

Border Trade Alliance

2026

Policy Agenda



BTA | Border
Trade
Alliance

Bolstering Trade | Strengthening Trade Relations | Lead Advocate Promoting Efficient and Safe Borders

Working Together. We Win.

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to present the Border Trade Alliance's 2026 Policy Agenda, a comprehensive reflection of our organization's priorities at a pivotal moment for North American trade. As the BTA marks its 40th year since its founding in 1986, the United States, Mexico, and Canada prepare for the first formal review of the USMCA, and policymakers at all levels confront new pressures on supply chains, infrastructure, and border management. The work of the BTA has never been more essential.

This agenda underscores our shared commitment to policies that strengthen the competitiveness of the North American region. Our committees have identified practical, forward-looking solutions to improve port of entry operations, modernize customs and trade processes, enhance cross-border transportation networks, and support the agriculture and manufacturing sectors that power our economies. We continue to champion a secure, efficient, and well-resourced border that facilitates legitimate trade and travel while upholding the highest standards of safety and integrity.

We are especially proud that this year's agenda reflects deep engagement from our membership across all three countries. The recommendations contained here are shaped by firsthand experience and informed by the realities faced daily by carriers, producers, manufacturers, customs brokers, local governments, and port users throughout the border region. That diversity of expertise remains the BTA's greatest strength.

From the USMCA review process to ongoing efforts to modernize ports of entry, streamline permitting, expand trusted-trader programs, and invest in the environmental and technological infrastructure that a 21st-century border demands, the year ahead will bring both opportunities and challenges. The BTA will continue to be a constructive partner at all levels of government as we work together to ensure that North America remains the world's most dynamic and resilient trade bloc.

Thank you for your continued leadership, participation, and support. We look forward to working alongside you in 2026 to advance the policies and partnerships that keep our region moving forward.

Sincerely,



Pete Sepulveda, Jr.
Chairman

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read "P. Sepulveda".

Britton Mullen
President

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read "Britton Mullen".A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read "Britton Mullen".



Security and Trade Committee



Jim Smith,
Committee Chairman
AO Smith Corp.
Ashland City, Tennessee

2026 GOALS

Supporting inspection policies and procedures that promote economic growth and security

Congressional participation in and oversight of tariff policy, including Sec. 232 tariffs, Sec. 301, and IEEPA

The BTA believes that:

- Tariff-free trade in North America as envisioned under the USMCA and its precursor NAFTA should be preserved, and policies that would undermine USMCA should be opposed.
- Congress should be treated as an equal partner with the executive branch in policy surrounding tariffs, especially in the establishment of new tariffs.
- Congress should exercise robust oversight in determining tariffs' effect on particular industries and the overall economy.
- Invoking Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 to impose tariffs for national security purposes should be done so only in rare cases where the security concern is apparent and clearly defined.
- The use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose tariffs or trade restrictions should be limited to genuine emergencies, and any such actions should be subject to prompt congressional review and transparency requirements.

Ensuring ports of entry are properly resourced to process trade and travel without interruption

BTA strongly urges the Department of Homeland Security to prepare ports of entry for sporadic but dramatic increases in migrants seeking asylum in the U.S. This includes:

- Taking all practicable steps to ensure that CBP Officers are not redeployed away from ports of entry to support Border Patrol, especially for administrative functions;
- Not using TDY assignments for CBP Officers to serve other agencies away from their regularly assigned ports of entry.

The BTA believes congressional appropriators should fund DHS and the agencies at U.S. ports of entry at levels commensurate with current and projected trade and travel volumes.

Innovative trade processing solutions

Customs modernization legislation

The BTA supports legislation to modernize CBP trade practices. Any legislation should minimize negative impact on importers, including new data requests that risk slowing trade and commerce.

- We believe a customs modernization legislative package should:
- Establish a true 1USG/Single window clearance and admissibility process.
- Establish reasonable guidelines for additional data requests.
- Develop PGA CTPAT programs with benefits.

- Create additional benefits for CTPAT partners.
- Establish pre-departure, pre-arrival release and/or resolution; minimize redundant data requirements for formal entries and for de minimis informal entries.
- Establish cargo pre-clearance process at foreign ports of departure and authorize preclearance of goods without the need to negotiate an international agreement or station CBP officers abroad.
- Develop a process that allows release of merchandise unless recalled due to imminent threat and creating modification to allow for penalty mitigation when redelivery is not possible.
- Treat manifest data of all transportation modes as private and confidential business information
- Require CBP to provide notification of data breaches to impacted parties.

Unified Cargo Processing

BTA supports the deployment of the Unified Cargo Processing model, whereby U.S. customs personnel and their cross-border counterparts conduct inspections side by side on U.S. soil. UCP:

- Reduces the likelihood that a truck could be inspected on multiple occasions before its release into U.S. commerce.
- Increases efficiency of the primary inspection lanes.
- Reduces wait times overall.
- Should become the default inspection model, as codified in USMCA.
- Should be expanded to the rail environment.

Technological pre-inspection

The BTA supports the continued rollout of pre-inspection processes at the northern and southern borders. Thanks to Non-Intrusive Inspection technology, images can be conveyed electronically to technicians who can quickly assess whether a shipment can proceed following the primary inspection, or whether it should be referred to secondary inspection. Final decision-making authority should rest with the CBP officer.

Trade-friendly public-private partnerships

The BTA supports:

- Trade-friendly public-private partnerships between the federal government and border stakeholders to increase staffing resources and improve aging infrastructure.
- Reimbursable fee agreements along the border to better align staffing levels with trade flows.

The BTA believes:

- P3s should not result in increased bridge tolls or new fees for industry. Toll-free bridges should remain free.
- Trade fees should go to specific trade facilitation purposes, not to the general fund.

Supply chain security and anti-corruption practices

The BTA supports efforts to strengthen supply chain security across North America through enhanced cross-border collaboration among customs, law enforcement, and private industry. Secure and transparent supply chains deter criminal enterprises, prevent the diversion of goods, and protect legitimate commerce. The BTA urges policymakers to ensure that law enforcement agency policies enhance security and do not impose unnecessary costs or delays that would undermine the rule of law or the competitiveness of North American trade.

Promoting Cross-Border Travel

Ensuring entry-exit system does not interrupt cross-border travel and trade

The BTA will monitor the Department of Homeland Security's deployment of a biometric entry-exit system to ensure that implementation at the land borders enhances security without impeding lawful trade and travel flows. BTA supports technological modernization that improves efficiency and identity verification but will advocate for operational practices that maintain the fluid movement of people and goods essential to North American commerce.

Ensuring strong diplomatic ties

Continued strong diplomatic ties between the U.S. and its border neighbors

The maintenance of fully staffed and resourced U.S. embassies and consulates in each country is necessary as countries work to align definitions of critical industries, public health protocols, and more.

Agribusiness Subcommittee



Dante Galeazzi,
Committee Chairman
Texas International Produce Association
Mission, Texas



2026 GOALS

Maintaining tariff- and duty-free cross-border agricultural trade

The flow of tariff-free fresh produce between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada supports jobs and investment on both sides of the border and ensures American consumers have year-round access to affordable, high-quality food.

Trade in a post-Tomato Suspension Agreement environment

The termination of the 2019 Tomato Suspension Agreement (TSA) has created uncertainty across the supply chain and tomato marketplace. The absence of a clear framework for minimum export pricing and trade discipline has led to disruptions in longstanding business relationships and introduced volatility that discourages investment and growth across the border region.

The BTA urges policymakers to recognize that abrupt changes to established cross-border trading arrangements reverberate far beyond a single commodity.

USMCA review and future trade negotiations

The BTA encourages the U.S. administration and its counterparts to pursue solutions that restore certainty to the tomato trade and to reaffirm the principle that regional agricultural markets function best when grounded in transparency, predictability, and mutual benefit.

Properly resourced ports of entry

Work with administration and congressional appropriators to ensure federal personnel levels at ports of entry are commensurate with trade volumes

Agencies charged with agricultural inspections and processing must be properly resourced. This includes:

- CBP Agriculture Specialists and technicians. CBP should assess whether expanding Specialists' release authority would improve efficiency at the ports.
- USDA entomologists, who should be on-site at every port with high volumes of agriculture imports.
- FDA investigators, who should have access to the testing resources that promote expeditious results necessary for keeping perishable commodities moving through commerce.

All relevant agencies across government should work together to ensure the personnel levels at ports of entry do not delay trade.

Strengthening sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) cooperation

Effective sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) systems are essential not only to safeguard domestic industries but also to maintain the flow of trade in agricultural goods.

The BTA urges USMCA member countries to:

- Strengthen SPS coordination through binational and trilateral working groups focused on early detection, rapid response, and transparent communication.
- Streamline regulatory processes to remove barriers, especially those that delay actions and measures identified as critical in addressing SPS emergencies.

Ensure consistent funding and capacity for SPS programs, particularly those monitoring pests and diseases such as the New World Screwworm that have the potential to spread rapidly across borders.

A transparent enforcement regime

CBP's strategy for enforcing forced labor standards, environmental regulations, and other areas affecting trade in North America should be communicated to trade stakeholders as transparently as possible, and to be implemented fairly and equitably at all POEs.

Cross-border cooperation and harmonization

Resist growth of technical barriers to trade, tariffs, and quotas

To ensure USMCA achieves its full economic potential, partner countries must adhere to both the letter and spirit of the agreement, resisting attempts to establish non-tariff barriers to free trade. That includes:

- Ensuring phytosanitary and quality inspections rely on scientifically based standards and not political pressures; and
- Consistently applying standards from port to port
- Ensuring inspections and oversight are driven by risk-based science

BTA strongly opposes any perceived protectionist actions that could spark retaliatory tariffs by our trade partners, which would increase costs, harm U.S. consumers, sacrifice jobs, and undermine USMCA's promise.

Partner countries, affected industries, and U.S. and foreign government agencies should rely on USMCA's dispute resolution mechanism and avoid unilateral protectionist actions that run counter to the agreement.

Harmonization of standards where possible

Trade partners should look for areas to align standards. Potential areas include pesticide residue standards, tariff codes, phytosanitary requirements and procedures, quality and SPS inspections, organic certification programs, and paperwork.

Advocate for reasonable packaging regulations

As Canada develops further P2 regulations, such as requiring that certain plastic packaging contain at least 50 percent recycled content or zero-waste for primary and secondary food packaging, the BTA will advocate for the safeguarding of unique packaging requirements of perishable agricultural products for the purposes of food safety requirements, cold chain and supply chain safeguards, the best handling of sensitive commodities, and similar necessary business requirements for providing the best possible product to the consumer.

The BTA also urges policymakers to approach Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) frameworks with balance and transparency. A patchwork of state or provincial EPR programs risks undermining the efficiency of North America's integrated supply chains.

Technology, policies and procedures that facilitate trade, reduce delays

Increasing refrigerated inspection capacity

BTA supports Congress and the administration increasing funding to expand the infrastructure for refrigerated inspection capacity at the ports of entry. GSA design plans should incorporate refrigerated inspection capacity in all import lots currently or considering allowing perishable agriculture or other food commodities to cross.





Transportation and Infrastructure Committee



Danny Rios,

Committee Chairman

RRP Consulting Engineers
McAllen, Texas

2026 GOALS

**Supporting a long-term,
pro-trade transportation plan**

Bipartisan infrastructure bill implementation and surface transportation reauthorization

The implementation of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act should facilitate trade, investment in and around ports of entry, promote freight mobility, ensure maximum flexibility for border state departments of transportation, and move projects from concept to completion more quickly. As Congress considers the next surface transportation reauthorization, the Border Trade Alliance urges the inclusion of policies that sustain and expand these priorities, particularly those that enhance cross-border freight corridors, modernize land ports of entry, and strengthen the integration of border region infrastructure planning within the broader national network.

Ensuring safe cross-border transportation

Consistently applied, border-wide safety inspection regime

Shippers should choose ports based on the efficient movement of freight; safety inspections should not be a determining factor in which port a shipper chooses. Safety inspections and related processes should be applied consistently from

port to port, ensuring that no facility gains a competitive advantage through procedural differences and that all inspections promote both safety and efficiency across the border.

Oppose state-level inspection policies that delay shipments

BTA strongly opposes state-level truck and rail inspection policies that are duplicative and cause congestion in and around ports of entry. The BTA supports greater consistency in inspection policies and practices from state to state to ensure uniformity, predictability, and fairness in cross-border freight operations.

English Language Proficiency enforcement in border commercial zones

BTA urges consistent adherence to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) established exemptions to the agency's English Language Proficiency requirements for drivers operating within the border commercial zones. Uneven enforcement of these rules by federal or state officials has led to citations and warnings, which unfairly damages carriers' CSA scores and mislabels safe carriers as unsafe.

Improving border infrastructure

Allow CBP to make repairs at GSA-owned ports of entry

CBP should be granted the authority to perform immediate and relatively low-cost repairs at ports of entry without the authorization of GSA to ensure operations at ports can continue without interruption.

Extending and improving the Donation Acceptance Program

The current Donation Acceptance Program allows local governments and private sector entities to donate capital improvements to the federal government. The BTA advocates for the program's extension beyond 2026 to ensure that proven public-private partnerships continue to accelerate critical infrastructure investments at ports of entry.

Updating GSA and CBP design standards

GSA and CBP design standards should require agriculture and food inspection areas that are enclosed, refrigerated and temperature-controlled by the officer. Revised design standards would improve product integrity and enhance food safety. Presently, most produce and fresh foods are inspected by CBP at open-air docks at the U.S.-Mexico border, at risk for contamination by animal and other hazards inherent with open-air inspections.

Upgrading border region environmental infrastructure and technology

BTA supports infrastructure improvements and funding to prevent the continued flooding of sewage, trash, and sediment into the Tijuana River Valley and similar northward sewage flows at the New River, Imperial Valley, Ambos Nogales, Naco, Los Dos Laredos, and other areas that experience them with unfortunate regularity.

The BTA urges sustained collaboration and funding through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) to modernize and expand binational wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. Strengthening IBWC's project delivery capacity and ensuring that EPA's Border Water Infrastructure Program remains robustly funded are essential to mitigating pollution, protecting public health, and supporting cross-border economic growth.

BTA supports infrastructure improvement to increase water availability through water reuse. Water scarcity affects economic competitiveness of the border region and the rest of North America.

Enhancing technological infrastructure

Dramatically increasing broadband access at ports of entry

BTA supports improving broadband availability at the ports of entry, which:

- Will lead to greater trade throughput by increasing the mobility of CBP officers around the port campus, preventing them from being tied to inspection booths.
- Allows CBP to move to a command center model that allows for remote inspection targeting and increases the likelihood that future agency resource decisions are based on reliable, fresh data.

Shift to a command center model

A command center inspection model allows officers in off-site locations to remotely make determinations whether commercial vehicles require more thorough inspection, greatly diminishing the opportunity for corruption at the ports.

Deploy leading-edge non-intrusive inspection equipment that can lead to 100 percent inspections

Non-Intrusive Inspection technology at ports of entry provides officers a clear picture of the contents of containers that it could allow the inspection of 100 percent of northbound and southbound trucks entering the United States with no loss in trade throughput.

A regulatory environment to encourage trade throughput and enhance border infrastructure

Improving the permitting process

BTA supports a streamlined process for issuing presidential permits like that outlined under Executive Order 13867 and in the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act.

Under those models, the secretary of state receives all applications for the issuance or amendment of presidential permits for the construction, connection, operation, or maintenance of international border crossings. The secretary then makes a recommendation to the president whether to proceed with the application. The secretary's recommendation is to occur within 60 days of application receipt, and any further information requested of agencies by the president is to be provided within 30 days.

- The permitting process should also justify the construction of new ports of entry, including existing trade flows, congestion and other economic reasons, and should ensure that existing ports of entry are being utilized to the optimal degree.
- Presidential permits should also be extended when events warrant so as not to increase the time and costs necessary to bring a project to completion.
- Regulations should be promulgated to facilitate the exchange of tolls between governments as the concept of joint facilities and concessionaire management is introduced to additional states.

The importance of a multi-modal freight strategy

The BTA believes that a multi-modal approach to freight transportation can help solve critical international infrastructure congestion with faster project delivery and lower costs to both shippers and governmental entities. BTA advocates that no mode is unfairly disadvantaged by border infrastructure, access, inspection levels, or allocation of CBP resources.



Seaports Subcommittee



Robert Vale,
Committee Chairman
Strauns Customhouse
Brokers
Rio Grande City, Texas

2026 GOALS

Increasing freight capacity at seaports

Seaports are vital to North America's economic health. In the U.S., cargo activity at seaports accounts for 26 percent of the economy and they are responsible for more than 31 million jobs.

The BTA supports:

- Infrastructure improvements at seaports to accommodate larger vessels and increased trade volumes.
- Congressionally authorized funding to deepen sea channels.

Ensuring commercial operational support at seaports for CBP cargo clearance

The BTA supports the use of the Merchandise Processing Fee (MPF) collected at seaports as a source of funds that permit CBP to invest in projects that facilitate the execution of the agency's mission.

Relieving backlogs at seaports

The BTA urges CBP to properly allocate staff resources to ensure the efficient processing of cargo and to work collaboratively with the trade community to develop strategies to process freight.

Improving processes and investing in automation

By streamlining workflows and reducing manual tasks, automation reduces bottlenecks, accelerates cargo throughput, and minimizes human error and theft, ensuring a more reliable supply chain and cost savings for both port operators, consumers and businesses.



USMCA Committee



David Panko,
Committee Chairman
City of El Paso
El Paso, Texas

As the United States, Mexico, and Canada prepare for the first formal review of the USMCA, the BTA reaffirms its commitment to the agreement's principles of open markets, tariff-free trade, and regulatory cooperation. The USMCA has provided stability and predictability for the North American economy, strengthening manufacturing, agriculture, and cross-border supply chains.

Guiding principles for the 2026 review

The BTA believes that a renewed USMCA should:

- Preserve trilateral, tariff-free trade. Any erosion of USMCA's benefits risks harm to supply chains and regional competitiveness.
- Focus on trade facilitation and modernization. Streamline both tariff and non-tariff barriers, simplify documentation, and eliminate redundant procedures.
- Apply tariffs narrowly and enforce them consistently to maintain predictability and fairness.
- Recognize imports as vital to manufacturing competitiveness, consumer choice, and food security.
- Avoid regionally targeted provisions—such as “seasonality” measures—that distort market access.
- Encourage stakeholder participation from industry, border communities, and all levels of government.
- Rely on the USMCA dispute resolution process as the proper, rules-based mechanism for resolving disagreements.

Cross-border manufacturing and supply chains

- North America's manufacturing base depends on complex, integrated production lines spanning all three nations. Components often move from Canada to Mexico to the U.S. for final assembly, leveraging each country's strengths and skilled workforce.
- The BTA urges the three governments to preserve this model through predictable customs procedures, efficient logistics, and consistent rules of origin.
- Recognize equivalency between the U.S. Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) program and Mexico's IMMEX program, both of which promote in-bond manufacturing for export. Equal treatment would advance regulatory harmonization and reduce administrative burdens.
- Establish trilateral committees to identify and eliminate redundant regulatory and documentation requirements, enhancing supply chain efficiency.

Labor mobility and workforce development

Create a framework for labor mobility and talent attraction across North America.

Expand and modernize TN visa categories and other legal channels (including H-2 programs) to reflect the evolving needs of logistics, manufacturing, technology, and clean energy sectors.

In border regions, ensure policies support short-term cross-border work authorization, credential recognition, and training alignment.

Logistics and customs modernization

- Develop a single, trilingual manifest for freight moving between the three countries.
- Establish a trilateral customs training initiative to ensure professionalism and efficiency at all ports of entry.
- Support creation of permanent trilateral committees on customs modernization, data sharing, and harmonized regulatory standards.
- Commit to a trilateral infrastructure funding mechanism for inspection facilities, pre-inspection zones, trusted-trader programs, and technology deployment.

- Reaffirm that commercial trucks should be able to haul freight from origin to destination throughout the USMCA region, with clear rules to prevent cabotage abuses.

Agriculture and market access

- Maintain duty-free, science-based agricultural trade. Resist protectionist measures disguised as health or seasonal restrictions.
- Strengthen dispute resolution access for agricultural trade.
- Encourage technical cooperation on grain-quality calibration, traceability, and sanitary protocols to expand market opportunities.
- Codify exemptions for USMCA-compliant imports from extraneous sectoral tariffs (e.g., Section 232 actions).

Energy and environment

- Encourage cross-border investment in renewable energy and infrastructure, particularly in Mexico, where private capital and technical expertise can accelerate decarbonization.
- Support a trilateral oversight group to monitor the intersection of trade, energy, and climate policies and to identify unintended economic or environmental impacts.
- Prioritize modernization of border environmental infrastructure to address sewage and water quality alongside water supply issues affecting regional competitiveness and quality of life.

The Border Trade Alliance supports a USMCA review process that deepens trade facilitation, strengthens labor mobility, modernizes border infrastructure, and reinforces the integrated manufacturing and logistics systems that define North American competitiveness.

601 Pennsylvania Ave, NW,
South Building, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 302-6225

www.thebta.org

