



Oppose indefinite restrictions on so-called “non-essential” cross-border travel harming border communities, U.S. citizens

Border Trade Alliance opposes future extension of travel restrictions, urges DHS to adopt transparent criteria for reopening in conjunction with border stakeholders

Background

Customs and Border Protection in March implemented a series of restrictions at the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico to dramatically limit entry into the U.S. only to those travelers making what CBP determined to be essential trips. Non-essential travel includes travel that is considered tourism or recreational in nature, while essential travel includes trips for business, supply chain continuity, and health care.

The restrictions at both borders have been extended multiple times. The current restrictions are set to expire September 21, 2020, but based on previous extensions, border stakeholders are anticipating another extension, possibly through the end of the calendar year.

Travel restrictions harming businesses, local governments & communities

Cross-border trips for shopping or leisure have ceased. The corresponding dramatic drop in private vehicle and pedestrian crossings has severely damaged the businesses that depend on consumers from Mexico or Canada and the local governments whose budgets depend on the sales tax revenues generated by those consumers. For these communities, especially along the U.S.-Mexico border, such crossings are essential to the livelihoods of thousands and to municipalities' ability to continue to deliver core government services.

Land border crossers pose no unique public health threat

There is no indication that an entry from Canada or Mexico into the U.S. via a port of entry poses any unique public health threat. In fact, flying into airports in border communities from points of origin in Canada or Mexico comes with few special protocols beyond those already adopted nationwide regardless of whether the visit is for business or pleasure. Whether a traveler can enter the same community by a land port of entry, however, is determined not only by the usual immigration and customs controls, but also by the nature of the visit.

No indication of public health criteria relied on by DHS, request path to reopening

The Department of Homeland Security has not communicated to border stakeholders the public health criteria it is relying on to make its decisions, nor has it indicated what benchmarks must be achieved before so-called non-essential travel can resume. As a result, border businesses and governments are treated as mere bystanders in determining their economic fate and are left to worry and wonder what new economic challenge each 30-day-or-longer extension of restrictions will bring.

On brink of collapse, border public and private sector needs improved communication with DHS, halt to arbitrary restriction extensions

Border communities are suffering during this indefinite halt to cross-border travel. Businesses are closing, governments are struggling. Our members in local governments and private sector stakeholders request to be part of the solution that will allow cross-border travel to resume safely. Our economic future depends on it. We are ready and willing partners in what we hope will result in the development of a solution that will protect and prioritize the public's health while staving off total economic collapse.

To that end, we call on DHS:

- To share with border stakeholders the public health criteria it is relying on in making its determinations in whether to extend border travel restrictions;
- Not to issue another extension of restrictions without publicly communicating what public health benchmarks must be achieved to allow for the beginning of a safe and responsible reopening; and
- To remove new protocols at some ports of entry announced in August that have resulted in significant delays at land border ports of entry due to reduced lane capacity during non-peak travel times.

We live and work in these communities. We urge the Department to work with local governments and the private sector to communicate the criteria and establish benchmarks that will set us on the path to a safe and responsible reopening in the very near future clearly and transparently.