (e.g., manufacturing, employment, population; truck and auto volumes). It appeared that the statement noted earlier applied throughout the day - that in order to plan and justify border infrastructure investment, there is a need for a strong data base. Add to this the desire to look at better ways to combine data bases and to share data. Several times people mentioned the value of not only being able to describe the situation, but with a strong data base, being able to show the impacts that could occur during construction, and the resultant benefits. It would allow before and after comparisons.

Data and its analysis could show the extent of a border issue where a border delay could impact downstream within a corridor; or a bottleneck as far south as Maryland could have an impact at the border. This showed in several presentations, such as the need for a project to work end to end, and where coordination efforts are needed even after construction is completed as seen at Champlain.

A point was raised as to the question planners and policy makers should be asking when it comes to the various proposed capital projects: If you did all this, what would be the border crossing needs? Improving or not improving one crossing could have an impact on other crossings, and the roads leading to each. If Quebec-New York crossings are not sufficient, will traffic continue to Ontario-Michigan crossings? What is the impact on the road systems between these crossings?

As another example, a decision by a port on the eastern seaboard to invest in rail infrastructure may not only affect the number and type of vehicles at highway crossings, but may create sufficient traffic at rail crossings that could have an impact on staff allocations by CBSA or CBP, especially if the rail crossings are not near the highway crossings. Infrastructure projects will have impacts on operational needs; operational changes would have an impact on infrastructure needs – and policy decisions can affect both. Could a strong data base better serve to answer these questions?

To this end, it was proposed that EBTC would look at developing a data sharing task for its 2008 workplan. This would be discussed the next day at the EBTC Board meeting, and what the Board developed would be shared with those in attendance for their comment.

With that, the participants were thanked for their attendance and for their participation, and the workshop was adjourned.