



## COVID-19 Bulletin

April 29, 2020

I wish to express my gratitude to all the fantastic, hardworking people in the far-reaching Smart Border Coalition network who help me compile the insights and information presented in these bulletins. It's an immense privilege to learn about the efforts of so many friends in our region who are helping their communities to cope with these extraordinary conditions.

**Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens*, *Homo Deus*, and *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***, commented on what the world might look like after this health crisis. One important choice is whether to do this in isolation or through international solidarity and cooperation. This will shape the world for years to come. For the first time in history, humankind has all we need to overcome this epidemic. We took two weeks to identify the virus, sequence its genome, and develop reliable tests. Please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRRhvwkV7L0>

**“Transborder Leadership and Why It Matters”**: Rick Morales, Ph.D. spent part of last year interviewing binational stakeholders to understand what makes a transborder leader. His analysis results are in. As he says, we are seeing “stakeholders continue to demonstrate the grit, resourcefulness and agility needed to reclaim, rebuild and reimagine the future.” For more information and a link to Rick’s report, please see: <https://bit.ly/2yRxImS>

**The Mexican federal government extended social distancing until May 30,** though municipalities with lower infection impacts could restart social contact as of May 17. Productive activities could start as of June 1.

**CBP changes and stats:** new operating hours for SENTRI vehicle lanes at the Otay Mesa Port are 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. until further notice.

Comparing the week of March 6 with the week of April 13, Otay Mesa has had a **43% reduction in vehicle crossings** and a **69% reduction in pedestrians**. Overall, for all California/Baja California ports, passenger vehicles are down 52% and pedestrians 76% in the same period.

During the week of April 13, **90-94%** of northbound crossers were U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

**SAT** export operations went from a high of 1,944 on April 8 to a low of 521 on April 19. Import ops went from a high of 1,629 on April 8 to almost zero on 4/19. The slowdown is a function of so many businesses in Mexico and the U.S. temporarily suspending operations or reducing activity.

## **SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS**

**Supply chain pressures in Baja have come down substantially,** with plant closures giving way to reopening through a mechanism hatched by industry and business organizations INDEX, Tijuana EDC, CANIETI, and CANACINTRA in close coordination with the Baja state government. The person who has instigated this is Kurt Honold, former Tijuana mayor and a successful businessman. Kurt is no stranger to leadership activity and is a trusted force in business and political circles.

**The Smart Border Coalition has had a number of conversations with companies affected by this, including several of our members.** One makes gas turbines and compressors used by the energy sector in Mexico and by 40% of the natural gas pipelines that cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Another company makes critical U.S. defense equipment and components used in MRI machines.

**Jorge Rochin, Kyocera plant manager in Tijuana**, pointed out that the company was proactive very early in making changes to comply with social distancing rules – it has changed the way it transports its employees in private buses, providing seating on every other seat, redesigning their cafeteria, and making employee schedule changes. The company was never closed though it reduced operations by more than 60%. It is aiming to be back to normal by mid next week.

We spoke with **Taylor Guitars, a non-essential activity company** that retrofitted part of its plant to make masks before it was closed. They are now working on reopening the facility. Taylor manufactures on both sides of the border, in Tecate and San Diego, and has the versatility to make wood-based and non-wood-based guitars.

**The larger issue is what Russ Jones, coalition member, is actively trying to do, keeping supply chains going while balancing two imperatives.** The first is recognizing that Mexico is in a different phase as far as the impact of COVID-19. The second is understanding that what Tijuana produces is, more likely than not, part of a longer supply chain that delivers critical goods and services on both sides of the border.

**The Border Trade Alliance (BTA) is urging alignment among North American countries on essential industries and services.** The BTA, of which the Smart Border Coalition is a proud member, sent a letter the secretary of Mexico's Ministry of Health urging greater alignment among Mexico, the U.S., and Canada in defining "essential" services or industries to ensure as few supply chain disruptions as possible. Please see <https://bit.ly/3f4ovYr>

Along similar lines, more than **300 leaders of U.S. companies** with manufacturing operations in Mexico, represented by the **the National**

**Association of Manufacturers** (<https://www.nam.org/>), wrote an important letter to President Lopez Obrador urging him to minimize manufacturing and supply chain disruptions due to the application of emergency health measures.

## **OTHER TOPICS**

**Rail cargo in our area is considered an essential activity.** With three people, rail can move the equivalent of 250 trucks. The number of SAT and CBP inspection agents for this does not exceed 10, whereas upwards of 35 each for SAT and CBP are employed for truck cargo. Baja Rail recently completed its contingency operations plan, focusing on preventive health measures for office and field personnel. Rail commercial activity is now down 75%, but in our “new normal,” rail should have a significant role. MTS and CBP should make the Tecate rail crossing a priority. Baja Rail is working on a funding package for the rehabilitation of the old Desert Line.

**Our coalition’s co-chair José Larroque and member José Galicot participated in the Border Summit Journalism Awards.** The Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, Tijuana Innovadora, and the Union-Tribune facilitated this refreshing event in the midst of the overwhelming COVID-19 conversation. Please see the summary and winning entries:

Human Interest: <https://zetatijuana.com/2019/04/deportados-connacionales-a-la-deriva/>

Investigative Writing: <http://radarbc.com/AguasNegrasKikoVega/>

Photography, Omar Martínez from Cuartoscuro: [1 Incendios Tijuana.jpg](#); [2 Musulmanes muro fronterizo.jpg](#); [3 Frontera garita Chaparral.jpg](#).

**Héctor Vanegas of SANDAG is optimistic on Otay Mesa East.** Though President Lopez Obrador canceled 281 federal government funds worth \$10 billion to reassign to economic revitalization programs and social projects, the fund to acquire the land that will become Otay Mesa East in Mexico was spared. This is

all the more reason for Tijuana leaders to champion the new Otay Mesa East Port of Entry. The COVID-19 crisis will pass. With the dwindling China-U.S. manufacturing relationship, Tijuana and Baja have a golden opportunity to attract foreign direct investment.

**Israel Delgado, head of the Carrier Association in Tijuana (CANACAR)** is worried about truck drivers. Two lost their lives to COVID-19 and others are infected. CANACAR launched a sanitizing campaign with drivers on Monday. It is also providing free food to drivers. Trade volume is down over 50%.

**Correction: In last week's COVID-19 Bulletin, I wrote that lenova's Ensenada Fund** donated \$680,000 pesos to the City of Ensenada for its efforts against COVID-19. **The \$680,000 amount is actually in dollars.** It has also been donating public washing stations to promote hygiene among workers. For its part, lenova Foundation is donating food baskets in Tecate and Mexicali in collaboration with Save the Children.

**Tijuana Contigo (<https://www.tijuanacontigo.com>)** has become the most practical financial and in-kind donation platform in the region, thanks to the Tijuana Development Council's initiative (<https://cdt.org.mx/>) to aggregate important efforts such as <https://www.apoyemosatijuana.com/>, Fundación SIMNSA, Club Rotario, Cruz Roja, and many others.

**Melissa Floca, Associate Director and Chief Strategy Officer, Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD**

The center launched the weekly COVID-19 Webinar to meet a new urgent need in the community of which it is a part.

It has been very difficult for the center's students to adapt to continuing their studies online from off campus. For example, some live alone and have to contend with that. Others have moved back into crowded homes surrounded

by family, where finding quiet study space or even having constant access to internet can be difficult. It's been hard to transition to virtual teaching and change strategies to keep students engaged.

The center has had to suspend some activities but has found ways to continue others.

### **Natalia Figueroa Lima, Consul for Political and Economic Affairs, Mexican Consulate General, San Diego**

Most staff are working from home but go to the consulate twice a week to issue emergency passports, consular IDs, and birth and death certificates. Also, the protection department is available 24/7 for any emergency. It may be contacted at (619) 843-6399, e-mail [proteccion@consulmexsd.org](mailto:proteccion@consulmexsd.org).

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) strongly supported the consulate in repatriating Mexicans aboard the cruise ship Celebrity Eclipse when it was unexpectedly forced to dock in San Diego. Passengers had not been allowed to disembark in Chile, the original destination, due to the pandemic. The Mexicans did not have the documents needed to disembark in the U.S. CBP issued special permits making it possible for the consulate to transport the Mexicans to the Tijuana airport.

### **Miguel Aguirre, Managing Partner, Grand Central West, owner of the McDonald Trolley Station at PedEast Line spacing problem**

Miguel has been very concerned about the increase in "wildcatting" in the area on the U.S. side of the San Ysidro Port of Entry. When the legitimate bus and van companies complied with lockdown orders by suspending operations, *raiteros* (drivers) and *taloneros* (solicitors) became more aggressive in offering illegal and unregulated public transportation to travelers. The San Diego police have dubbed this intersection the "Wildcat Gauntlet." Passengers can end up being harmed in sometimes horrifying ways. Miguel sees it as a public safety emergency.

**Kinsee Morlan, producer and project coordinator for KPBS's San Diego "News Matters" podcasts, former producer of the KPBS "Only Here" podcast on the subcultures, creativity and struggles at the U.S.-Mexico border**

The "Only Here" podcast continues, hosted by Alan Lilienthal. Prior to the pandemic, each podcast featured a person who lives the border experience and who crosses the border in the course of the recording. With Alan (and the main KPBS border reporter) staying in the U.S. these days, the current podcasts struggle to create the same richness as before. All the interviews are now conducted over Zoom. The KPBS Radio audience was classically car commuters. The plunge in car travel has changed the audience profile.

With best wishes,

Gustavo De La Fuente

Executive Director