



## Bulletin

January 25, 2021

Already, 2022 has proven that change is the constant in our border environment. In the last month alone, the **Omicron** variant has infected one quarter of all the people who have ever gotten infected since the pandemic started in the United States. Though there have been **rumors of a border closure**, there is no official information that would lead us to believe there will be one.

**Customs and Border Protection** in the **San Diego Sector** kicked off the month with a new organizational chart. **Mr. Sidney Aki** is now the sector Director of Field Operations, **Mr. Moises Castillo** is in charge at the San Ysidro Port of Entry, **Ms. Rosa Hernandez** is the new chief at the Otay Mesa and Tecate Ports of Entry, and our esteemed colleague **Sally Carrillo** is now Assistant Port Director at Otay Mesa.

As of January 22, **“essential” travelers who are not U.S. citizens** are now required to attest to their vaccination status and produce proof of vaccination if requested by Customs and Border Protection in order to enter the U.S. from Mexico. This impacts the trade environment, where there are many non-U.S. citizen truck drivers.

The new Secretary of Economy and Innovation for the State of Baja California, **Kurt Honold Morales**, has used the first weeks of January to meet with Baja business organizations to announce strategic infrastructure projects. San Diego **Mayor Todd Gloria** just completed a trip to Washington, D.C., where he met with Mexican Ambassador **Esteban Moctezuma** and new Customs and Border Protection chief **Chris Magnus**.

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Our board meeting last week underscored how alliances can motivate us to action. **Sidney Aki** not only described 4 priorities for his office, but also responded to our coalition’s “Decalogue” of efficient border principles. His priorities are Partnership, Staffing, Technology and Communication. He wants to partner with civil society and governmental organizations for joint solutions; better staffing by providing more attractive incentives to employees, repositioning officers, reassessing current positions, and training. In terms of technology, he sees using the **CBP1 App** to create efficient pedestrian and passenger vehicle scheduling systems as a component of the new CBP. He also stated that his doors would be

open to meetings with stakeholders offering solutions to the complicated logistics at the border.

The **Rady School of Management's Dean, Lisa Ordóñez**, put the future of cross-border relationships in a new light. In her vision for the next 10 years for the school, she sees cross-border relationships as critical, and the **Border Innovation Challenge** as a program that will get much more attention and dollars to thrive. You may recall that the Border Innovation Challenge is a competition our coalition started in 2019 in the hopes of getting entrepreneurs, college and graduate students from UCSD and universities with border campuses to present ideas and business plans to improve border crossings.

Our friend **Tomás Pérez Vargas**, member of **Tijuana Development Council**, and a champion for mobility and big data efforts, described the organization's efforts to use recently acquired trip data within Tijuana and from Tijuana to San Diego to provide travelers and governments with heretofore ignored information on traffic patterns. He also described the **"virtual line"**, a new way of waiting in line for daily cross-border travelers without actually using a physical line.

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I have begun 2022 with a new a renewed sense of contributing to the border's positive development by accepting a role within the Baja California Government. The new administration has created an office called **"Pro Baja"**, which is an agency similar to the very successful but defunct **"Pro México"**. The new office promotes the state with important business groups and potential investors and also supports the planning and execution of strategic binational projects in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The role I have is as **director of international projects**, and part of my responsibilities will be to coordinate the **Commission of the Californias**, a program created to leverage the **California-Baja California-Baja California Sur relationship** to enhance our response to economic development, tourism, agroindustrial, environmental, educational and infrastructure and transportation challenges and opportunities. The Commission was dormant for many years until it was relaunched in December of 2019. My position reports to the **Economy and Innovation Secretary** and in special cases to the **Governor**.

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Our **Stakeholders Working Committee** met virtually on January 13<sup>th</sup>. I asked **Consul General Tom Reott** to make remarks on his experience in the region after 6 months on the job. He clearly told our group that CBP staffing is the top issue for all Northern border Consuls General in their conversations with **U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar**. Reott believes that the **El Chaparral** migrant encampment is having an impact on increasing northbound wait times and on preventing the reopening of the all-important pedestrian crossing known as **PedWest**.

He added that the **Tijuana River Valley** got a boost from the **EPA** after it announced its plan to address the water sanitation issue. Ambassador Ken Salazar and **DHS Secretary Mayorkas** are closely following and advocating for the new **Otay Mesa East POE** by 2024. Incidentally, the Ambassador will be returning to our region next month.

In a first for the Coalition, we invited the **Union Tribune’s Publisher and Editor, Jeff Light**, to talk to us about how the paper covers the border. Over the years I have been in discussions with stakeholders who give media a “bad wrap”, arguing that their Tijuana and Baja coverage is skewed toward crime and negative stories. Jeff set the record straight, by conveying in no uncertain terms that UT coverage of Tijuana has been broad and objective in scope, with over 400 articles published in 2021. Coverage depends on the reporters’ beat. There is no set “line” about Tijuana. That said, coverage of security issues cannot be ignored. Tijuana has 20 times the murder rates that San Diego has.

I was pleasantly surprised when Light forcefully put forth that we must raise the priority level of “manning the booths” with CBP, meaning that we must not take our eyes off the agency’s staffing challenges that don’t seem to go away.

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My trip to the **Mexicali-Imperial Valley** region on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> made it clear that the California-Baja California border goes well beyond our San Diego-Tijuana centric perspective. Tijuana and Mexicali, though large border cities with a similar set of challenges, are not treated the same in borderland discussions in Washington, D.C. and Mexico City. Mexicali and the Imperial Valley are generally seen as less important than the coastal border.

Being a larger, more bustling, more industrial, much more diverse city and a neighbor to California’s second largest city, Tijuana has outsized importance. Mexicali is Baja California’s capital city. With over 1.2 million people and over 1 million head of cattle, a large agroindustrial footprint and plenty of flat land and water for more orderly growth, it is a force to be reckoned with. However, its border with the Imperial Valley’s 180,000 citizens -- only 5% of San Diego County’s population—does not help its cause.

The State’s new **Binational Affairs Director, David Pérez Tejada**, set up numerous meetings with the **Imperial-Mexicali Alliance**, the **Mexicali Economic Development Council**, Mexican **Consul in Calexico Tonatiuh Romero**, **Imperial County Supervisors Luis Plancarte and Jesús Escobar**, the **Mexicali Water Authority**, and the **Civic Alliance**, among others. Some key takeaways are that we must advocate for ramp investment at **Mexicali Port of Entry East (“Mexicali 2”)** to tie in with the widening of lanes above the **All-American Canal** on the U.S. side. Air pollution is the most pressing binational community issue plaguing the area. It starts

by installing new monitors to gather data for policy changes, cleaning up the **Río Nuevo** watershed and implementing new agro programs to stop burning of fields. In the end, much will depend on enforcing the rule of law with Mexicali large cattle and land owners, not an easy feat.

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I want to thank the **San Diego Regional Chamber, Otay Mesa Chamber, San Ysidro Chamber, the Ensenada, Tijuana, Tecate and Mexicali EDCs, the Tijuana CCE, City of San Diego, Border Fusion, Government of Baja California, Tijuana Innovadora, Calimax, Design Forward Alliance, Sempra Energy**, for their steadfast support of the “**Calibaja Crossing Experience**” conversations.

The purpose of our group is to have the best possible border crossing experience for travelers. Achieving this requires a great deal of work in seven key areas, namely wait times, advocacy and lobbying, infrastructure, public health, security, evaluation, and image. The group is working now on a set of principles to govern our activities.

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I had a fascinating discussion about binational education with **Joe Pilco, Director of International and Binational at Southwestern College**. The college offers over 130 programs and has 20,000 students. It is believed that at least 10% of these students are from Mexico, but there is no precise number yet given that many of them use San Diego County addresses.

The school is in the midst of revamping its international program to focus on the relationship with Baja California students. It wants to develop a more practical enrollment process for them. The college is also looking for more robust and far reaching agreements with Baja universities such as **Cetys, UABC and UTT**. In addition, it wants to be a key actor in a project to build a new binational university in **Chula Vista**.

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**Mayor Todd Gloria’s State of the City address** on the 12<sup>th</sup> focused on the most pressing San Diego issues, leaving out his ongoing significant efforts to improve the relationship with Tijuana and Baja California as a whole. It is understandable that the Mayor highlighted citizen interest in improving public infrastructure, keeping people safe, managing homelessness, and creating sustainable jobs. However, I believe he could have spent 2 minutes on his energetic advocacy for vaccines for border residents, restriction lifting, wait time reduction and high level meetings with **DHS Secretary Mayorkas** and White House

officials. Our community needs to be aware of the Mayor's actions for the benefit of the binational relationship.

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I was delighted to hear **FUMEC's Executive Director Eugenio Marín** on the group's highly developed tools to help Mexican entrepreneurs and business owners (<https://www.fumec.org/>). The meeting between the organization's top brass and the **Baja Economy and Innovation Secretariat** was the first of many to accelerate innovation and technology projects in the state.

FUMEC is the **United States-Mexico Foundation for Science** which has well known regional names on its board member roster, including **Pedro Romero Torres, Mary Walshok and Andy Carey**. Their mission is to foster binational competitiveness by using science and technology to solve problems and seize opportunities for economic and social development based on innovation. Their vision is to contribute to turning U.S. & Mexico into the most inclusive, competitive and sustainable region in the world.

Their programmatic areas in business, entrepreneur and ecosystem development, including manufacturing **reshoring** and **manufacturing 4.0** as well acceleration of small and medium size companies in the border area will be complementary to the priorities set by the Baja California **Economy and Innovation Secretariat**.

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Our next online **Stakeholders Working Committee** meeting will convene on March 3<sup>rd</sup> in Tijuana. We will provide you with more information in the early part of February.

Sincerely,

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