



Bulletin

April 7, 2021

Happy Easter to everyone! This time Easter has had a more significant impact in my family and community life as covid vaccinations start to turn the tide and optimism begins to percolate into our binational region, despite the much lower vaccination levels in Tijuana and Baja as a whole.

Economic, social, and school activity is picking up. The time is now to start making changes to our partially closed border by working in earnest with agencies, governments, and private enterprise. The clamor to open, present since Day One of restrictions last year, has now become an absolutely necessary step forward. We must resume cross-border activity.

Our next online **Stakeholders Working Committee** meeting will convene on Zoom on **May 6th** from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. Please register in advance at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZApdOGhqTgrHtR1JhqQzignamiJOvftq1jf>. Attendance is free and incurs no obligations. All our meetings are stimulating and information-rich, with expert presenters.

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

I have become convinced that the substantial, creative measures required to “reinvent” our border—and alleviate the problems that chronically hobble movement, causing huge losses—will remain untried if the civic and private

sectors are not involved. Options may entail attracting investors able to consider non-conventional business opportunities in our region.

So I was grateful to have learned of **Mission Driven Finance** (<https://www.missiondrivenfinance.com/>), a San Diego-based impact investment firm dedicated to building a financial system that ensures strong nonprofits and businesses have affordable access to funding.

Their chief investment officer, **Louie Nguyen**, a knowledgeable and experienced finance professional, can create structures to support opportunities that banks and venture capital firms typically regard with too much skepticism.

I want to thank the **U.S.-Mexico Foundation** (<https://www.usmexicofound.org/>) under the leadership of **Enrique Perret** for asking for our coalition's support in penning a letter to **Roberta Jacobson**, recently named Coordinator for the Southern Border and a former U.S. ambassador to Mexico. Our friends from the **Borderplex Alliance** in El Paso (<https://www.borderplexalliance.org/>), the **Economic Development Association of Ciudad Juárez** (<https://www.desarrolloeconomico.org/>), and the **Tijuana Development Council** (<https://cdt.org.mx>) signed the letter.

This was done in the context of her March 23 meeting with Mexican foreign secretary **Marcelo Ebrard** to discuss cooperation on immigration issues.

The letter strongly recommends to Ambassador Jacobson to gradually reopen our border starting with SENTRI lane users as well as those who can prove they have been vaccinated for Covid.

Meeting with **Mike Krenn**, CEO of **Connect** (<https://connect.org/>) improved my understanding of the organization's positive impact on startups in the life sciences and information technology world. Connect is focused on supporting entrepreneurs, investors, accelerators, incubators, universities, government

agencies, and other key market influencers in order to benefit great companies in San Diego.

In 2019, San Diego's innovation economy companies directly generated more than **\$63 billion in sales**, employed more than **164,000 workers**, and provided over **\$21 billion in payrolls**. The direct economic contribution to San Diego's economy is over **\$33 billion**, accounting for more than **13 percent** of the total regional economy or gross domestic product.

So what of Connect's linkages to Mexico? How come they are able to find more software developers in Poland, Roumania and India than in Mexico? This was a question Mike and I discussed. We both concluded it is time to do something about it. Some 10-15 years ago, Connect looked into starting a formal connection to Baja California, but the initiative was short-lived.

There is no question in my mind that Connect must find a way to start formal communication with credible, reliable, and high-quality people and organizations in Baja California. Our coalition started this process last week.

Kudos to **MaeLin Levine** for submitting the San Diego-Tijuana bid for the **2024 World Design Capital** competition (<https://wdo.org/programmes/wdc/>). It went down to the wire, but in the end MaeLin rallied her team and made it happen.

Benefactors and professionals on both sides of the border made this possible: **Malin Burnham, Jeff Silberman, Michelle Morris, Scott Robinson, Design Lab Creative, Katalina Silva, Bennett Peji, Gaspar Orozco, Laura Araujo, and Flavio Olivieri**, among others. This is the first time in the history of the event that a binational effort has been mounted.

I am proud to be part of the **Tijuana Innovadora Binational Advisory Council** led by **Laura Araujo** and chaired by two gentlemen who need no introductions: **Jose Galicot** and **Malin Burnham**. Here I want to focus on an important message that our friend **Alan Bersin** delivered at the end-of-March session. Alan has filled many major public leadership roles in Washington and the San Diego-Tijuana region.

There is truly just a handful of people in leadership positions who understand the many facets of the U.S.-Mexico border, and Alan is one of them. In his remarks, he stated that there are two critical tasks we must tackle. The first one is long-term: **reinventing the ports of entry**. He says the Smart Border Coalition can lead here. For now, this task has to be secondary to the task which of resuming **cross-border activity "in its fullest."**

This kind of talk energizes the coalition. We have thus proposed a pilot project with the local U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to lift restrictions to non-essential travelers gradually and constructively. I will have more on this soon.

Reinventing the ports of entry has been on the coalition's agenda for some time. Reinvention is not just a matter of advocacy with our congressional delegation or our state legislature. It requires a full scope of activities, from finding adequate solutions or attempts at solutions, to fine tuning them, to mentoring those wishing to bring these to fruition, to creating a structure that can work beyond the trite "let the government do it" or "get a grant for a study."

Then it is about convincing public and private entities to give credence to the idea. Funding is also crucial, and this is the stage where most people decide to discontinue the effort. We are working on a couple of initiatives at this time, and it is my objective to present concrete options before by the end of June.

Miguel Aguirre is on the move with **Border Fusion** (<https://www.borderfusion.global/about>), a movement that "envisions the flourishing of people-centered infrastructure and strategic cross-border, smart-growth urbanism that will promote North America for competitive global impact."

Miguel and his team want to "encourage a better understanding of public spaces, public-private partnerships, and smart growth planning." Essentially, Aguirre believes that the spaces and areas closest to our ports of entry should be destinations, not places one wants to leave as soon as one leaves the port of entry.

It is clear that one of the first items of business is managing **long- and short-haul transportation at San Ysidro**. The current system is a far cry from what border crossers deserve. The San Diego **Metropolitan Transportation System (MTS)** will soon be issuing the **Intercity Bus Facility Request for Proposal**.

As a follow up to the Intercity Bus Facility, can we imagine a modern, technology-inspired San Ysidro Intermodal Transportation Center?

With equity and inclusion more than buzz words, we are now at a critical juncture for these transportation changes to happen. I think of most people who cross the border today not as wealthy citizens but as modern day pioneers and *transfronterizos* whose travel schedules and activities on either side are important to the success of our binational region.

Our coalition participated in the **North American Strategy for Competitiveness (NASCO)** meeting where panelists focused on workforce development. Mexico has before it opportunities for manufacturing re-shoring and more self-sufficient supply chains. However, any evolution toward re-shoring necessitates a more highly skilled workforce. Supply chain resilience will require the growth of a reliable and high-quality supplier base. It is conceivable that re-shoring will be extended to Central America.

The March 26 **SANDAG Borders Committee and COBRO joint meeting** heralded the most exciting news we've heard about border planning and infrastructure in many months. **Ray Traynor**, executive director, spoke about the final approval of the Calexico East Port of Entry widening project and the grand opening of the 11-mile mid-coast trolley corridor after the summer.

Jose Marquez of **SANDAG** made remarks about the recently concluded **Border Master Plan** (<https://calibajabmp.org>). Our coalition was particularly interested in the remarks, as I participated in the visioning exercise for how ports, traffic, and intelligent transportation technology might look in the next 10-20 years.

The plan outlines a total **183** port of entry and related transportation projects representing an investment of approximately **\$13.5 billion** that have been identified for the California-Baja California region over the next 20 years.

The way that **SANDAG** is presenting the plan is quite impressive. There is a sophisticated yet easy to understand website that houses the report as well as past reports, and there is emphasis on the plan's overview, with clever and informative charts of vehicle, pedestrian, and cargo traffic stats.

It was also very heartening to see that SANDAG has taken stakeholder opinion increasingly more seriously, with sections on "innovation," "white papers," and "proposed projects" that were the result of workshops and consultations with citizens.

I'd also like to underline some of what **Mario Orso** from **Caltrans** told us at this meeting regarding the California-Mexico relationship for the new **Otay Mesa East Port of Entry** project. For every dollar invested in the port, there are \$10 of benefits to the region.

California Transportation Director **David Kim**, SANDAG Executive Director **Hasan Ikhata**, and Caltrans District 11 Director **Gustavo Dallarda** met with **Secretary Arganis** of Mexico's **Communications and Transportation Ministry (SCT)** and other high-level officials to agree on a memorandum of understanding to be executed this month that will create a critical path for the grand opening of the port in 2024.

The **Tijuana Development Council** is getting closer to making the long-sought system of recreational parks a reality. Luis Lutteroth and team are working with the City of Tijuana to open 3-5 "microparks" each year and start chipping away at increasing park area per capita, given the city's title as having the lowest park area per inhabitant in Mexico.

CBP's Cargo Group met the last day of March, with a number of newsworthy items to highlight. Otay Port Director **Joe Misenhelter** offered a rich account of stats.

CBP is adhering to extended hours at Otay until 9:00PM for laden trucks and 9:30PM for empties. However, there is “not a significant” amount of usage at these hours. It’s ironic that groups representing carriers and exporters had wanted this extension, but are not taking advantage of it. This is something that the **Otay Mesa Chamber of Commerce** advocated strongly for last year and was able to get authorized.

When comparing October 2020 to February 2021 to the previous October through February period, truck volumes are up **6.4%** including Tecate and **6.8%** in Otay Mesa alone. **Tecate Port of Entry** hours are 6:00 AM to 2:00 PM Monday through Friday and 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM on weekends.

The current **Otay Mesa Port modernization** has been fully funded. A new pedestrian ramp will come on line later this year; in February of 2022 we will see an access to the new commercial annex building for permits such as SENTRI and FAST. And by the summer of 2022 we will have 16 lanes for northbound cargo, a 60% improvement from today! There will be two lanes for empty trucks rather than the single one today. Recently, empty trucks comprised 19% of all cargo traffic. This tells me that wait times have not improved overall.

It was good to see that **Cesar Reyna Carrillo**, new **SAT (Mexican Customs)** administrator for Baja California, joined the meeting. SAT trade operations are 4-5% greater than at this time last year. They are working with CBP on a return lane for exports as well as changes to better accommodate truck crossing.

I will be doing an event with **Pioneers 21** (www.pioneers21.org) out of El Paso/Juarez to discuss ***El Tercer Pais: San Diego & Tijuana. Two Countries. Two Cities. One Community.*** The book’s author, **Michael Malone**, will be joining us. Our coalition will also have a role in the event. This is the first time that our audience will be mostly non-San Diegan or -Tijuanan. I expect people from El Paso, Juarez, the Laredos, and other border city pairs. I want to thank **Carlos Martinez-Vela**, Pioneers 21 Executive Director, for offering this excellent opportunity.

This effort is part of our ongoing campaign to get the word out for this great new book that for the first time tells the story of San Diego-Tijuana relationship in an intimate way. We have given over 400 books to key stakeholders in our border region, Washington, DC, Sacramento, and beyond but still have hundreds more to send to strategically selected figures.

I have been in conversations with the **Border Trade Alliance** to opine on a very timely initiative by **Congressman Henry Cuellar (D-Texas)** to create a **Land Port of Entry Modernization Trust Fund Act**. The congressman is probably the most active federal legislator on the entire U.S.-Mexico border. His sensitivity to the border has even pitted him against some of the new administration's changes in immigration policy.

If agreed to and passed, the act will channel resources for the construction of ports of entry, their expansion and improvement, the procurement of technology and supporting infrastructure, the facilitation of major repairs, and the **hiring of officers, agricultural specialists, and professional staff** all within CBP to support the agency's trade and revenue mission.

Thank you,

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