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A Map of Bilateral Cross-Border Mechanisms and initiatives

The U.S. - Mexico border region links citizens of our two countries in a complex and vibrant network of trade, cultural, social and institutional relationships. Our common border is one of the most dynamic international boundaries in the world, demarcating a region of high population growth and economic expansion, most dramatically in recent years under NAFTA. More than 12 million Mexicans and Americans now live in the counties and municipios that stretch from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. Almost 250 million people crossed legally into the U.S. from Mexico via land ports of entry in FY 2006.

A wide variety of formal and informal mechanisms have developed in recent years to manage border issues. Mexican and American officials at the local, state and federal levels meet on an almost daily basis to work out common approaches to building the border infrastructure necessary to sustaining the growth in trade and commerce along the border, and jointly solve problems related to illegal migration, drug smuggling, environmental degradation and its impact on the health and well being of border citizens.

Presidents Bush and Fox share a commitment to expanding U.S. Mexican cooperation along the border. Meeting in February 2001 in Mexico, they pledged to "build an authentic partnership for prosperity and work for the economic and social development of our border communities." ([See](#)

[Full Text of Bush-Fox Communiqué](#)

Cooperation Along La Linea

The rapid increase in U.S. -Mexico trade presents challenges as well as opportunities in the border region. Border facilities, including road, bridge, rail crossings and the customs and immigration offices charged with monitoring the traffic they carry, are straining under the load of dramatically increased border activity. Binational cooperation is essential and is maintained through regular contacts between Customs and Immigration officials of both countries, a Joint Working Committee on transportation infrastructure and annual meetings of the Binational Group on Bridges and Border Crossings.

In recent years, new bridges across the Rio Grande/Bravo have been constructed at four locations. Mexican and U.S. share costs for the construction of these crossing points. The newest bridge was opened in 2000 and links the two Laredos. It will allow close to three million commercial trucks to cross the border annually, relying on an electronic toll collection system to expedite transit. New ports of entry have been established along the California/Baja-California border and frequent cross-border commuters travel time reduced considerably through the implementation of automated commuter ([SENTRI](#)) lanes at the busiest crossing points. New multi-lane ports of entries near San Diego are also under consideration by both countries. Presidents Bush and Fox called for the creation of a new high level working group under the auspices of the U.S. - Mexico Binational Commission (see below) to identify specific steps each country can take to improve the efficiency of border operations.

Border Liaison Mechanisms

Developed in recent years to address cross-border issues at the local level, Border Liaison Mechanisms (BLM's), operate in each of the ten "sister city pairs" along the border. Chaired by Mexican and U.S. Consuls Generals, BLM meetings draw in officials from federal, state and local agencies. The business community and non-governmental sector often participate as well. BLM's foster a web of personal relationships among local officials, which address short-term crises and help resolve long-term issues. BLMs have stepped in to help defuse tension related to illegal migration and the strain it places on border governments and citizens. Partly as result of ideas floated in BLM - led discussions, federal officials in both countries have expanded programs to make the border region safer for migrants, residents and the officials responsible for protecting them.

Migration

Illegal migration, organized alien smuggling and their effects on border society have received priority attention of the new Bush and Fox administrations. In February 2001, the two leaders announced the formation of a high level joint working group on migration and labor issues at their meeting in Mexico. The group will be headed by the Secretary of State and his Mexican counterpart and will search for common approaches to constructively address migration and labor issues.

The working group will build on the positive steps taken in recent years to improve border security while protecting

migrants. Mexico has doubled its staffing of the National Migration Institute's "Beta Groups" in the most hazardous areas along the border and provided them with improved surveillance search and rescue equipment. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service likewise deployed additional personnel and resources to such areas on the U.S. side of the border. Jointly, U.S. and Mexican authorities have instituted binational training programs in search and rescue as well as training in swift water rescue. Public information campaigns, stressing the dangers of illegal crossings have been drawn up and implemented from the border area to deep into southern Mexico and Central America. [For additional information.](#)

Environmental Cooperation

Like illegal migration, the problem of environmental degradation demands close bilateral cooperation. Rapid growth and industrialization in the border region have been accompanied by serious pollution of water, air and soil. Quality of life in transboundary urban zones has suffered and the region's ability to sustain future growth placed in doubt.

The tradition of cross-border cooperation in environmental management goes back more than fifty years and in recent decades has seen a proliferation of binational institutions

International Boundary and Water Commission

The first binational environmental institution was the [International Boundary and Water Commission](#), established by the 1944 Water Treaty. Responsible for demarcating territorial limits and water allocations, it has also been extensively involved in the planning and development of wastewater treatment plants. Most recently, the IBWC was responsible for the construction of a wastewater treatment plant in San Diego to treat sewage originating in Tijuana. The plant was opened in 1999 and treats up to 25 million gallons daily. The Commission has begun negotiations toward constructing a secondary treatment facility in Tijuana.

The 1983 La Paz Agreement/Border XXI

Signed by Presidents Ronald Reagan and Miguel de la Madrid in 1983, this breakthrough agreement established a framework for cooperation on environmental problems that has been carried forward by subsequent presidential administrations in Mexico and the U.S. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (formerly SEMARNAP, now SEMARNAT) are jointly charged with searching for and implementing solutions to problems related to air, water and land pollution along the border. The commitment made in La Paz has led to two multi-year initiatives, most recently the ambitious [Border XXI Program](#). This effort brings together virtually all U.S. and Mexican Federal, state and local entities that are responsible for environmental and natural resource management in the border region. It places particular emphasis on public inputs, decentralization of environmental management and improved communication and cooperation among officials at all levels.

A particular innovation was the effort to draw tribal authorities, representing indigenous peoples whose lands straddle the border, into the environmental decision-making process.

Nearing the end of its five-year term, Border XXI has fostered an improved dialogue among governments and citizens. Specific accomplishments during the five-year period have

been:

--Development of information sharing mechanisms on potential siting of hazardous or radioactive waste disposal facilities,

--Better tracking of hazardous wastes returned to U.S. from plants in Mexico,

--Mechanisms to allow cross-border responses to hazardous waste incidents,

--Establishment of the Paso del Norte Joint Air Quality Advisory Committee to remedy air pollution related problems in the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez Dona-Ana County air basin,

--Development of air pollution monitoring networks in Tijuana, Mexicali and Ciudad Juarez.

Given the commitment made by both governments at the highest level to a comprehensive approach to border cooperation in the environment, a successor to Border XXI will likely continue its efforts. Planning for a follow-on program is underway.

Good Neighbor Environmental Board

The [GNEB](#) was created by the enterprise for the Americas Act of 1992 to advise Congress and the president on environmental matters and related infrastructure needs within states along the border with Mexico. Representation on the board is broad, including all U.S. border state environment and health agencies as well as the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The Board functions as a clearing-house for information, analysis and innovation on border environment, health and infrastructure issues. One of its chief roles is to provide Mexican agencies with environmental technologies and funding alternatives for border environmental projects. The Board works closely with the Mexican National Council for Sustainable Development.

Environmental Cooperation under NAFTA

NAFTA is the first trade agreement that contains provisions to deal with environmental issues related to trade relations. [The North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation](#), a NAFTA side agreement established the Commission for Environmental Cooperation to address regional environmental concern, help prevent trade and environmental conflicts and enhance environmental enforcement mechanisms. A Secretariat, located in Montreal, implements the annual work program under the direction of a Joint Public Advisory Committee which is composed of fifteen citizens, five from each of the three countries.

Two additional NAFTA related institutions were established in 1993 under an agreement between the U.S. and Mexico. [The Border Environmental Cooperation Commission](#) is a binational organization supporting local communities in developing and implementing environmental infrastructure projects related to water treatment and wastewater and solid waste management. BECC identifies, assists and certifies projects for financing consideration from the [North American Development Bank](#) (NADBank) and other sources.

The NADBank was established to provide loans and loan guarantees to projects certified by the BECC. It is capitalized by

funds from both the U.S. and Mexican governments and by charter must make its loans at market rates. Close to \$20 million has been allocated by the BECC to aid in the development of environmental infrastructure projects in 98 communities in Mexico and the U.S. NADBank has authorized \$250 million for 31 environmental projects along the border.

In November 2000, the NADBank Board approved a resolution allowing the Bank to finance new types of BECC-certified environmental infrastructure projects within the current charter. While water, wastewater and solid waste will continue to be priorities, this new flexibility to consider additional sectors and financing mechanisms will greatly enhance the Bank's positive impact along the border. The Bank and the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) are working together to identify which new environmental infrastructure sectors to pursue in the near term.

The U.S. Mexico Binational Commission Since 1981, a Mexico-U.S. Binational Commission has provided stewardship over the broad array of bilateral issues. The BNC draws cabinet-level officials and other agency chiefs into intensive one-or-two-day discussions on an annual basis. It brings into high relief unresolved issues dividing the two countries and provides opportunities to discuss remedies. BNC meetings frequently lead to breakthrough agreements and occasion brainstorming which lead to innovative programs designed to manage affairs in a broad range of border issues.

The BNC currently has 13 working groups and subgroups, which reflect the political, economic, law enforcement, social and environmental issues forming the fabric of U.S. Mexico relations.

Narcotics Trafficking Control The U.S. Mexico border provides a long, open access route for the majority of illegal drugs that enter the United States. Both governments recognize the threat to the health of their citizens and the social fabric of their countries that this illegal trade represents and are acting aggressively and concertedly to deal with it. At their February 2001 meeting in Mexico, President's Bush and Fox resolved to strengthen law enforcement strategies and institutions as well as develop closer cooperation to reduce demand for illegal drugs and eliminate trafficking organizations.

Mexico and the United States continue to work actively on a variety of counter-narcotics fronts. A High Level Contact Group meets at least twice annually to supervise the implementation of the Bilateral Drug Strategy. A Plenary Group of Senior Law Enforcement Officials conducts ongoing discussions.

The U.S. carries out more money laundering investigations with Mexico than any other country. Cooperation between the Mexican Navy, U.S. Coast Guard and Mexican Navy continues to result in multi-ton seizures of illegal narcotics. In 2000 an Interdiction Working Group was established to exchange drug interdiction information that has improved communications and cooperation.

The U.S. and Mexico have made considerable progress in cooperative demand reduction efforts. Demand reduction conferences have taken place annually since 1998. USG funded projects in Mexico City help university aged students and street

children avoid drug addiction through education and training. At his meeting with President Fox in Mexico, President Bush pledged to step up U.S. efforts to curb demand among Americans.

Exchanges between U.S. and Mexican legal professionals draw hundreds of prosecutors and judges together for conferences and seminars yearly, and joint law enforcement operations take place each year. Law enforcement cooperation at the operational level is expanding each year as U.S. and Mexican officials take part in joint investigatory and interdiction efforts. In January 2001, Mexico's Supreme Court of Justice ruled that the extradition of Mexican nationals is not prohibited by the Mexican constitution. This ruling will allow the Mexican government added legal authority to send drug fugitives to the U.S.

At their meeting in Mexico, Presidents Bush and Fox resolved to strengthen their respective law enforcement strategies and institutions, as well as develop closer and more trusting bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Education and Culture

Education Cooperation between the two governments was formalized with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Education in 1990. The MOU fosters dialogue on education and facilitates links between educators, policy makers and researchers in both countries. Migrant education receives added attention and through contacts between the Secretariat of Education and U.S. Department of Education, joint efforts are undertaken to promote teacher training in this special area, carry out textbook distribution and maintain proper academic records for migrant families traveling frequently between countries.

Through the [Fulbright](#) program, an exchange program for border area scholars is conducted which offers grants for three to nine month teaching and research opportunities for Mexican and American academics. Grantees can commute across the border daily to take advantage of this program. A private/public sector program, the U.S. - Mexico Fund for Culture, supports cultural exchange and collaboration between the two countries. Headquartered in Mexico City the fund underwrites projects that reflect the artistic and cultural diversity of Mexico and the United States. Border projects figure prominently in the list of grants.

Border Cooperation at the State Level Reflecting the complexity of the relationship at every level, governors from the ten border states have met annually at the [Border Governors' Conference](#) since 1980 to discuss an ambitious agenda which includes: Agriculture, Border Crossings, Economic Development, Education, Environment, Health and Tourism. Working tables are established at each annual meeting to give priority attention throughout the year to key issues. The 2001 conference will be hosted by the state of Tamaulipas.

Jointly and individually, states have taken the initiative in a variety of issue areas. Border states frequently discuss migration issues and work out common approaches to take with regards to their national governments. In agriculture, the ten states formed a committee and signed a pact in which they agreed to work toward strengthening sanitary practices, pest prevention and food safety enforcement. Border States have

also explored ways to attract industries to both sides of the border, from manufacturing and health services to tourism.

There has been more than a decade of close consultation and coordination on environmental matters among border states. Some examples of such coordination are found in:
--A Chihuahua-New Mexico-Texas Tri-State Strategic Environmental Plan, hich takes a regional approach to environmental management.

--Joint Recycling Campaigns undertaken in Texas/Mexican border communities

--Joint monitoring of waste treatment facilities and air monitoring along the Sonora-Arizona border.

In March 2001, California and Mexico signed sweeping environmental agreements to tackle joint pollution problems. The two will cooperate in developing an automobile emission measurement and control system for Tijuana and extend current wastewater management efforts in Tijuana to the cities of Tecate and Mexicali.

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