



Binational Alliance Releases Findings of First Comprehensive Binational Border Study

By WKBW News



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Buffalo, N.Y. (WKBW release) -- On Wednesday at Buffalo's NYS Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics & Life Sciences, the Binational Alliance released the long-awaited findings of the first comprehensive Niagara border study addressing the changes that have taken place at this border over the past ten years and the impacts on regional residents, businesses, and visitors.

Following preliminary tourism and traveler research completed by the Binational Alliance in 2009 after the full implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, the Alliance retained Deloitte & Touche LLP in 2010 to assist in this strategic study. Partners in this initiative include Erie County Industrial Development Agency, Niagara Region, Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, Buffalo & Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, Ontario Motor Coach Association and NITTEC (a consortium of Customs, Bridge, Transportation, Security and Community partners along the Niagara River corridor).

“Our objective was to get an accurate assessment of the current situation at our Niagara border crossings in order to deal with the many myths that have been created about the challenges of cross-border travel through this region over the past decade” said Arlene White, Executive Director of the Binational Alliance. “The study more than fulfilled that objective by confirming there are far fewer delays at the border crossings than the public currently perceives, and identifying the changes, new processes and best practices developed, and providing specific recommendations for additional improvements that are essential to the economic growth and prosperity of our binational Region.”

Deloitte undertook a comprehensive study that involved a review of all key Canada-U.S. border crossing, trade and tourism reports released over the past decade, interviews with key stakeholders from both sides of the

Niagara border and covering all industry sectors including government agencies and the bridge commissions, and the development of four case studies focusing on economic impacts, border challenges and new practices in these sectors: cross-border education, trucking and transportation, the motor coach industry and sport tourism (2011 World Junior Hockey Tournament in Buffalo).

Highlights of the key findings shared with the audience included:

- Confirmation that Niagara is the highest total volume border crossing along the Northern Border and a critical trade pipeline for North America.
- 90% of the time there are no Niagara border-crossing delays, and the remaining 10% can be managed with better cross-sectoral communications, advanced planning, staffing and traffic management.
- WHTI was only one of several factors impacting the Niagara border-crossing over the past 10 years.
- Leisure travel into Niagara has been impacted by a lack of marketing and the development of competitive offerings over the past decade.
- Significant physical and technological infrastructure improvements have been made at all Niagara bridge crossings but not always in a jointly coordinated manner between U.S. and Canadian agencies involved.
- Various industry sectors have incurred additional costs related to these changes and have developed new processes, staff specialists, and use of a 24 hour business clock to deal with the requirements.

Economic impacts cited from the case studies included:

- Motor coaches carry approximately 860 million passengers per year in Canada and the U.S., and each bus generates between \$7,000 and \$13,000 per day in economic activity to communities visited.
- The average Canadian border commuter student spends \$22,000 to \$32,000 annually for study programs – in one school alone that amounts to \$19.2 million annually.
- Border crossing inefficiencies cost \$290 million to Canadian trucking industry and \$9 billion to U.S. trucking industry (2007 Transport Canada Study).

According to Maryann Stein, Director of International Programs at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency in Buffalo NY, “Understanding what is occurring at our border crossings is crucial for those involved in binational trade. In 2012, the ECIDA will launch two new programs focusing on selling our local products into Canada and informing our companies as to how to expedite the border crossing process will be a key component of our assistance.”

The 15 study recommendations focused on four specific areas of improvements related to Communications, Infrastructure, Process and Policy. Most importantly it was noted that no one organization is responsible for the border improvements, but that all border community stakeholders and users – Bridge Commissions, CBP, CBSA, Business, Tourism, Political, Community Leaders and the traveling public - must be involved in the solutions identified. Summary comments reinforce the fact that our borders have changed permanently, the global economy is a reality, and that cross-border regions like Niagara must recognize the importance of our border crossings and utilize them, along with new binational business partnerships, in order to attain and maintain global competitiveness.