



SAN YSIDRO BORDER FACILITY GETTING A MAJOR OVERHAUL

\$577 million expansion awaits world's busiest land crossing

BORDER • Northbound access will be widened from 24 lanes to 34 lanes with 64 inspection booths; pedestrian facility will have 20 inspection stations

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Long lines and lengthy waits have become an inescapable burden for tens of thousands of cross-border commuters at the San Ysidro Port of Entry.

Proposing to dramatically decrease crossing times for both vehicles and pedestrians, authorities Thursday formally launched a \$577 million expansion and modernization of the world's busiest land-border crossing.

Wait times during peak hours can currently stretch to more than two hours, and a 2009 study by the U.S. General Services Administration showed that if nothing is done, those waits could stretch to 10 hours by 2030.

Planned for completion by 2016, the new facility would reduce maximum waits to 30 minutes, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Added lanes, more booths and high-tech inspections are at the heart of the overhaul. It is the largest and costliest infrastructure project the U.S. government has ever undertaken along its land border.

"The need for a new facility is clear,

and the stakes are high," said Martha Johnson, administrator of the GSA, speaking at the port during an outdoor ceremony that drew authorities from the United States and Mexico. Over the next two decades, she said, traffic through the San Ysidro port is expected to increase by as much as 90 percent.

Growing delays have stifled myriad transactions on both sides of the border. San Diego's supermarkets, shops and restaurants have lost large amounts of business from Mexican customers. Baja California's hotels, restaurants and other tourist amenities have suffered a devastating drop in U.S. clientele in recent years, partly as a result of tighter security measures adopted following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The San Diego Association of Governments' latest

estimate, from 2007, calculates that the congestion at California's border with Mexico costs the region close to \$7.2 billion and more than 62,000 jobs annually.

"For most people who don't go back and forth across the border, it's just out of sight, out of mind," said Christina Luhn, director of the Mega-Region Initiative at the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corp. "They don't understand what a two- or three-hour wait can mean."

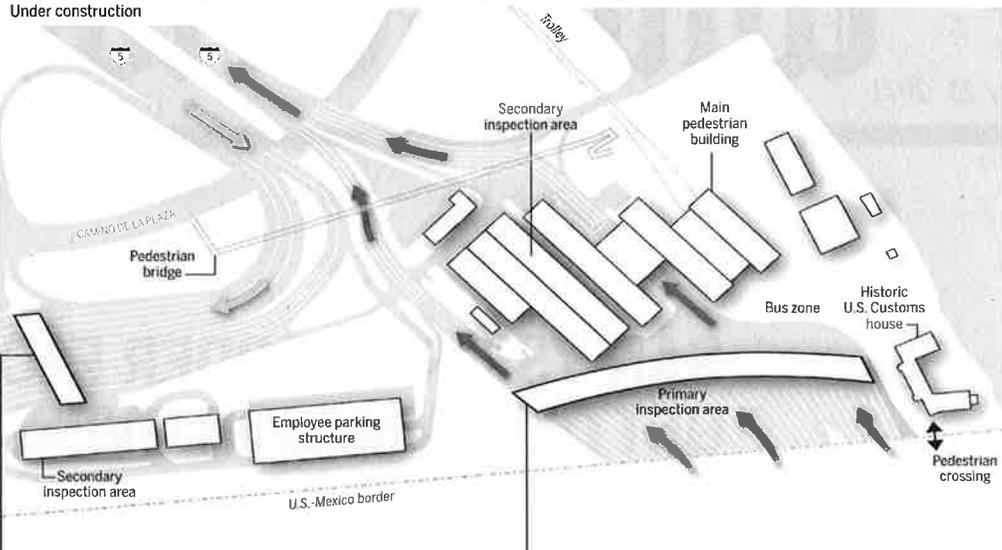
San Ysidro's current facility has long been outdated. When it opened in the mid-1970s, the country was recovering from the Watergate scandal, disco was all the rage and terrorism wasn't a domestic concern.

"It's a changed society and buildings have to change with it," said Ramon



Planned reconfiguration of San Ysidro port of entry

Under construction



U.S. primary inspection area, southbound



U.S. primary inspection area, northbound



Maximum wait time during peak hours
 Over 2 hours
 Less than 30 minutes
 Projected

Maximum planned lane and booth configurations represented above.

Sources: U.S. Customs and Border Protection; U.S. General Services Administration; SanGIS

AARON STECKELBERG • U-T

Riesgo, land port of entry adviser for the GSA, which is overseeing the construction of the new port.

The new facility is being called the "port of the future." While San Ysidro has 24 northbound lanes, including six with two inspection booths each, the rebuilt facility will include 34 northbound lanes with 64 inspection booths. Expanded pedestrian facilities will include a shaded path and 20 inspection stations.

To handle beefed-up inspections southbound, six lanes are being added on the U.S. side of the border.

The design, by Seattle-based Miller Hull Partnership, includes a translucent roof structure that shields cars and officers from rain and sun. The project is being planned to conserve energy and water, and the aim is to achieve LEED Plat-

Top U.S. land ports of entry, based on number of passengers and pedestrians

Despite handling more traffic than any other port of entry, San Ysidro does not have the most processing lanes

Rank/Port	2009	2008	Hours	Commercial lanes	Vehicle lanes	Pedestrian lanes
1. San Ysidro	30,329,459	34,781,403	24/7	—	24*	14
2. El Paso, Texas	28,227,677	32,376,571	24/7	15	37	21
3. Laredo, Texas	19,846,778	21,475,239	24/7**	17	20	5
4. Hidalgo, Texas	15,261,895	16,323,520	24/7**	6	23	5
5. Brownsville, Texas	14,591,927	16,139,862	24/7**	8	17	5
6. Buffalo/Niagara Falls, N.Y.	14,011,229	16,049,812	24/7**	11	36	—
7. Calexico West	12,990,567	14,707,530	24/7	—	12	6
8. Nogales, Ariz.	12,759,443	16,246,899	24/7**	4	12	6
9. Otay Mesa	10,929,192	11,085,832	24/7**	10	13	6
10. Detroit	9,027,340	11,152,266	24/7	15	30	—
11. Eagle Pass, Texas	8,288,476	8,963,305	24/7**	2	11	—
12. Calexico East	6,320,603	7,713,324	3a-12a	3	9	4

* Port has 30 inspection booths. ** Ports with several entry points, including some that close for part of the day.
 Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection

inum certification, a recognition for environmentally friendly structures.

Another environmental benefit being cited is improved air quality at the crossing, due to the decreased wait times and shorter lines.

The new port "will enable us to better manage traffic

in many, many ways," said Thomas Winkowski, assistant commissioner for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the agency that operates the port of entry. The changes will allow for improved use of technology, greater flexibility in opening and closing lanes, and the expansion of trusted

traveler programs where prescreened crossers are processed more quickly.

U.S. authorities have worked closely with Mexico in designing the project. The Mexican government is planning changes south of the border costing more than \$53 million, including expanding the number of

lanes from six to 20, said Juan José Erazo, who directs border crossing infrastructure projects for Mexico's Communications and Transportation Secretariat.

Mexico is also building bridges and access roads to the new crossing, as well as an intermodal facility that would allow San Diego Trolley passengers to connect directly to a rapid transit bus system being planned on the Mexican side.

While many community groups seem hopeful the expansion project will achieve its aims, not everyone is convinced that infrastructure is the only answer.

"It comes down to efficiency of inspections," said Jason Wells, executive director of the San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce and member of a coalition fighting to improve security and border-crossing times while providing support for local businesses.

"We could spend \$600 million and have a new port of entry, but if you have agents in primary inspec-

tion lanes getting on their knees tapping on tires and opening trunks, we could still have a two-, three-hour wait time," he said.

The U.S. modernization project is being conducted in three phases. Only the first phase, totaling nearly \$293 million, has been funded. It includes a pedestrian bridge scheduled for opening next month, an expansion of the northbound inspection facilities, and a southbound pedestrian crossing. The second phase involves improvements and construction of pedestrian processing facilities. The third phase entails new southbound lanes.

At Thursday's ceremony, U.S. Rep. Bob Filner, D-San Diego, said the fight to fund the second and third phases continues in Congress. Last week, the House voted to cut \$1.5 billion from the GSA budget. "We've got to make sure those cuts don't stay," he said. "Because they threaten the economic viability that we're celebrating today."