

San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report

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SOUTH COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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Preface

The international border between Tijuana and San Diego is an economic engine, a gateway for commerce between Mexico and the United States. Daily, companies located on both sides of the border exchange employees and products. Tourists visit San Diego and Tijuana to enjoy and spend money in the bi-national region. Local consumers regularly shop in both Mexico and the United States, purchasing goods to satisfy everyday needs.

The San Ysidro Port of Entry (“SYPOE”) is the busiest border crossing in the world. On an average day in 2010, United States Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) processed over 17,500 pedestrian crossers. With more than 80,000 people walking or driving across the border daily, the SYPOE is a critical gateway for commerce, business, tourism, family, employment, education and more. The port serves as a vital link for the two neighboring countries.

In January 2006 the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) released a study entitled “Economic Impacts of Wait Times at the San Diego-Baja California Border.” In this study SANDAG indicates that “...traffic congestion and delays cost the US and Mexican economies an estimated \$6 billion in gross output in 2005.”¹ Due in part to SANDAG’s dramatic findings and the untold loss in human productivity, the South County Economic Development Council (“SCEDC”) undertook the effort of obtaining input from pedestrian crossers at the SYPOE to better understand this nexus of the intertwined economies.

In May 2010, CBP Commissioner Alan Bersin challenged stakeholders and CBP employees to increase pedestrian Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) participation by 70%, suggesting this would dramatically reduce wait times. SCEDC, supportive of actions to minimize economic losses to the region, pursued this survey as a tool to study the current application and future potential of SENTRI as a means of reducing border wait times.

SENTRI is one of several CBP trusted traveler programs. These programs provide expedited travel for low risk, frequent border crossers through dedicated lanes and kiosks. SENTRI is designed specifically for expedited crossing of the U.S. - Mexico border. The application process is open to U.S Citizens and non U.S. Citizens with original documentation of immigration admissibility into the U.S. Examples of valid documents include U.S. passport, Permanent Resident Card, and Visa. http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/trusted_traveler/sentri/sentri.xml

The purpose of this report is not to debate the need for a border or the need for security measures. Rather, this report is intended to convey important information regarding pedestrian crossings. The survey was conducted to increase awareness and understanding of the reasons people cross the border, solicit input on its functionality, and document what pedestrian crossers consider solutions for shorter wait times.

¹ “Economic Impacts of Wait Times at the San Diego – Baja California Border, Final Report”. San Diego Association of Governments California Department of Transportation, District 11. Prep. HDR/HLB DECISION ECONOMICS, INC. Jan. 19, 2006.



Introduction

In July 2010, SCEDC began collecting data from pedestrians exiting the SYPOE into the United States. Survey questions were designed to capture the opinions of pedestrian crossers, the conditions they encountered, and their view of the Port. Information gathered included how often individuals cross from Mexico into the United States, how long they waited to cross, and where, in their opinion, improvements are needed to increase overall efficiency. Of key importance are the responses to questions aimed at determining respondents' attitudes towards the SENTRI program and its potential to cut wait times. Having collected surveys throughout 2010 and 2011, this report presents SCEDC's findings and recommendations based on the analysis of a year's worth of data.

Border wait times have a direct impact on the local economies by contributing to employee absence and tardiness as well as lowering levels of consumer and tourist spending. Furthermore, the unpredictable and lengthy periods of time encountered by pedestrians waiting to enter the U.S. creates a humanitarian issue requiring everyone's attention.

Location and Time

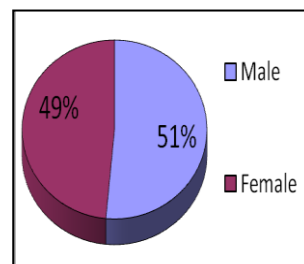
The survey was conducted at the SYPOE in San Diego, California. Surveyors were located outside the SYPOE facility, adjacent to the San Ysidro Trolley Station. CBP granted SCEDC unprecedented access to the port's facility providing an opportunity to survey all U.S. bound pedestrian crossers.

U.S. bound pedestrian crossers were surveyed between July 2010 and June 2011, Monday through Friday, from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

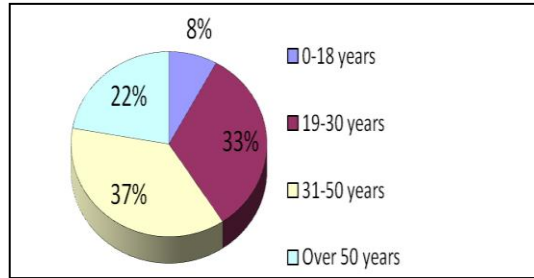
Survey Respondents Demographics

Survey respondents were randomly selected as they exited the SYPOE into the United States. A series of open-ended survey questions were asked in English or Spanish depending on the participant's language preference. With an emphasis placed on collecting unbiased results, surveyors received training on survey techniques and how to document all unforeseeable answers. When applicable, multiple responses were documented for certain questions.

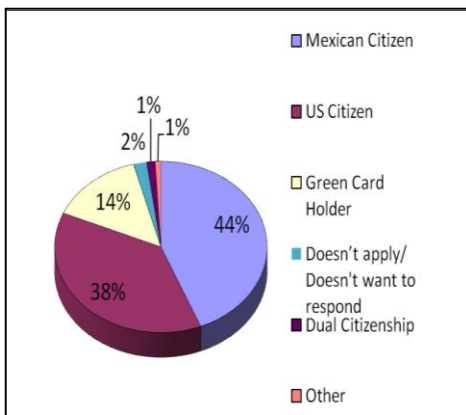
In total, 5,861 surveys were collected from pedestrian border crossers entering the U.S. Survey data shows that throughout the year, the sample population was of relatively equal gender distribution, composed of 51% male and 49% female respondents.



Surveyed pedestrians were classified into four age categories 0-18, 19-30, 31-50, and over 50 years. Of the respondents, 70% were of workforce age, between 19-50 years old. As a proportion of the “over 50” age group is still working, the percentage of pedestrian crossers with in the potential workforce is likely higher. Taking this into consideration, it is important to consider the economic impact waiting in line has by obstructing employees from crossing.



Note, age and gender data was collected by visual observation alone. Respondents were not asked their age or sex directly.



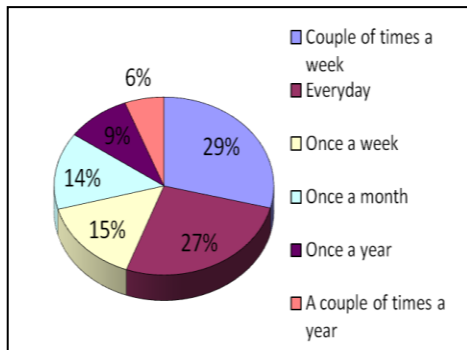
In order to eliminate the potentially intimidating effect of requesting participants communicate their citizenship, the question regarding it was asked last. Furthermore, the inquiry was phrased as to immediately inform respondents that providing this information was “optional”. Interestingly, almost all participants answered this question, with 44% percent of respondents identifying themselves as Mexican citizens, 38% indicating they were U.S. citizens, and 14% responding that they held a Green Card. Respondents who reported having dual citizenship were most often citizens of both Mexico and the

United States. Those categorized under “other” citizenship were generally from European countries.

Crossing the Border

CROSSING FREQUENCY

Surveyors asked respondents how often they cross the border from Mexico into the United States. 29% of surveyed pedestrians stated that they cross a couple of times a week and 27% responded that they cross on a daily basis. 15% indicated they cross once a week, 14% once a month, 9% once annually, and 6% a few times a year.



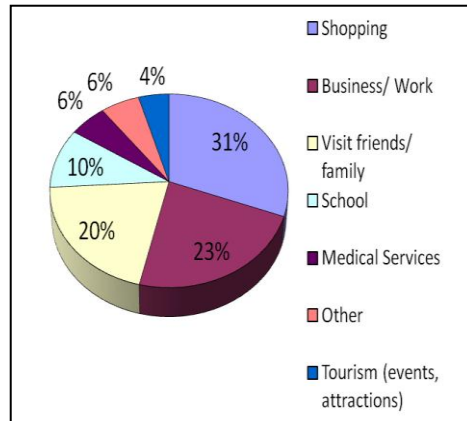
A cumulative 56% of pedestrians crossing at SYPOE may be considered “Frequent Crosser”, passing between the United States and Mexico multiple times a week.



REASON FOR CROSSING

Participants were asked to indicate their reason for crossing into the United States. The survey allowed for multiple answers to this question.

31% of respondents cited shopping as their motivation for crossing the border. Following this, 23% responded that business/work brought them across the border and 20% answered that they cross into the U.S. to visit family and friends. 10% indicated that they cross for school, 6% attributed their transit to obtaining medical services, and 4% stated tourism as their reason. The 6% who provided "other" responses included pedestrians crossing for banking purposes, mail collection, and personal reasons.



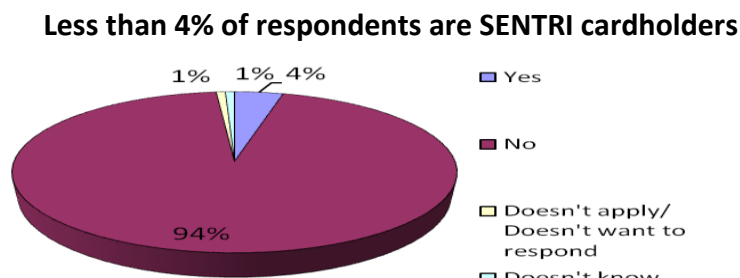
Of the Frequent Crossers surveyed, 37% cross for business/work related reasons, followed by 24% crossing to shop.

It should be noted that these results are cumulative and that fluctuations throughout the year may be attributed to seasonal factors, including school schedules, increased tourism, and other components.

SENTRI

SENTRI ENROLLMENT

Of the 5,861 surveyed pedestrians, only 231 were current SENTRI cardholders.



*Note that the percentage of pedestrian SENTRI cardholders as reported by CBP in June 2011 was 3.2%.²

² Passenger Working Group Meeting Summary, CBP. June 17, 2011.



REASON NOT ENROLLED IN SENTRI

The data displayed an upward trend in respondents' general understanding of the SENTRI program throughout the year. A simultaneously disturbing trend shows an increase in the proportion of respondents concluding that they would not benefit from enrolling in SENTRI.

24% of survey respondents communicated that they did not think they needed the card. This statement was often based on respondents' perception that they would not benefit enough to offset the time and monetary costs of applying for the program. Several participants conveyed the belief that they did not cross often enough to warrant the program's advantages; this opinion was expressed even by some Frequent Crossers. Others respondents communicated that they already had some alternative form of identification, indicating why they did not 'need' a SENTRI card.

19% indicated that they did not know how to acquire the card. This response pertained to those who either did not know how to enroll in the SENTRI program or where they could do so.

14% were uncertain as to why they did not have a SENTRI card. These respondents were generally unfamiliar with the SENTRI program or were uninterested given limited knowledge.

11% provided "other" reasons not falling into the pre-determined categories for why they had not enrolled in the program. "No time", "SENTRI office hours", and "too complicated" constitute the majority of these reoccurring responses.

Currently, the SENTRI office near SYPOE is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The current hours of operation make it difficult for workers with regular schedules, requiring them to take time off from work in order to utilize the office's enrollment resources.

10% stated that they were unable to afford the card. Those answering with this response often cited their limited income or superior priorities. Participants decreasingly attributed mistaken beliefs about the SENTRI fee and duration as reason for avoiding the program.

10% did not know if they were eligible for the SENTRI program. Respondents indicated they did not know the criteria to qualify for the program.

6% answered that they did not meet the requirements, often citing criminal backgrounds or previously denied SENTRI applications.

6% declined to state why they were not enrolled in the SENTRI program.



Respondent Recommendations for Border Efficiency

Survey participants were asked what they would suggest to improve border crossing conditions and decrease pedestrians wait times. The survey allowed respondents to provide multiple answers to this inquiry.

33% indicated increasing the number of open lanes would alleviate pedestrian traffic congestion. Additionally, respondents suggested that an increase in open lanes should be coordinated with peak traffic periods.

28% mentioned the need for faster inspection by CBP agents for the purpose of reducing wait times. Respondents commented that CBP agents take too long when inspecting documents, ask too many or unnecessary questions, and socialize with other agents while on duty.

16% provided “other” suggestions for improving conditions at the SYPOE. Most prominent among these was the need to control line cutting. Respondents also suggested separating lanes according to documents or characteristic specifications, such as age or disability. Often cited in conjunction with other recommendations, participants reported the perceived need for more officers; additional officers were correlated with realizing more open lanes, faster inspections, reduced cutting, and improvement in overall organization.

8% did not provide any recommendation for augmenting efficiency at the border. Some concluded the wait could not be avoided due to an increasingly higher number of pedestrian crossers, while others did not know how conditions could be improved.

3% responded that improved technology would enhance efficiency at the border, maintaining security levels while simultaneously decreasing the average border crossing wait time.

3% expressed that increasing SENTRI enrollment would generate greater inspection efficiency of both pedestrians and vehicle crossers, effectively decreasing congestion at the border.

3% stated that completion of the border expansion project would reduce wait times. As the construction has resulted in greater vehicle congestion, the higher volume of pedestrian crossers may in part be attributed to more people opting to walk instead of drive across the border. Consequently, the perception was communicated that elongated pedestrian wait times are a bi-product of the remodeling process.

3% indicated a need to develop new infrastructure. Respondents mentioned the need to start projects such as new ports of entry in San Ysidro and Otay Mesa, etc.

Note, respondents may not be aware of proposed infrastructure. Answers to this question may overlap with the answers recognizing project completion as a potential source of wait reduction.

3% of the surveyed population declined to answer this question.



Findings

1. Respondents exhibited an increased understanding of the SENTRI program compared to one year ago.

Consistent declines in responses indicating lack of program knowledge or lack of understanding of program requirements can be interpreted as an increase in the public's understanding of the SENTRI program and its criteria. Such trends include a 6% drop in respondents answering that they did not know how to enroll, those responding that they did not know if they were eligible dropped 7%, and similarly those stating that they did not meet the requirements increased by 6%.

2. SENTRI office and improved web accessibility.

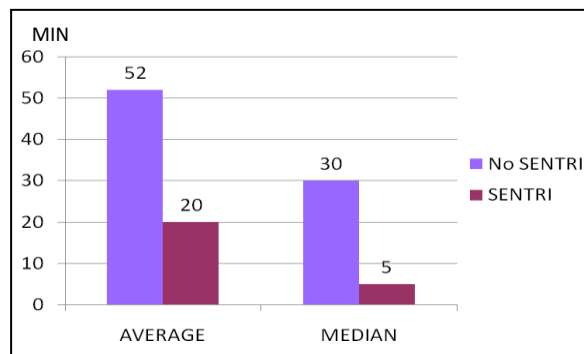
The new SENTRI office located on San Ysidro Blvd. has likely played a critical role in disseminating program information. Processing over 120 applicants a day, it has exceeded the expectations for its success. CPB.gov has generated online content making SENTRI information more readily available, such as the online SENTRI Orientation video and a Step-by-Step application tutorial. Such measures are essential to encouraging enrollment by providing support and diminishing confusion for interested persons.

3. The perceived benefits of SENTRI still fail to outweigh the costs of enrolling.

Nearly a quarter of the surveyed population believes they “do not need the card”. Surveyed pedestrians felt that either they do not cross often enough to warrant the SENTRI card, or that the application process is too lengthy and complicated. This perception existed even among Frequent Crossers, the program's target audience. The survey also demonstrated many are still not aware that SENTRI cardholders are allowed to go to the front of the line on the Mexican side in order to reach the port's SENTRI entrance. Without knowledge of this benefit, SENTRI appears no different from other documents, decreasing its comparative value.

4. Pedestrian wait times for SENTRI cardholders compared to crossers not enrolled in the program.

SENTRI cardholders experienced drastically lower pedestrian wait times than those using other traditional documents to pass. On average, SENTRI cardholders waited 20 minutes to enter the United States through SYPOE: this is 32 minutes less than pedestrians not enrolled in the program, who waited an average of 52 minutes. Median wait times further evidence the benefit of enrolling in SENTRI: enrolled



pedestrians were more likely to wait 5 minutes or less throughout the year compared to 30 minutes for those not part of the program. Furthermore, the average and median wait times of non-SENTRI pedestrians do not reflect the extreme wait times experienced at SYPOE during peak hours: participants reported wait times of up to three hours or longer during peak periods while SENTRI card holders continued to wait less than 30 minutes on average.

5. SENTRI Fees still too high.

10% of surveyed participants are unable to afford the actual cost of enrolling in SENTRI. Lowering the SENTRI enrollment fee is not only essential for enabling the working poor access to the program but will also present the opportunity for people to reevaluate the costs and benefits of enrolling.

6. Wait times are unpredictable.

Respondents reported a persistent volatility of wait times, encountering both expected and random peak periods. Furthermore, participants indicated wait times reported by media sources, such as the radio, are commonly inaccurate. In some cases, surveyed pedestrians conveyed surprise at the speed with which they crossed the border, having expected to wait an hour and a half only to pass through SYPOE in 15 minutes. Others expressed re-occurring frustration at having to stand in line for twice the time reported. This variability in wait time not only disrupts the schedules of those crossing the border, specifically employees and students, but has a negative effect on the local business community which includes companies relying on the availability of employees. The unpredictable fluctuation of wait times is also detrimental for those unable to physically manage standing for extended periods of time, such as elderly, children, or disabled persons.

7. Line cutting needs to be controlled.

Occurring both inside and outside of the SYPOE facility, cutting in line prevents maintenance of structured and predictable pedestrian waits. Survey respondents have noticed and reported that in Tijuana, people waiting in line sell their spot to individuals or a small group of people. Respondents recounted witnessing very coordinated efforts between the always present bus line salesmen and regular cutters and spot sellers. During school season, students frequently let friends in line, backing up waits in the morning peak hours. This disproportionately increases the wait times for individuals at the end of the line. Once inside the facility, pedestrians are able to utilize the generally uncongested area dedicated to SENTRI cardholders for the purpose of cutting ahead of those waiting in the non-SENTRI lines. The lack of effective lane dividers or monitoring allows for this movement of people in and out of lanes. The combined effect of all these factors add up to prolonged waits by pedestrian crossers who follow the rules.



It is important to recognize that “cutting” increases wait times dramatically. For example, people toward the back of the line that would normally wait 30 minutes, may experience a much longer wait time caused by people cutting to the front of the line instead of starting at the back. Consequently, the increase in the number of people being processed lengthens wait times. Typically, authorities do not supervise or deter “cutters”, nor are those who are caught reprimanded.

8. Confusion persists regarding which documents are WHTI compliant.

When entering SYPOE, pedestrians are directed to enter one of three lanes: SENTRI, WHTI/General Public, and Permit (No Documents). The installation of more visible lane identifiers has been an important step towards increasing border crossing efficiency. Clear signage indicating areas dedicated to different documents decreases the likelihood of pedestrians accidentally waiting in the wrong line, leading to inspection inefficiencies. However, surveyed pedestrians conveyed uncertainty as to which documents are actually WHTI compliant. Furthermore, the absence of clear separation between WHTI and General Public lanes renders the distinction functionally meaningless. Frequently, pedestrians suggested the creation of separate passport lanes, not knowing that WHTI lanes exist particularly for this reason.

9. Completed infrastructure improvements and necessary developments.

Over the last year, CBP has installed a water fountain and benches within the SYPOE facility. These improvements aid in relieving fatigued pedestrian crossers, especially those that have waited in line for extended periods of time. While Phase Two of the San Ysidro Development plan includes plans to expand the facility, it is nonetheless necessary to point out that the current structure is inadequate. As the largest port of entry in the world, the San Ysidro facility is in need of expansion to properly accommodate the tens of thousands of people it processes daily. During the summer, overhangs are necessary on the Mexican side entering SYPOE to protect people from the sun. Accessible restrooms for pedestrians waiting far from the front of the facility are also needed.



Recommendations

Based on survey results, SCEDC makes the following recommendations to increase pedestrian border crossing efficiency at the SYPOE.

1. Increasing SENTRI enrollment and disseminating program information

It is essential to maintain efforts aimed at keeping the general public informed about the SENTRI program. Increasing information circulation about the program will simultaneously diminish misconceptions regarding it and promote the benefits of enrolling. Furthermore, making information visible and easily accessible will alert current SENTRI cardholders of benefits which they may not be aware of, such as the advantage of walking to the front of the line in Tijuana to access the designated SENTRI entrance.

Increase Spanish language SENTRI marketing.

While a Spanish language application and requirements list exist on the SENTRI website, other marketing materials, such as the tutorials and videos, need to be available in Spanish to effectively market the SENTRI program. This is especially important considering survey data shows 44% of respondents identify themselves as Mexican citizens and likely speak Spanish as their primary language.

Use available resources to promote SENTRI.

Use of pamphlets, tangible materials

The continued use of pamphlets to promote SENTRI on both sides of the border is essential for keeping pedestrians informed about the program. The SYPOE facility gates are strategic location for dispersing pamphlets: stands situated at these locations would capitalize upon the visual absence of a long SENTRI line and provide information immediately to interested pedestrians.

Use of web

Maintenance and updates on the CBP.gov SENTRI web page are key to communicating with the public. Development and improvement of online tutorials are essential to supporting further enrollment. For example, streaming instructional and informational videos about the program will reach out all levels of internet users, functioning as a condensed, easily accessible source of material for interested persons.

Use of personnel

Booth officers' direct contact with border crossers presents an opportunity to promote SENTRI. Officers can be used to identify frequent crossers and market the SENTRI program by directly providing marketing materials and verbally recommending it.



Through the use of effective marketing, many common misconceptions associated with the SENTRI program can and have been eliminated. It is critical that such efforts continue to be expended so that interested persons will not be deterred by inaccurate information.

2. Modifying SENTRI program and accommodations

In order to open enrollment to persons currently unable to apply, SCEDC makes the following suggestions.

Create separate lane leading up to the dedicated SENTRI entrance.

On the Tijuana, B.C. Mexico side of the SYPOE, there is no defined SENTRI lane leading up to the marked SENTRI entrance. While the trusted traveler entrance is unmistakably labeled, issues arise for SENTRI cardholders when they must pass a multitude of pedestrians during peak times to reach it. Painting a designated SENTRI lane on the ground or placing signs along/above the line instructing SENTRI participants to move ahead to the specified entrance will minimize the any confusion of “cutting”.

Extend SENTRI office hours

Opening the SENTRI office on Saturdays would provide those who work a traditional full time job more convenient access to its resources. Also to this effect, extending office hours until after 5:00 p.m. would enable such persons to utilize the office on their way home.

Reevaluate existing regulations prohibiting criminal record holders/ felons from getting SENTRI as appropriate.

By reevaluating regulations and seeking additional flexibility as it applies to specific circumstances, ideal SENTRI candidates with tarnished backgrounds may be reconsidered for the program. For example, a 65 year old male who may have been convicted of felony when he was 19 years old (such as driving under the influence) should not be permanently barred from participating in the SENTRI program.

Restructure SENTRI card fees.

SENTRI fee reduction has been anticipated for over a year. Having clarified a majority of the confusion regarding the cost of the card, an average 10% of the pedestrian population is still unable to afford SENTRI.

Reduced cost for families.

SENTRI currently offers reduced pricing for families. However, this information is not widely known. Information for families needs to be better disseminated to the public.



Combine with your existing passport.

It is recommended that the passport application process be modified to allow the option to apply for a SENTRI card as well. Also, including additional information about the SENTRI program within the passport application or in passport marketing materials would greatly increase awareness about the SENTRI program.

3. Communicating border wait times.

By utilizing lighted signs to convey both SENTRI and non-SENTRI pedestrian wait times, two objectives may be achieved:

- Interest will be sparked in the SENTRI program when pedestrians see how short the wait is for the program participants.
- Communicating wait times will enable pedestrians to make informed decisions about standing in line, thereby minimizing useless time expenditures by persons able to cross at a less congested time.

4. Controlling line cutting.

Minimizing line cutting will greatly diminish unpredictable fluctuations in wait times as well as bring increased order to the border crossing process.

Increase line monitoring to prevent cutting outside the gate in Mexico and inside the gate on U.S. territory.

Respondents indicated frequent incidence of “cutting” as greatly diminished when security is visibly present. Security staff should be assigned to monitor the lines from back to front in order to eliminate “cutting.” Placement of security is needed on both the Mexican side of the SYPOE and within the facility.

Utilize lane dividers to minimize cutting.

An effective use of strategically placed, safety compliant lane dividers inside the gate on U.S. territory could reduce instances of people cutting to the front of line. This is especially necessary for preventing “cutters” from utilizing the open SENTRI lane to cut ahead of people waiting in the other lanes.



5. Improvements to SYPOE for increasing inspection efficiency

As mentioned, confusion persists regarding which lines pedestrians holding certain documents may utilize, leading to inspection inefficiency. Furthermore, documents which expedite the inspection process should be promoted to further decrease the pedestrian wait.

Separate of Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)-compliant lanes.

Wait times can be reduced if WHTI-compliant document holders are provided a dedicated lane. Crossers with WHTI-compliant documents usually require less inspection time than ordinary document holders.

Clarifying which documents are WHTI-compliant is a necessary measure as well. Utilizing existing signage or installing adjacent signage to list and display images of the appropriate documents will eliminate existing confusion.

Incorporate new technology at SYPOE

Increasing the amount of Radio Frequency Identification documents (RFID) at San Ysidro has the potential to alleviate wait times by leaving security unaffected while decreasing the amount of time necessary to inspect individuals. It is calculated that accessing individual information using an RFID technology is 60% faster than with documents not equipped with the technology.

6. Improving SYPOE facility.

Various improvements are necessary within the SYPOE and on the Mexican side of the facility. On the U.S. side, the creation of more inspection booths, staffed appropriately, will diminish congestion. An expanded facility will allow for less confusion regarding lane division. On the Mexican side, restrooms need to be made available to waiting pedestrians at various points in the line. Also, overhangs need to be installed to shade pedestrians from the sun while waiting for long periods of time in Tijuana.



Conclusion

The joint effort expended by SCEDC and CBP over the last year exists as the foundation for the survey's success. By allowing SCEDC the exceptional privilege of collecting data directly from pedestrians exiting SYPOE, CBP has enabled the gathering of information from a concentrated sample of the desired population. Through the ongoing transmission of survey findings over the last year, several improvements have already been considered and implemented at SYPOE. As efficiency issues at the border continue to require attention, SCEDC will further work to identify and promote possible improvements at the border in conjunction with CBP.

In addition, SCEDC will continue to work with other SYPOE stakeholders on both sides of the border to decrease wait times and improve circumstances for all crossing pedestrians and vehicles alike. The undeniable necessity of establishing a reliable method of communicating wait times is acknowledged and has been discussed with the Baja/ Tijuana business organization. Methods such as installing cameras along the pedestrian line to measure real wait time and ultimately relay this information to CBP are being considered. Furthermore, construction plans along the San Diego – Baja Region borders continue to be developed by the General Services Administration (GSA). Unfortunately, due to the recent economic downturn, completion and implementation of various projects is threatened by budget shortages. In light of this, SCEDC and other stakeholders will nonetheless continue to strive for improvement of border conditions.

Lastly, SCEDC makes these recommendations without regard for security concerns as that area of expertise lies with United States and Mexico security officials. This report is not intended to reduce security measures, but rather find ways for security and commerce to co-exist at the SYPOE ports of entry.

