



Is Border Security Trumping Trade?

U.S.-Canada trade is worth hundreds of billions of dollars annually. How do we balance the interests of homeland security with those of commerce at our northern bridges and ports of entry?

BY APRIL TERRERI

The effects of any event causing the shutdown of one of our nation's primary trading arteries with Canada are almost beyond comprehension. "Take Detroit as an example, with over 6,000 trucks incoming to the U.S. crossing the Ambassador Bridge on a daily basis," states Ronald Smith, chief of the Detroit field office for Customs and Border Protection (CBP), responsible for the ports of Detroit, Port Huron, and Sault Ste. Marie. "A shutdown would mean closing automotive plants and suppliers in both the U.S. and Canada. It would cause a rippling effect to our economy that would quickly become a tsunami. The vitality of our economies depends on the security we need to have

deployed so legitimate trade can continue."

The U.S. and Canada enjoy a trading partnership unlike any other two border countries, with the largest bilateral flow of goods and services in the world. Trade between the two countries averaged a whopping \$1.2 billion per day in 2004, well over \$428 billion that year. Canada moves about 87 percent of its exports to the US, as the US market is 10 times the size of Canada's. The Ambassador Bridge, connecting Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, is the No. 1 commercial crossing in the world.

So, few security concerns are more vital than keeping these arteries free flowing. But, what really is the current health of our border security measures? Ask James G.



U.S.-Canada Commercial Trade by All Surface Modes

Border Crossing	Incoming Trucks	Truck Lanes	Trade Dollars
Detroit	1.8 million	14	\$75.7 billion
Buffalo	1.2 million		\$36.6 billion
- Lewiston-Queenston Bridge		4	
- Peace Bridge		7	
Blaine	366,000	3	\$7.9 billion

Source: U.S. DOT Bureau of Transportation Statistics and data provided by U.S. Customs & Border Protection (2004)

Liddy of Liddy International to rate security at our northern border crossings and he can give only a 'fair' rating because so many initiatives are at an elementary level.

Although the issue of security has a lot more attention these days, Liddy stresses not enough prescriptive remedies are focused on critical operational transportation nodes within our bridges, tunnels, and border crossings. "We have to keep in mind that these critical nodes are what terrorists want to target in order to attack our economy." On the other hand, economic considerations underscore the importance of not burdening these trade channels with unnecessary bureaucratic impediments.

So, where do you make the trade-offs? How are we maintaining the balance in preserving the critical infrastructure supporting this healthy trade partnership? To find out, we examined a few of the busiest commercial border crossings along the northern border: Detroit, Buffalo, and Blaine (Washington).

In the crosshairs

Jurisdiction at U.S.-Canada border crossings is two-fold. CBP, a division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, is responsible for assuring no entering vehicle, its passengers, or its cargo, will pose a security threat. Bridge authorities and commissions—owned privately or through public-private partnerships—are responsible for the safety, maintenance, and security of bridge infrastructures and decide how to protect them

CBP's mission is to keep terrorists and terror weapons out of the U.S. "Since we began operating, we doubled the number of people working at and between

our ports of entry and we've deployed advanced targeting systems and intelligence sharing between agencies in the federal, state, and local governments," reports Mike Milne, press officer for CBP's Seattle field office, responsible for the busy Blaine, Washington crossing (which is actually two crossings, the Peace Arch Crossing, or Interstate 5, dedicated to passenger vehicles, and one mile east the commercial Pacific Highway Crossing with three truck lanes).

The second part of CBP's mission is to facilitate legal trade and travel, adds Smith. "The technology we've deployed at the borders makes our officers more efficient and effective, which helps us in this mission." Officers are trained to spot anomalies indicating risk.

Another initiative requires e-manifests for incoming commercial trucks and trains, under the new ACE (Automated Commercial Environment) ruling. "This is similar to prior manifests necessary for ocean vessels and aircraft to determine if a truck needs further scrutiny when it arrives in our port," explains Milne.

CBP plazas are vigilant ports of entry where activities are constantly monitored using gates, lighting, and cameras. License plate readers gather information. VACIS (Vehicle and Cargo Inspection Systems) are gamma X-ray imaging devices scanning entire trucks, trailers, and trains. "Radiation portal monitors are also used to screen all cars, buses, trucks, and trains for any sources of radiation."

A first layer of security here is assuring there are no anomalies between a truck, its driver, its contents, and its e-manifest, adds Kevin Corsaro, CBP public affairs officer for the Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and Lewiston, New York region.

"Security should be approached as a **'dollar for security equals a dollar for safety and efficiency'**. Then you will really get buy-in because it's more efficient and increases throughput."

After the 2001 attacks, bridges and border crossings received threat and vulnerability assessments. "We made a large investment in technologies, including integrated closed-circuit TV and an access-control alarm system," adds Brent Gallagher, manager of agency relations and security for Niagara Falls Bridges Commission responsible for the security of the Rainbow, Whirlpool Rapids, and Lewiston-Queenston bridges. "We decided we

would get beyond the cutting edge and get to the bloody edge of technology. With sophisticated systems, over 160 cameras at our bridges, and over 100 access control points using proximity cards, we control who gains access to our facilities."

The balancing act

The Canadian/American Border Trade Alliance (www.canambta.org) headquartered in Lewiston, New York, is an organization comprised of Canadian and American companies, Chambers of Commerce, bridge and toll operators, brokers, and governmental agencies. Its mission is to ensure growth of cross-border trade and efficient, productive border-crossing capabilities. "Our intent is to get effective programs implemented while avoiding knee-jerk

reactions to security concerns, such as some legislators demanding that everything be inspected,” says Jim Phillips, president and CEO.

Nevertheless, some still maintain the pillars of trade facilitation and security do clash. “There is the sense in the business community that the balance has tipped in favor of security,” says Jason Conley, senior manager of homeland security for Washington, D.C.-based U.S. Chamber of Commerce (www.uschamber.com).

Since NAFTA, there’s been an explosive growth in the volume of trade between the two countries, states Conley, although trade volume has stabilized somewhat in recent years. “This means the further integration of the North American economy and we would like to see that continue. If security measures are implemented incorrectly, they can create friction on trade and result in a non-tariff barrier trade.”

The balance between security and trade facilitation, says Gallagher, is something with which both the U.S. and Canadian governments continue to wrestle. “We want to know who or what is coming so we can be prepared. This is what FAST (Fast and Secure Trade) and other pre-arrival notification programs do.”

Ron Rienas, general manager of the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority (www.peacebridge.com) is acutely aware of the challenge. “We believe we can do both if we do it intelligently.”

By this, Rienas means intelligently designed non-intrusive security systems and bridge infrastructures. “These should be seamless from the perspective of a trucker crossing the border. The average person isn’t even aware of the level of security in place at international crossings.”

What about those who contend some security measures impede trade? Smith doesn’t see a problem. “That could be a valid argument except for our risk-based approach,” he says. “With 6,000-plus trucks coming into the country every day in Detroit, trade would definitely cease if we were to physically examine each truck.” So, they don’t try. But, he is quick to add that “100 percent” of those trucks are checked for radiological devices or sources. “Then we have information on the truck, its contents, and the driver through advance e-manifest requirements.”

Liddy, however, offers cautionary advice. “Terrorism risk studies by the DHS and port authorities are good initial first steps. But, I am concerned that a potential terrorist could look at these programs as a ticket in.”

Some initiatives, Liddy contends, are still approached at almost a superficial level. “This is because the mentality out there is a dollar spent is a dollar gone. Unfortunately, we’ve made so many mistakes in the past doing just that. Security should be approached as a dollar for security equals a dollar for safety and efficiency. Then you will really get buy-in

because it’s more efficient and increases throughput.”

Additional border crossings and improved infrastructures in key crossings, especially in the Detroit and Buffalo regions, would help reduce processing times, Conley adds. “We are also a strong supporter of voluntary programs—such as C-TPAT and PIP (Partners in Protection) on the Canadian side—that encourage companies to strengthen their own supply chain security practices.”

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Vehicle and truck inspections have increased at the Peace Bridge, reports CBP’s Corsaro. “It only takes us two to three minutes to scan the contents of a truck with our new equipment, where it used to take two or three officers two or three hours to do the same level of inspection.”

CBP’s Smith in Detroit emphasizes the importance of Customs’ highly trained officers. “So much of security depends on their training and experience. If an officer feels we need to check a vehicle further, I trust that instinct and we will take a closer look.”

FAST-certified commercial trucks get red-carpet treatment. “We have five lanes now for auto and truck traffic on the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge, with a dedicated FAST lane from the Canadian side through to the U.S. side,” notes Gallagher.

Mitigation plans

Plans for any disruption involve both CBP and bridge personnel, who periodically participate in tabletop exercises, along with U.S. and Canadian governmental agencies, and local, state, and provincial law enforcement agencies. “Everything on paper always looks great,” says CBP’s Corsaro in Buffalo. “However, when you actually enact a scenario, you want to make sure that what’s on paper is actually what is supposed to happen.”

Downriver a bit, the Rainbow Bridge (dedicated to passenger vehicles only) was the subject of a live exercise (the first of its kind) this past December, when the bridge was shut down for about five hours. “We had a mock chemical and biological terrorist event, which was a resounding success on several levels,” reports Gallagher. “We kept it close to the vest, and only senior officials knew it would happen, so it was as real as possible.”

The exercise happened on a weekday and traffic diversion plans kicked in. “We have the advantage of being able to close a bridge, since we have three bridges in close proximity,” Gallagher says.

Rienas at the Peace Bridge reminds us that we can do ‘only so much’ to protect bridge infrastructures. “So, we try to harden the infrastructure and make it difficult for anyone to harm the bridge structure or the people using the bridge. The challenge is to balance what is financially and realistically feasible while still allowing the bridge to function without impeding traffic flow. For instance,

video surveillance systems detect if someone is spending too much time—or time on target—in a particular area.”

Next level: minimizing the tsunami

“As the Ambassador Bridge is the No. 1 commercial crossing in the world, our ability to facilitate trade speaks for itself,” says McMahon of Canadian Transit Company. “We handled about 3.5 million trucks (inbound and outbound) last year.”

McMahon says his company, along with U.S. proponents, endorses reverse inspections. This means U.S. and Canadian Customs would flip sides on the bridge. “We believe every truck should be inspected prior to—and not after—entering the facility and crossing the bridge. We compare it to getting on an airplane and having your luggage checked after you get off the plane. It makes no sense.”

Although legislation in the U.S. supports reverse inspections, and President Bush has signed the legislation, Canadians have yet to come onboard. “All infrastructure, whether bridges or tunnels, will not get a fuller level of security and protection until trucks are inspected (and VACIS’d) prior to crossing the bridges or entering the tunnels,” states McMahon. “Reverse inspections provide a higher layer of security than what’s available today to protect our valuable infrastructures.”

The Ambassador Bridge stands ready to conduct a pilot program on reverse customs inspections. “We can get it going fairly quickly once we get the word, but

the holdup at this time is on the Canadian side,” states McMahon.

Meanwhile, CBP and bridge managers report security advances are ongoing. One program on the horizon is the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), expected to go into effect January 2008. Currently, Customs personnel must examine about 8,000 different accepted documents allowing entry into the U.S. WHTI will reduce that number to five documents, including a valid passport and alternative documents. “Officers can shave off four or five seconds for each inspection, and those five seconds add up very significantly,” says CBP’s Smith in Detroit.

But James Liddy isn’t persuaded. To protect physical infrastructure, he advocates back-up plans. “As we plan our infrastructure improvements, we should focus on redundancies. If we’re going to build new bridges, we might want to have bridges exclusively for trade, with more security and screening measures built in than bridges for passengers.”

Improving our infrastructure over the next decade or two requires a different mindset. “In this era of terrorism, asymmetrical warfare, and fourth-generation warfare, it makes sense—from both security and safety standpoints—to separate commerce from people,” Liddy advises. **WT**

April Terreri writes about security and the global supply chain for national publications.

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