



Bulletin

January 19, 2021

Happy **Martin Luther King Day** to all of you! The spirit of Reverend King's campaigns to end racial segregation and bring racial equality across the United States plays out today in the binational world.

My feeling is that acceptance of differences—including skin color—comes naturally for most of those who go back and forth, have family, friends, or business on either side of the border or on both.

However, from the borderlander perspective, what continues to this day is the quest for equality vis-à-vis people and groups not familiar with the border or who prefer to ignore it. There are deeply rooted negative perceptions about who Mexicans or Americans are and what they look like. Profiling of this sort perpetuates ignorance of the "other." Fear and distrust are two unfortunate consequences. When one adds to this the many asymmetries between our countries—political systems, idiosyncrasies, religious beliefs, language, cuisine, infrastructure, histories—It is hard to reconcile our two worlds.

So it becomes increasingly important for *transfronterizos* to come out of our comfort zone and become ambassadors for the border beyond the groups we normally communicate with. The new book ***El Tercer País***, discussed below, can be a powerful tool for all of us to help in enriching and rectifying perceptions.

With a new year come many expectations. 2021 is no doubt a year most of us thought we didn't reach fast enough. In the U.S. we have a new federal administration led by President Joseph Biden and the first Hispanic U.S. senator from California. In our region, we have opened the year with a new San Diego Mayor, several new Supervisors and Representatives, and up-and-coming young councilmembers and chiefs of staff. In Mexico, we will see very

significant mid-term elections. Baja California will have a new governor in the fall.

All this in the midst of the worst wave of the pandemic as vaccination efforts begin globally. Our border is still closed to non-essential travel. But we are hopeful that we will head into very different and more welcome circumstances during the second half of the year once the vaccination efforts cover the majority of the population by early summer.

Last week I shared **Customs and Border Protection's "Strategy 2021-2026"** document (<https://www.cbp.gov/document/publications/cbp-strategy-2021-2026>) recently released to the public. This document distills clearly and in detail how CBP intends to pursue its mission over the coming years.

CBP describes three goals: **"Mission", "Team" and "Future."** Under "Mission", the agency states it *"must also collaborate with industry, other government agencies, and non-government organizations to improve the risk assessment process, integrate information sharing and adopt innovations in all environments to streamline the inspection process and move people and goods as securely, quickly, and efficiently as possible."*

This should motivate us to look for more ways to be proactive and creative in our interactions with the agency.

Under "Future", CBP tells us that *"we will significantly expand usage of next generation technologies like data and analytics tools to improve fraud and threat detection, machine learning algorithms to provide proactive trade targeting, and biometrics to enhance entry/exit border security."*

It is incumbent on us as stakeholders to ask our friends in the San Diego Field Office about how these technologies will also reduce wait times.

At the very end of the document, CBP writes that its aspiration is *"to be the most innovative and trusted law enforcement agency in the world."* Currently,

we are seeing the implementation of “facial comparison” at all ports. It would help to know of other innovations coming down the pike.

Mexican Customs (SAT) in Baja California removed local administrators in Tecate, Tijuana and Mexicali the second week of January. This is not surprising, as these decisions happen every few years. The question is whether it was the best decision. Two of the previous directors, **David Pérez-Tejada** and **Eva Viridiana Soria** are coalition stakeholders. **Raymundo Jiménez** was in Mexicali. They were appointed by a former SAT National Director, **Ricardo Peralta** –now Deputy Secretary of the Interior-- with the consent of **Governor Bonilla**.

The federal government typically states that these types of decisions are necessary to make sure corruption hasn't taken root. Due to customs duties being in the billions of dollars every year on Mexico's northern border, there is a long history of corruption at SAT. However, we must be careful not to generalize and call every SAT executive corrupt. There are many efficient and upstanding SAT directors who are wrongfully associated with “bad apples.”

There are also many power struggles at the federal level that have a huge bearing on what happens in SAT offices such as Tijuana. Many times decisions are not made to clean up SAT but to install a new cohort.

The new regional coordinator for SAT will be **César Reyna**, an engineer by training, who will oversee Tijuana, Mexicali, Tecate and San Luis Río Colorado in Sonora. As of January 18 I see that **Viridiana Soria** has been named **Tax Director for Baja California**, a state agency that is not related to federal SAT.

Border wait times have been one of the greatest headaches for many travelers, but help is on the way. Mexico's **Communications and Transportation Ministry (SCT)** has built at least 6 towers all along the San Ysidro Port of Entry every 3 lanes and 100 yards from the CBP booths.

Antennas and modems have been set up. They will be powered by solar panels. The information gathered will be used to inform travelers of accurate wait times, temperature and pollution levels and is intended to be part of a system-wide approach to border crossings.

For its part, the **Local Development Council** in Tijuana has gotten approval to install WiFi readers on the Mexican side to gauge wait times.

And **Caltrans** obtained funds to set up infrastructure in Mexico to measure wait times. This is all good news, and it will be helpful for all those involved to figure out how best to complement what they are doing to the benefit of travelers.

Baja Rail and the **San Diego Metropolitan Transit System** (MTS) continue to discuss their divergences in terms of the Desert Line, with no end in sight. In the meantime, yet another opportunity to move goods from our “maquilatropolis” to the U.S. Midwest and East Coast is not living up to expectations.

A **Desert Line** story of how not to revive trade via rail seems to repeat itself every few decades. San Diego and Tijuana need to get their act together. We call on MTS board chair Nathan Fletcher and border-savvy board members such as Coronado Councilman **Bill Sandke** and Imperial Beach Councilmember **Paloma Aguirre** to help us better understand where we are headed.

I invite you to hear **Dean Al Pisano** of the **Jacobs School of Engineering** at UCSD talk about the new **Franklin Antonio Hall** at the university (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO6Ejllvjtg>). The building will open in 2022 and represents the cutting edge of a multidisciplinary collaborative ecosystem designed to go from research to execution.

We will witness a similar approach at UCSD's downtown campus which **Dr. Mary Walshok** has tirelessly led, with a grand opening this fall. Please see Mary's enlightening article in the Union Tribune: https://www-sandiegouniontribune-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.sandiegouniontribune.com/opinion/commentary/story/2021-01-14/san-diego-downtown-life-sciences-technology?_amp=true

Our coalition has started our ***El Tercer País*** book campaign with media on both sides of the border. We will continue telling the story that author Michael Malone has penned based on dozens of interviews with border luminaries and much research to document the 250-year history of our cities' relationship. It's the first and only complete recounting of our shared story. Businesses, elected officials, policy makers, and influential people will be receiving the book, in English and Spanish versions, whether in its electronic, hard cover, or paperback version.

This book should be a must-read for high schoolers on both sides of the border and a primer for anyone wanting to start understanding the region.

I thank sponsors and coalition board members **Steve Williams, Lorenzo Berho, Jose Fimbres, Salomon Cohen, and Jose Galicot** for their generosity in sharing some of their book allotments with us.

If you are not aware of what the **World Design Capital (WDC)** contest is, I urge you to find out (<https://wdo.org/programmes/wdc/>). San Diego and Tijuana are working on a bid to become WDC in 2024. As stated in the pitch from the **Design Global Alliance** led by **MaeLin Levine** and **Scott Robinson**, this would "elevate the region's reputation for creativity and innovation to the world stage, and secure our position in the pantheon of other design capitals from around the globe."

In Tijuana, **Laura Araujo** of **Tijuana Innovadora** and **Katalina Silva** of Enigma Creative are leading the way.

Cities such as Mexico City, Seoul, Lille (France), and Valencia (Spain) have been recent winners. However, this is the **first binational, dual-city gathering of the world's top designers, innovators, and civic leaders** – drawing talent and global influencers to our region and instilling great pride in our community. The application is due at the end of March, and both cities are diligently working on making this an optimal joint proposal.

The **Qualcomm Smart Cities** group, led by Sanjeet Pandit, should be targeting the border as one of its new growth areas. We proudly count this great company as San Diego's most global, having more influence in the creation of the smartphone than any other company in the world.

The recent stepping down of CEO **Steve Mollenkopf** has brought exciting possibilities with **Cristiano Amon**, an experienced Qualcomm executive for the last 17 years who has owned and molded the company's **5G** strategy.

Qualcomm's A-to-Z approach for data has a huge role to play at our border: from collection and sensing, to edge processing and analysis and 5G connectivity, to data management, AI applications and smart spaces.

It is up to our binational community to attract the company and its array of technology partners to what we see as a phenomenal opportunity to improve the way we "border."

We anticipate a **boom in manufacturing growth** for the binational region during the next five years. As the prospects of foreign direct investment increase, it will be critical to attract high-powered executives from other parts of the world, not just Mexico, the U.S., and Canada.

A friend of mine who owns a highly respected accounting and tax strategy firm in the area has told me there have been dozens of **Chinese companies** that will move to our region in the next few years and are looking for Mandarin speakers, preferably Chinese nationals. The companies have deliberately had a low external profile but are actively seeking to set up operations in Tijuana and Baja California as a whole.

Our Stakeholders meeting last January 7 introduced **Rita Fernandez**, the new **Global Affairs Director** for the **Office of San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria**. Rita had been Immigrant Affairs Manager for the Office of Mayor Faulconer, a position that was introduced two years ago.

She is a polished public administration professional, having worked on immigration policy for lawmakers including Democratic Los Angeles Mayor **Eric Garcetti** and **Rep. Juan Vargas**, D-San Diego.

The office she leads is not only about the San Diego-Tijuana relationship. It will promote San Diego's global leadership, build new relationships with other global cities and international organizations, and attract global business and foreign trade.

Another face in the public spotlight is the new **County Supervisor Nora Vargas** (District 1) who joined us for our coalition board meeting last week. She is from Tijuana and is the first Hispanic woman in a supervisor role in San Diego (<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/politics/story/2020-11-28/nora-vargas>)

She is not new to public administration, however. Nora was the first Latina appointed to the California Teacher Retirement System (CalSTRS) board, the first Latina vice president at Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, and the founding director of the City of Los Angeles Office of Immigrant Affairs.

She has appointed our Stakeholder **Denice Garcia** as **chief of staff**. Congratulations Denice for your new role!

Sara Jacobs, newly minted Representative for the **53rd congressional district**, and at 31 the youngest member in Congress, joined **South County EDC's** board meeting on January 12. She represents 750,000 constituents. She is keen on a covid relief package and funding for child care and has joined the Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees. Good luck, Congresswoman!

Vincent Blocker and I met with new **San Diego Councilmember Raul Campillo** and his Economic Development and Intergovernmental Relations Committee Consultant **Sophie Barnhorst** for a very positive and dynamic meeting to start connecting the dots between the border and the rest of the county.

Councilmember Campillo “gets it” and is eager to get the ball rolling with **Mayor Gloria** and other potential allies for the “smart” border.

We salute the creation of the **Burnham Center for Community Advancement** (<https://burnhamcenter.org/>). **Tad Parzen** will be its executive director. As the new website states, this is “a brand-new model to improve our quality of life,” where “good ideas are not enough: we’re here to get work done.”

I want to highlight the work of **Steven Wright**, a binationally focused entrepreneur and well-known to many of us through his **4WallsInternational** non-profit (<http://www.4wallsintl.org/>). Steven has been working on a project, led by **Ocean Conservancy** and supported by 4Walls International and research partners, to reduce plastic pollution in the **Tijuana River watershed**.

Through a community-focused design process, the project will identify waste management interventions to reduce the flow of trash at key locations on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border and will develop one or more financial instruments (“**The Border Impact Bond**”) for potential investors to fund the most promising interventions.

Our next online **Stakeholders Working Committee** meeting will convene on Zoom on **March 4th** from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. The coalition warmly welcomes broad, open participation by all U.S. and Mexican (and all other) parties interested in port of entry operations from any perspective. It will be the first meeting of 2021. Please register in advance at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwpf-CppzgrH9XMRRpHOQ5mDCNayoJ9XYHa>

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

It will be excellent to see all of you!

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