



COVID-19 Bulletin

July 24, 2020

Greetings from El Paso! Though the scenery changes dramatically and the outside temperature is 30 degrees higher than at home, the border is our common denominator. USMCA, immigration, border restrictions, cross-border economy, ports of entry, and trade are trending topics. The Borderplex is a three-state, two-country region (El Paso, Ciudad Juárez and Las Cruces), home to 2.5 million people. It is the fifth-largest manufacturing hub in North America and has five major universities, three medical schools, and three military installations, including Fort Bliss.

Our **July 9 Stakeholders Working Committee** was delighted to have Assemblyman and mayoral candidate **Todd Gloria** as a guest. He did not mince words when he said that issues of the binational relationship have been a hallmark of his career and that as the largest city on the border, San Diego must be outspoken about border issues.

He pointed out --referring to **Jason Wells'** recent statement-- that our economy won't reopen until our border reopens. We will face a host of new procedures when using the ports, so establishing protocols to generate confidence is critical. Our border is not just about dollars and cents, however. We cannot forget the human element -- the pedestrians and passengers who cross.

In our meeting, **Dr. Rick Morales** started a much-needed conversation about what it means to be a transborder leader. He interviewed 43 professionals in

the binational region as part of his unique analysis. For more on his outstanding presentation, please go to:

<https://smartbordercoalition.com/storage/files/Dr.%20Rick%20Morales%20on%20Transborder%20Leadership.pdf>

Imperial Beach Mayor Serge Dedina was optimistic about the EPA's taking over the regional water treatment issue. He was clear: We can't continue to manage the binational region if we don't prioritize public health and investment in water. A smart border is not just about crossings!

Our **Board of Directors** videoconference on the 16th featured **Roman Caso**, president of the Tijuana IT and Electronics Chamber (CANIETI), talking about nearshoring. It would seem that because of geopolitics, COVID-19, and USMCA, supply chains are coming to Mexico, and Baja is a prime destination.

Keeping the industrial economy thriving should involve the use of local sourcing and technology transfer whereby there is co-investment from Mexican business people, R&D, and high-end manufacturing. Mexico cannot continue to be a rent-based economy where any global company can leave almost at a moment's notice.

Tijuana Contigo, one of Tijuana Local Development's answers to the pandemic, has enabled professionals in many fields to make 15-minute observations of how we return to a sense of normalcy, how we are changing, and what the future holds. The program saw over 14 million online impacts, 70 conversations and 200,000 recorded minutes. Our coalition was interviewed on the topic of **"What will our Border Crossings look like?"** Please see: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=257152972095591>

Linda Hill, UCSD-SDSU Preventive Medicine Residency Director, has been pushing for border COVID-19 random testing just north of the San Ysidro Port of Entry using small drive-through kiosks. She believes our region could gain invaluable information on crossers to better understand and manage the virus's spread. Funding and political will are ingredients for success. Mexican Consul General **Carlos González-Gutiérrez** is helping in this effort.

The July 17 **SANDAG** meeting on **COVID-19's impact in San Diego County** underscored tourism, retail, and transportation as the most affected economic sectors. Economist **Ray Major** stated that these three represent 31% of regional employment.

As of June 15, **general retail** is down 35% from January, and **transportation** has seen a 35-40% decline. **Taxable sales** are 13% below what they were at the beginning of the year. The communities most affected with the lethal combination of unemployment and COVID-19 cases are Hispanics and African-Americans.

Tijuana Local Development's new president as of August will be **Luis Lutteroth**, a member of a prominent family of Sonoran origins with real estate and fast food restaurant interests. Luis is an extrovert and an easy-going but effective leader, so we look forward to a productive couple of years.

There are both public health and political reasons to keep **border restrictions** in place. It may sound counterintuitive, but to move towards **lifting of travel restrictions** at our ports of entry we propose for **agencies (CBP, SAT, INAMI)** to strengthen procedures and protocols to inspect and in some cases detect symptomatic or infected travelers.

The logic is that the more disciplined ports strive to be about this, the more confidence governments and travelers will have and the greater the chance

that federal authorities in both countries will lift restrictions. However, this must be done without increasing wait times.

Some question the current COVID-19 vetting procedures at the ports. They ask whether the procedures put in place are actually followed, or whether they are the correct ones in the first place. Others say that all ports should diagnose their infrastructure, staffing, and scheduling to enable better ways to process northbound and southbound travelers. Still others argue that border restrictions are completely uncalled for since the responsibility to contain the virus falls on the commercial establishments that cater to crossers.

We should look to the **U.S.-Canadian border** for new perspectives. The decline in passenger vehicle and pedestrian traffic in Western Washington/British Columbia, Detroit/Windsor, and Buffalo/Niagara/Toronto has reached maximums of 98%. Small businesses are suffering, and many are closing.

The **Cross-Border Institute** at the University of Windsor has started a dialogue for next-generation port mobility policies with a regional approach, bringing together stakeholder groups. The Institute is eyeing touchless technologies using biometrics and artificial intelligence to change the concept of restrictive borders (<https://www.cbstitute.ca/>).

California Lieutenant Governor Kounalakis was the keynote speaker in the recent Alianza University of California – Mexico (<https://alianzaucmx.ucr.edu/>) panel with Mexican Consuls General **Carlos González-Gutiérrez** in San Diego and **Liliana Ferrer** in Sacramento. Kounalakis said that the “coast is not clear” about the virus, that there are testing challenges in both countries. A very positive development is that California has trained approximately 10,000 contact tracers.

Matthew Rooney, managing director of the **Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative** (<https://www.bushcenter.org/explore-our-work/issues/economic-growth.html>), has put together a “border brain trust” to discuss a variety of bilateral topics, including USMCA, border restrictions, and other topics of interest with the intent to advance North America’s global competitiveness. Our coalition is a proud member. The group has the power and the connections to change the course of U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico border policy.

UCSD’s Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies’ Emerging Stronger after COVID-19 group discussed border health on July 13. I was impressed with **Andrés Smith, Director of Urgent Care at Sharp Hospital** and Board President of the Tijuana Red Cross. He said that people outside the region do not understand our border crossing culture and how it has played a major role in the COVID-19 impact.

Though he acknowledges the strong collaboration of health authorities, he asks for greater support for Tijuana where there is a very limited number of ambulances, still low levels of PPE, and not enough health workshops and cross-border consultation.

Liliana Osorio of the Health Initiative of the Americas at UC Berkeley noted that the region needs a regional strategic plan for public health. Gudelia Rangel of COLEF and the Border Health Commission (Mexican section) pointed out that the U.S. sector of the commission has not been active due to having a very limited budget. This has been to the detriment of COVID-19 containment.

I hope that many of you will have an opportunity to take a few days off with family this summer, after four months of quarantine, where days go by without even noticing and where we’ve gotten used to new routines that now seem old. A change of place and pace is healthy for the body and soul!

With best wishes,

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