

# What Are North America's Smart Borders?

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The terrorist attacks perpetrated in the United States in September 2001 opened up the way for a new form of organization to safeguard the security of the international system based on the implementation of measures to prevent any act of violence that could be carried out in the international, regional, binational and/or national spheres.

Proof of this is the UN Security Council's unanimous approval of Resolution 1373, a common position on terrorism for the entire international community.

Actions with this aim have also been agreed upon regionally. The most important case is precisely that of North America, which has decided on a security mechanism for coordinating activities above all with regard to borders.

The proposal to establish "smart borders" in North America is seen as the best option to deal with future risks, at the same time that guidelines for making relations among the United States, Canada and Mexico more effective are drawn up, since this way of organizing the borders presupposes the construction of a kind of protective perimeter that would simultaneously respect each country's sovereignty and the growing flow of trade and persons.

The plan is to reach this objective by adopting actions that zero in on specific areas and include setting up the most sophisticated electronic surveillance equipment and new technologies for transborder transportation, as well as the establishment of mechanisms for information exchange. After these measures have been introduced, the authorities of the three countries will face the most important challenge, since while everyone agrees with the reasons for their implementation, the priorities are different: security vs. agility.

Given the obvious differences between its northern and southern borders, the United States has begun

to implement plans of action on its own in accordance with each border's specific characteristics.

## THE U.S.-CANADIAN BORDER

The injuries to the integrity of U.S. space produced a significant impact on the almost 8,000-kilometer-long border between these two nations. Unexpected delays were observed at ports of entry,<sup>1</sup> given exhaustive inspections, putting trade at risk mainly because of the export of perishable goods.

As a result, authorities in both countries agreed that, in keeping with the dawning century, the time was right to set up a "smart border," which would also reflect one of the world's most dynamic trade relationships. That relationship is based mainly on land transportation through the 11 most traveled ports of entry and represents more than U.S.\$1 billion a day. In addition, almost 200 million people cross that border every year.

With the announcement of the Smart Border Declaration in December 2001 and its accompanying plan of action, Canada and the United States established 30 points of joint work in accordance with four main lines of action: safe flow of persons; safe flow of goods; better infrastructure; and coordination and exchange of information for these purposes.<sup>2</sup>

The first area—undoubtedly one of the innovations—formalizes the coordination of the flow of individuals by extending the NEXUS Project to other ports of entry.<sup>3</sup> In addition, as of March 25, 2002, teams of customs agents from both countries began to operate in Vancouver, Montreal, Halifax, Seattle-Tacoma and Newark. In U.S. territory, the Canadian agents are in charge of inspections with the U.S. agents as observers, and in Canada vice versa. An additional aim is fostering the identification of potential threats before they arrive in the United States with the aid of systems

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to analyze crew and passengers in air and land transportation, as well as through greater coordination of visa granting policies.

The investment in border infrastructure concentrates on technological solutions that relieve bottlenecks at key crossings and speed up flows of all kinds. Canada has earmarked Can\$1.2 billion, plus an additional Can\$600 million program, exclusively for improving infrastructure at the main border crossings with the United States, including the use of “smart transportation systems” to obtain information about travelers, traffic management, public transportation, commercial vehicular operations, emergency response management and vehicle security.

#### THE MEXICO-U.S. BORDER

With regard to the common 3,181-kilometer-long border between our country and the United States, the relationship is both unique and *sui generis* because it is between the world’s most industrialized power and a developing nation. It is a region with a very complex economic, commercial and human interconnection, with migratory difficulties as well as problems of illicit traffic in goods, drugs and people. Nevertheless, we should also take into account the more than 300 million people who cross the border every year to carry out legal activities that benefit the border communities, as well as the 4.3 million truck crossings, an exchange that represents an average of U.S.\$650 million a day.

The creation of a “smart border” to safeguard the security of both nations without damaging the dynamics of this relationship was agreed to during the meeting of the presidents of Mexico and the United States on March 22, 2002 in Monterrey, Nuevo León.

With the approval of the Alliance for the Mexico-U.S. Border and its plan of action, implementation has begun of a series of 22 points focused along three guidelines: creating a safe infrastructure in accordance with the rhythm of growth of transborder trade; guaranteeing the safe transit of persons; and guaranteeing the safe flow of goods.<sup>4</sup>

Optimizing infrastructure involves creating facilities that will help avoid bottlenecks that slow up the movement of goods and persons. The operating times of the international bridges and crossing points are being synchronized and the existing mechanisms for bilateral coordination on a local, state and federal level will also be strengthened.

Plans have been made to expand the Secure Electronic Network for Traveler Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) at points of entry with a high volume of crossings of individuals who live or work on both sides of the border. Without disregarding assistance and advice for people who want to cross the border, the plan is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of specialized institutions, among them those responsible for fighting the illegal traffic of persons. In addition, systems to exchange consular and intelligence information will be created to detect, investigate and take action to deal with citizens of third countries.

With regard to the transport of goods, the proposal has been made to foster cooperation between the private and public sectors. High-level working groups will be formed to design and implement mechanisms to increase border security and guarantee continued commercial flows; at the same time procedures for the electronic exchange of customs information and a program to allow for the exchange of experiences in the use of state-of-the-art surveillance technology (such as electronic reading of license plates and gamma-ray systems at railroad crossings) will be implemented.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The United States and Canada share 126 official border crossings; however, 90 percent of the vehicle flow goes through 11 ports of entry.
- <sup>2</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, “The Canada-U.S. Smart Border Declaration” (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, December 12, 2001).
- <sup>3</sup> The NEXUS Project is a fast-lane system for proven low-risk travelers. It will tend to replace Canada’s CANPASS program and the U.S.’s PACE system in the near future.
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State and Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México, *Plan de Acción de la Alianza para la Frontera México-EUA* (Monterrey, Nuevo León: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 22, 2002).