



COVID-19 Bulletin

August 10, 2020

The prolific Brazilian author Paulo Coelho wrote, “God turns crises into opportunities, tests into lessons, and problems into blessings.”

In these uncertain moments, rules change, and neither the smartest nor the strongest necessarily survive but those who can adapt the fastest to a new reality. The border is no exception. We must anticipate the issues and opportunities that will shape our border and take action.

In the midst of much negative news there are inspiring local stories to be told. San Diego startups raised a record \$1.2 billion between April and June. The San Diego Foundation channeled \$27.2 million for COVID-19, with 167 grants awarded since March thanks to the efforts of donors, CEO **Mark Stuart**, and his team. Mexican investors **Eric** and **Alan Adler** of **Puesto** fame (artisan kitchen and bar) opened a brew house last month in Mission Valley. **NASSCO** inked a deal for six fleet replenishment oilers for the Navy. In June the **Otay Mesa Chamber of Commerce** held a virtual Mexport Trade Show for the very first time. **Tijuana Innovadora** will go completely digital to celebrate its 10th anniversary in October. The U.S. Navy successfully extinguished an extremely dangerous fire in the San Diego shipyard.

UCSD’s Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies’ Emerging Stronger after COVID-19 group discussed the Tijuana River Valley on July 27. **Keith Pezzoli** from the school’s Bioregional Center for Sustainability Science, Planning, and Design

described the concept of “**bioregionalism**” as improving urban-rural interdependencies and promoting a culture of working with nature.

This was music to featured speaker **Carlos de la Parra**’s ears, since he is behind the concept that the concrete drainage channel we see today in Tijuana should go back to being a river. There are many benefits to this, not least of which is groundwater recharge. Cities like Seoul, Monterrey, and Los Angeles have corrected course and are treating their channelizations as natural rivers. The effort to change this will take many years, but it is a must in de la Parra’s eyes.

Wait times at the border are increasing according to many stakeholders who reach out to us daily. One would think that with restrictions in place, we should be seeing short waits, but many times the opposite is true. With fewer lanes open and adjustments not being made as fast as needed, there is more tension about crossing today than in January. We trust our friends at **U.S. Customs and Border Protection** will adapt faster to traveler demand.

Our coalition has consistently asked CBP to explain long waits, and though they are responsive, the Smart Border Coalition advocates for a more formal, structured, and consistent approach to examining our ports. It is best to establish key performance indicators with CBP collaboration that can tell us on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis the status of our crossings.

The **Cross Border Institute’s Marta Leardi-Anderson** believes we need an artificial intelligence (AI) approach to predicting crossing times <https://www.cbainstitute.ca/>. Transportation modeling for predictability will save hundreds of millions of dollars.

The institute has a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving, with students from computer science, engineering, and business departments working with faculty members. SANDAG has been modeling transportation for years. Could we imagine a UCSD-SANDAG-Smart Border Coalition collaboration?

Thanks to the efforts of **San Diego County Supervisor Greg Cox**, San Diego will have its first testing site for COVID-19 at the San Ysidro/El Chaparral Port of Entry. Testing will be exclusively for northbound pedestrians and will happen at PedEast. Testing has been designed with essential workers in mind, with 200 tests available Monday through Friday at cost of \$309,000 a month to operate (<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/health/story/2020-08-09/new-testing-site-at-pedeast-crossing-first-of-its-kind-along-u-s-mexico-border>).

Mexico's consul general in San Diego, **Carlos Gonzalez Gutierrez**, has pushed for testing on the Mexican side. Infection rate (incident rate) is a data point that Mexico must have and that the U.S. has been prioritizing.

Lindsay Winkley of the San Diego Union-Tribune wrote an article that caught my eye last week. It was titled "Phone app for tracing covid cases sidelined" (edition.pagesuite.com/popovers/dynamic_article_popover.aspx?guid=dfc7296c-baco-4636-b0bc-d0097a1ae422&v=sdk). She refers to Apple and Google creating a foundation for "exposure notification applications which harness Bluetooth technology to let you know if you've come in contact with someone who later tested positive for COVID-19."

If someone with the app tests positive for the virus, a public health entity uploads the last 14 days of the sick person's ID numbers to a database. Users download this database and receive a notification if they came in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19. However, the State of California has not given its go-ahead for the app to move forward.

It turns out that Germany, Switzerland, Canada, and Uruguay are using exposure notification apps built with Google and Apple code to enhance contact tracing. We've argued all along that we need tracing, mainly for people

crossing the border, north- or southbound. Uruguay has been a model for anti-COVID-19 efforts and is using the app to monitor border crossings to and from Argentina and Brazil.

The **Bay Area Council Economic Institute** has just published “The Baja California and Nuevo León Industry, Innovation, and Talent Clusters,” an effort to assess the technology, startup, and innovation environments in these two regions which are intimately connected to the U.S. (bayareaconomy.org/report/the-baja-california-and-nuevo-leon-industry-innovation-and-talent-clusters).

A long list of regional business and civic leaders were acknowledged, including **Laura Araujo, Melissa Floca, Cecilia Romero Larroque, Guillermo Mejia, Flavio Olivieri, David Peguero, Georgina Serrano Romero, Rob Ryan, and Gary Swedback.**

The study states that “the major challenge as Baja California attempts to build an innovation economy is the need to transition its manufacturing economy toward higher value-added activity through a deeper connection to R&D.”

Though ties with southern California are strong and the maquiladora system is well established, Bay Area and Silicon Valley companies usually look to Guadalajara and Mexico City to invest or to find talent.

Thankfully, large international companies are starting to play a greater role in R&D. **Samsung** has a software development center in Tijuana. **Honeywell, Plantronics, Thermo Fisher, Skyworks, Solar Turbines, and Japan’s SMK** are producing locally generated intellectual property, with new design centers being established.

We’ve always said that there are better ways to process pedestrians, vehicles, and cargo at our ports. The second edition of the **Border Innovation Challenge** will tap entrepreneurs from all over the world for solutions to our border

logistics needs. **The Smart Border Coalition and UCSD's Rady School of Management and Jacobs School of Engineering** will be the coordinators for the competition that is to start this month and award at least \$20,000 in prizes on December 1st.

This time we will also leverage connections with **ICES Lab** in Tijuana (tijuanaemprendesocialmente.com), **RedOTT** (redott.mx), **Start Ups Tijuana** (startupstijuana.com), and Canadian, European, and Asian entrepreneurial networks to get substantive proposals.

I would like to recognize **Olivia Graeve**, a UC San Diego professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, for receiving the **Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring** from the **White House**.

She is being recognized for roles in the IDEA Engineering Student Center at the Jacobs School of Engineering, promoting binational research opportunities for high school and college students across the U.S.-Mexico border, and her efforts within the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. Olivia is a Tijuana native and one of our Stakeholders. Please see https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/feature/engineer-earns-presidential-award-for-improving-underrepresented-student-access-to-stem-experiences?utm_source=This+Week+Subscriber+List&utm_campaign=26612f29fa-THIS_WEEK_2020_08_06&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_db568fca07-26612f29fa-92486333.

Kudos to **Vincent Blocker**, Smart Border Coalition advisor, for penning “Commentary: The border is a strange artifact that joins and separates San Diego and Tijuana.”

His contribution is part of the Union-Tribune’s “Community Voices Project” launched recently. Its role is to share a diversity of views and perspectives from thought leaders and move to a stronger, more inclusive San Diego.

Vincent’s article is rich with references to many aspects of the crossing experience and the meaning of the border. In one section he states: “Given the magnitude of the exchanges, our binational region would be better off if these border crossings received the richer civic attention normally invested in amenities such as schools, airports, libraries, hospitals, parks, and paved and lighted streets and sidewalks. All these assets support safe, healthy, decent, meaningful and productive lives for millions. The border crossings do no less.”

Please see <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/community-voices-project/story/2020-07-08/commentary-the-border-is-a-strange-artifact-that-joins-and-separates-san-diego-and-tijuana>.

The latest installment of “**CaliBaja Dialogues**” organized by our consuls general featured border infrastructure. I was pleasantly surprised to see **Roberto Velasco**, Director for North America in the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Relations, and **Hugo Rodriguez**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

An important part of the discussion focused on the management of border master plan projects such as a new port, **Otay Mesa East**, three miles east of the current Otay Mesa port, and the binational coordination of smaller border infrastructure projects. **Mario Orso** of Caltrans, **Ramon Riesgo** of GSA, and **Hector Vanegas** of SANDAG stressed the importance of more focused and

frequent technical meetings, looking at border crossings as a system, city-state-federal coordination, and leveraging existing binational protocols to get things done.

We are hearing good news from the new communication and transportation minister for Mexico regarding the **Otay Mesa East Port of Entry**. The State of Baja California officials who visited **Minister Jorge Arganis** on July 30 were overjoyed. Arganis stated his commitment to the construction of the new port and willingness to work with Baja California. We will be following developments closely.

At the **South County Economic Development Council's** board meeting on August 4, I asked the new **Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) CEO Sharon Cooney** about the status of the **Tecate rail crossing**. We had assumed that because of the recent management transition, MTS had not been able to meet with Baja Rail, the Desert Line's operator, to manage next steps. However, she stated that due to *force majeure* MTS would be looking into remedies for the contract it has signed with Baja Rail.

The **Tijuana Development Council (Consejo de Desarrollo de Tijuana)** is getting ready for an unprecedented move to make its leadership more cohesive and to focus on truly feasible projects. Government funding has been scarce. There will be a need to find additional sources of capital. It won't surprise me to see that council leaders will be called on to work closely with each other to come up with better results.

Pedro Romero Torres-Torrija is known as the founder of *Tiendas El Aguila*, a very successful chain of discount stores in Baja California. But more recently, he has taken on the role of senior advisor for the border to President Lopez

Obrador. Don Pedro is not keen on titles, but he told me that most people know him as the “Coordinador Zona Libre Frontera Norte” (Northern Border Free Zone Coordinator).

He travels the entire border and stated that there are three border projects the administration has its sights on: “Otay Mesa 2 in Tijuana, moving the train tracks out of Ciudad Juarez’s downtown to the Santa Teresa industrial area, and the construction of international bridge 4/5 in Nuevo Laredo.”

Mexican foreign relations minister **Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon** is very interested in the border and has started a group to coordinate border infrastructure. They have agreed on 61 priority projects. As you may have guessed, Otay Mesa East is at the top of the list. Ebrard is considered a strong contender for the presidency in 2024.

Remittances to Mexico: Despite the global economic decline, Mexicans received **\$3.53 billion** in remittances in June — an **11 percent jump** year-over-year. Kevin Sieff of the Washington Post wrote about this on August 6 and also interviewed Andrew Selee, president of the Migration Policy Institute, who said that “we understand the economics of migration and how people make decisions in times of crisis a lot less than we thought we did.” ([washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/coronavirus-remittance-mexico-guatemala-salvador-honduras/2020/08/05/5a1bcdbe-d5be-11ea-930e-d88518c57dcc_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/coronavirus-remittance-mexico-guatemala-salvador-honduras/2020/08/05/5a1bcdbe-d5be-11ea-930e-d88518c57dcc_story.html))

The latest edition of **The Economist** features an article on global migration, pointing out that every country in the world has closed or partly closed its borders since the pandemic began. Countries have issued more than 65,000 restrictions on mobility, with billions of cancelled trips and millions of jobs lost, lives disrupted, and dreams postponed. Let’s hope this doesn’t continue for too long.

Thank you all for your generous support for the **Smart Border Coalition**. We hope to see you at our next webinar on **September 10, from 9 to 11 a.m.**. Please register here:

us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_uVnhTgEbSeGLn2qc6YImwQ

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

I leave you with a link to the recently done, lively welcome video for our coalition. I think it reflects effectively the spirit we strive to promote. I hope you like it: youtube.com/watch?v=xRuQTMSaO6U

With best wishes,

Gustavo De La Fuente
Executive Director
gdelafuente@smartbordercoalition.com
(619) 814-1386