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Preface

The border between San Diego and Tijuana works as an economic engine. Every day, thousands of people cross north bound into the United States through the San Ysidro Port of Entry (SYPOE). An exchange of goods and labor take place at the border on a daily basis.

Approximately 7.9 million pedestrians crossed from Mexico into the United States through the San Ysidro Port of Entry in 2014\(^1\), making SYPOE one of the busiest border crossings in the world. Congestion at the border as a result of security measures and many other factors has an impact on the regional economy. According to SANDAG’s Fact Sheet “Economic Impacts of Wait Times in the San Diego-Baja California Border Region” in 2007, there was a total loss of $7.2 billion for California and Baja California due to border wait times.

Considering the economic impact of wait times, South County Economic Development Council (SCEDC) decided to update the 2011 San Ysidro Pedestrian Report. The purpose of this is to observe the current pedestrian crossing experience, as well as make recommendations to reduce border wait times.

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\(^1\) Border Crossing/Entry Data: Query Detailed Statistics, U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, refer to
http://transborder.bts.gov/programs/international/transborder/TBDR_BC/TBDR_BCQ.html

\(^2\) "Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Acces Study for the California / Baja California Lands Ports of Entry" KOA Coporation, ITC, Caltrans, SANDAG (February, 2015), p.51
1. Introduction

In 2011, South County Economic Development Council (SCEDC) released a report on the San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing, in which recommendations were made to the appropriate authorities to improve the pedestrian border crossing experience and reduce wait times. SCEDC partnered with CBP officials to obtain unprecedented permission to gather data by conducting surveys of pedestrians outside of the San Ysidro Port of Entry (SYPOE) facility.

The following report conveys the information retrieved from surveys conducted in 2015 and 2016. The statistics of the report represent only the participants that responded to the survey. The objective of the report is to demonstrate the current border crossing situation and analyze the improvements made by the authorities. The results obtained will be compared to those presented in the 2011 report.

The survey questions were designed to demonstrate the length of pedestrian wait time, crossing frequency, purpose of crossing the border, as well as the conditions they encountered. The first half of the report conveys the results of the surveys and compares the results to those of 2011, while the second half explains the findings, improvements and recommendations for an improved border crossing experience.

1.1 Location and Time

The survey was conducted at the San Ysidro Port of Entry (SYPOE) in San Diego, California. The respondents were surveyed outside the SYPOE facility on the United States side between March 2015 and February 2016. The surveys were conducted Monday through Friday, from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The location where surveys were conducted was pivotal to the project, because surveyors had unprecedented permission from CBP to stand outside the exit of the SYPOE facility.
2. Respondents Demographics

In an effort to obtain an overview of the average pedestrian profile, survey respondents were randomly selected while exiting the San Ysidro Port of Entry facility. A total of 3,283 surveys were collected between March 2015 and February 2016. 55% of respondents were female and 45% male, demonstrating the gender distribution of participants.

The respondents were classified into four different age groups. The first age group was between the ages of 0 to 18, the second age group was between the ages of 19 to 30, the third age group was between the ages of 31 to 50 and the fourth age group was over 50 years of age. 6% of respondents were under 18 years of age. 43% of respondents were between the ages of 19 to 30. 32% of respondents were between the ages of 31-50 and 19% of respondents were over 50 years of age.

In 2011, the majority of respondents were between the ages of 31 to 50, while in 2016, the majority of participants were between the ages of 19-30. From 2011 to 2016, there was a 10% increase in survey respondents that were between the ages of 19 to 30.

While conducting surveys, it was observed that survey participants were guarded when asked to indicate their citizenship status, especially when they indicated that...
they were Lawful Permanent Residents (Green Card Holders). Figure 2.4 shows that 50% of respondents indicated that they were U.S. citizens, while 32% said they were Mexican citizens. This information shows a significant 12% increase in the number of U.S. citizens crossing into the United States compared to the results of 2011. In Figure 2.4, there appears to be a proportional decrease of 12% of Mexican citizens crossing north bound at the SYPOE, compared to 2011. In 2016, 10% of respondents identified themselves as Green Card holders, compared to 14% in 2011.

![Figure 2.4 Citizenship 2016](image)

![Figure 2.5 Citizenship 2011](image)

*San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report, 2011 (SCEDC)*

3. Crossing the Border

Every day thousands of people cross into the United States for different purposes. To understand the reasons why pedestrians cross into the U.S. and how often they do so, participants were queried on the subject. Two questions were added to the current study to obtain information about the pedestrian’s point of origin and method of transportation upon arrival into the U.S.
3.1 Crossing Frequency

Figure 3.1 illustrates the crossing frequency of participants in 2016. A cumulative 59% of surveyed pedestrians are considered “frequent crossers,” as 34% of participants indicated they cross from Mexico every day, while 25% said they cross a couple times a week.

From 2011 to 2016, the most significant variation was the 6% increase in participants that cross the border every day. Participants, who crossed the border a couple times a week decreased by 4%, while those who stated “once a week” decreased by 3%. Participants who reported crossing the border once a month decreased by 2%.

3 59% percent of “frequent crossers” is the result of combining the participants that crossed every day (34%) and those that cross a couple of times a week (25%).
3.2 Reason for Crossing

In 2016, 33% of participants at the SYPOE indicated business/work as their reason for crossing into the United States, while 24% of participants stated they crossed to shop. Additionally, 18% of participants stated that visiting friends and family was their reason for crossing, while 10% stated school, 4% stated tourism, and 4% stated medical services as the purpose for crossing the border. Participants who indicated other reasons for crossing represented 6% of the total and 1% of the pedestrians surveyed did not want to respond.

Compared to 2011, the percentage of participants who indicated business/work as their reason for crossing increased by 10% in 2016. The amount of participants who cross for shopping in the U.S. decreased by 7% compared to 2011. Meanwhile the percentage of participants crossing the border in order to go to school was 10% for both periods showing no variation, as well as tourism with 4% of participants.

*San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report, 2011 (SCEDC)
3.3 Point of Origin

In 2016, participants were asked to indicate the point of origin for their trip. 83% of participants stated Tijuana as their point of origin, 5% stated Rosarito and 1% stated Ensenada. 10% of participants indicated other as their point of origin. This is characteristic for the summer season.

As previously stated, two questions were added to the current study to obtain information about the pedestrian’s exact point of origin and method of transportation. Figure 3.6 illustrates the participant’s point of origin within Tijuana. 35% of the participants stated that they began their trip in Zona Rio/Zona Centro; 19% stated Playas de Tijuana, 10% stated La Mesa and 8% stated Mesa de Otay.
3.4 Method of Transportation

Figure 3.7 Method of Transportation 2016

The second question added to the current study queried participants about their method of transportation upon arrival to the U.S. The number one method of transportation for pedestrians that crossed into the U.S. was the trolley, with 50% of respondents citing this as their mode of transportation. 19% of participants indicated walking as their method of transportation; 12% of respondents indicated they would take a bus; 7% said someone was picking them up and 6% indicated they were taking their personal vehicle.
4. SENTRI Enrollment

Participants were asked if they were enrolled in the Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) program. 12% of participants said they were enrolled in the program, a significant increase compared to 4% in 2011. 86% of the participants are not enrolled in SENTRI, while 1% did not want to respond and 1% did not know about the program.

**Figure 4.1 SENTRI Enrollment 2016**

86% 12%

1% 1%

**Figure 4.2 SENTRI Enrollment 2011**

94% 4%

1% 1%

*San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report, 2011(SCEDC)*

4.1 Reason for not being enrolled in SENTRI

To identify the reasons why pedestrians were not yet enrolled in the SENTRI program, participants were asked to indicate their main reason for not applying. 28% of participants answered that they did not think they needed a SENTRI card; 18% of the participants didn’t want to respond or felt the question didn’t apply to them, and 8% of participants believed that they did not meet all the requirements. 12% of participants stated other, as the reason for not being enrolled in the SENTRI program. The two most common responses for participants who answered other, were procrastination and a personal lack of time to apply. 10% of participants indicated that they did not know why they were not enrolled.
In 2016, 8% of pedestrians indicated that they do not know how to get a SENTRI card, a considerable decrease of 11% compared to 2011.

5. Border Wait Times

One of the purposes of this report is to determine the average border wait times at the pedestrian border crossing in San Ysidro. In order to determine how long people were waiting in line, pedestrians were approached as they exited the SYPOE facility and asked how long they waited, then asked if they had a SENTRI card.

*San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report, 2011 (SCEDC)*

*Non-SENTRI includes all travelers that are not enrolled in SENTRI.*
In 2016, Non-SENTRI participants waited in line for an average of 61 minutes, while SENTRI participants waited an average of 16 minutes. There is a 45 minute average difference between SENTRI and Non-SENTRI participants.

In 2011, the average wait time for Non-SENTRI participants was 52 minutes and 20 minutes for a SENTRI participant. From 2011 to 2016, average wait time reduced by 4 minutes for SENTRI participants, while it increased by 9 minutes for Non-SENTRI participants.

6. Respondents Suggestions

Surveyors asked participants their opinions on what needed to be done to reduce wait times at the SYPOE pedestrian crossing. This survey question was the one that respondents commented on the most.

Figure 6.1 Suggestions made by respondents 2016
• **35%** of the total participants suggested increasing the number of open lanes. Most of the time, participants mentioned that having an officer in each lane, especially during peak hours, would make the crossing faster.

• **27%** suggested faster inspections by CBP officers. Participants mentioned that CBP officers socialize among themselves and ask unnecessary questions, consequently increasing the wait times.

• **15%** indicated other as their response. The option of creating specific lanes for students/workers and controlling the cutting in lines were the most common suggestions in this category.

• **12%** did not know what could be changed. The majority of participants who responded with this answer were SENTRI cardholders.

• **4%** of respondents said the question did not apply to them or chose not to answer.

• **2%** of participants indicated developing new infrastructure as an option to shorten wait times.

• **2%** of pedestrians recommended improving technology for faster access and inspection.

• **2%** suggested increasing SENTRI enrollment to reduce wait times.

• **1%** suggested completing the border expansion project as a solution for reducing the wait times.
7. Findings

Crossing Frequency

The majority of participants that cross through the SYPOE daily tend to cross to attend school or work in the U.S.

Reason for Crossing

The amount of participants who cross to shop in the U.S. decreased by 7% compared to 2011. This could possibly be explained by different factors, such as wait times and the devaluation of the Mexican peso.

SENTRI enrollment

In the 2011 San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report⁴ it was mentioned that CBP officials suggested that an increase in SENTRI enrollment would reduce wait times. There was an 8% increase in SENTRI enrollment among respondents from 2011 to 2016. The wait times for SENTRI enrollees did drop, however the wait times for Non-SENTRI card holders increased.

Reason for not being enrolled in SENTRI

There was an 11% decrease of respondents who did not know how to get a SENTRI card. This could be attributed to marketing efforts over past few years. Also interestingly, 12% of respondents chose not to respond or felt that the question did not apply to them.

Border Wait times

The 3rd quarter of the 2016 survey results recorded the longest wait times for Non-SENTRI pedestrians. The average wait time for Non-SENTRI pedestrians was 72 minutes. This may be attributed to the holiday shopping season, resulting in a larger number of crossers.

⁴SCEDC “San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report”, 2011
Figure 7.1 Border Wait Times 3rd Quarter 2016

*Non-SENTRI includes all travelers that are not enrolled in SENTRI.*
8. Situational Changes

From 2011 to 2016 there have been significant changes to the San Ysidro Port of Entry. One of those changes was the addition of “Ready Lane”. The “Ready Lane” is dedicated to travelers who have RFID-enabled cards, U.S. Passport Cards, or Border Crossing Cards among others.

The Ready Lanes were an improvement made to what used to be called Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) Compliant lanes. WHTI requires all travelers, U.S. citizens and foreign nationals alike, to present a passport or other acceptable documents that denote identity and citizenship when entering the United States. The name of the lane was changed from WHTI Compliant to Ready Lane, which is easier to read and understand by the pedestrians. The digital monitors that display the name of each lane, and the pictures that display the type of documents that can be used in the Ready Lanes has helped the public understand what lanes to use.

Another significant change that has recently occurred at the San Ysidro Port of Entry facility is the implementation of innovative technology. In order to reduce the time of inspection, kiosks were installed prior to arriving at an officer’s booth. The kiosks read the traveler’s documents with Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology; as a result, the traveler’s information is retrieved faster.

In 2015, an expanded Mexican Port of Entry was opened at the San Ysidro border. The facility has separate lanes for Mexican citizens and Non-Mexican citizens. Beginning in August 2015, Non-Mexican citizens are now required to apply for an FMM (Forma Migratoria Multiple) permit when crossing into Mexico. To apply, visitors must possess a valid passport and pay a fee of approximately $20 dollars. The application can be found online and at the Mexican border crossing.

The FMM permit is valid for up to 180 days and permits Baja California visitors to exit and reenter with the same FMM when traveling by land. If tourists are visiting Mexico for less than 7 days the FMM is free, yet a valid passport or passport card is still required. This new requirement could have resulted in longer wait times for foreigners crossing into Mexico through the San Ysidro border.

On September of 2012, the pedestrian crossing located in the Puerta Mexico was closed permanently, and pedestrians were re-routed to the east side behind the SENTRI building. The SENTRI building is adjacent to the San Ysidro Port of Entry Pedestrian East Facility. Pedestrians crossing into Mexico can locate this new route by going behind the San Ysidro trolley station and the commercial stores that are located next to the SENTRI building. According to GSA’s San Ysidro Land Port of
Entry Fact Sheet, this change was part of Phase1C named as “Southbound Pedestrian Crossing”, as part of the SYPOE infrastructure improvement project. The Southbound Pedestrian Crossing was completed in August of 2012\textsuperscript{5}.

9. Improvements

The 2011 South County EDC San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report made recommendations based on the information gathered from 2010 to 2011, in order to improve the border crossing experience. In the five year period from 2011 to 2016, there have been improvements made by the U.S. government that were visible in 2016.

In the 2011 San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report, SCEDC recommended an increase in SENTRI enrollment and requested that Customs and Border Protection (CBP) market the benefits of the program to pedestrians. In 2016, participants enrolled in SENTRI increased by 8%. Also, participants that did not know how to enroll in SENTRI decreased by 11% in 2016. This appears to be the result of efforts made by CBP authorities, who promoted the SENTRI program. Additionally a SENTRI office was added in San Ysidro, providing a convenient location for SENTRI application and processing.

Another improvement observed by SCEDC in 2016 are the organizational changes made to the interior of the San Ysidro facility. Participants mentioned that once inside the building, it is now clear which are the Ready, General, SENTRI and Disabled Lanes.

\textsuperscript{5} GSA “San Ysidro Land Port of Entry Fact Sheet”, July 8, 2015
10. Recommendations

Table 10.1 displays a list of recommendations made by SCEDC in the San Ysidro Pedestrian Crossing Report in 2011. Adjacent to each recommendation is the letter Y, indicating that an improvement has been made in the matter, or N indicating that the recommendation has not been resolved. Following Table 10.1 is an in depth description of the recommendations that still need to be implemented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Completed Y/N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase SENTRI enrollment and dissemination of program information</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Spanish language SENTRI marketing efforts</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use available resources to promote SENTRI</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create separate lane leading up to the dedicated SENTRI entrance</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend SENTRI office hours</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reevaluate existing regulations prohibiting SENTRI enrollment</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure SENTRI card fees (Family Fee)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating real border wait times</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control line cutting</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements to SYPOE for increasing inspection efficiency (kiosk)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving SYPOE facility</td>
<td>In Process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Create Separate Lane Leading Up to the Dedicated SENTRI Entrance

On the Mexican side of the SYPOE, there is no defined SENTRI lane leading up to the marked SENTRI entrance. While the trusted traveler entrance is unmistakably labeled, issues arise for SENTRI cardholders when they must pass a multitude of pedestrians during peak times to reach it. Painting a designated SENTRI lane on the ground or placing signs along/above the line instructing SENTRI participants to move ahead to the specified entrance will minimize any confusion and reduce the perception of SENTRI program participants cutting.
Reevaluate Existing Regulations Prohibiting SENTRI Enrollment

By reevaluating regulations and seeking additional flexibility as it applies to specific circumstances, ideal SENTRI candidates with tarnished backgrounds may be reconsidered for the program. For example, a 65 year old male who may have been convicted of felony when he was 19 years old (such as driving under the influence) should not be permanently barred from participating in the SENTRI program.

Effectively Communicating Real Border Wait Times

By utilizing lit signs to convey both SENTRI and non-SENTRI pedestrian wait times, two objectives may be achieved:

- Interest will be sparked in the SENTRI program when pedestrians visibly see the shorter wait times for the program participants.

- Communicating wait times will enable pedestrians to make informed decisions.

Control Lines

SCEDC continues to recommend that Mexican authorities schedule police officers or security agents at the front of the line to prevent cutting, fights, criminal activities, and accidents, especially during peak hours. People cutting in line directly impacts wait times. SCEDC highly recommends constant surveillance to prevent this situation.

SCEDC recommends the line-cutting that is occurring inside the federal facility at the SYPOE be addressed. The security agents, standing by the front gate where the turnstile doors are located, keep the pedestrians outside the gate waiting at times for more than 30 minutes. As the security agents let a group of people in, the majority rush, speed, and run, to the end of the lines inside the Federal Facility. At times, people have incurred minor injuries. Once people are lined up in different lanes, respondents have reported that there are some people that walk in the SENTRI lane because it has less people, and proceed to the front of the line where there is a gap in between two rail stands as shown on the picture located on the adjacent page.
In addition to Table 10.1 and the suggestions made by respondents, SCEDC makes the following recommendations:

**Train CBP Officers on "Excellent Public Service"**

Surveyed pedestrians reported that some CBP officers appeared to exercise too much authority when not necessary. Therefore, SCEDC recommends a customer service training program for CBP officers.

**Increase the Number of Open Lanes**

On Tuesday February 9th, the line was exceptionally fast as was noted by a vast amount of respondents. When asked about possible improvements that could be made to reduce wait times, responses were to use the same methods as they did that day. Respondents reported that all lanes were open and fully staffed and SCEDC found that Non-SENTRI wait times were 31 minutes on average. Therefore, SCEDC recommends increasing the number of open lanes, especially during peak hours and prior to peak hours. Figure 10.2 illustrates the average wait time for surveyed pedestrians on February 9, 2016. Wait times are 30 minutes less than the annual average wait time for Non-SENTRI participants and 14 minutes less for SENTRI participants.
Manage Shift Change of CBP Officers

When asked their opinion on what needed to be done to shorten the pedestrian wait time, 35% of respondents mentioned the need to increase the number of open lanes. Respondents stated that during a shift change lanes close for an undetermined period of time causing an increase in wait times and adding to the frustration of pedestrian crossers. SCEDC recommends CBP manage shifts changes more efficiently. Furthermore, shift changes could be scheduled to occur during non-peak hours.

Improve Pedestrian Flow into the SYPOE Facility

In some cases the perception of wait times for pedestrians may be associated with traffic flow. Respondents commented that there are long periods of time when Ready Lane and General Lane users are not moved into the SYPOE facility, slowing traffic flow and increasing wait times. SCEDC recommends CBP address this common complaint by managing the flow of pedestrians inside the SYPOE facility with consistency.

In the past, CBP has effectively managed traffic flow by allowing pedestrians to enter the facility on a consistent basis. The majority of respondents who commented on this issue reported that they did not move for over 30 minutes when standing on the Mexican side of the border. This could be attributed to CBP temporarily and on an intermittent basis closing the SYPOE in an effort to maintain crowd control.
**Improve Signage**

Lack of proper signage on the Mexican side creates confusion for pedestrians. It is not clear which lanes are Ready Lane, SENTRI Lane, General Lane or lanes for I-94 permits.

**Improve Infrastructure on the Mexican Side**

South County EDC also recommends adding benches and shaded areas for pedestrians; as well public restrooms. Lastly, SCEDC suggests that Mexican authorities work together with CBP to create a more welcoming environment at the San Ysidro Port of Entry.

Another issue that needs attention from the Mexican authorities is the space and infrastructure of the access to the pedestrian border crossing. SCEDC recommends increasing the space for lanes. This will allow Mexican authorities to better manage lanes and ensure pedestrians are in the correct lane.
Create Student VISA Lane

The student population makes up 10% of the total number of respondents in the 2016 pedestrian survey. All students are frequent crossers. Surveyed pedestrians reported that in the morning before 8:00am students cut the line in groups. As a result, wait times for all other pedestrian crossers are considerably increased. In an effort to reduce border wait times, CBP may wish to consider a separate student VISA lane, on Monday thru Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.

U.S. San Ysidro Border Entrance Signage

SCEDC recommends improving the signage of the U.S. San Ysidro Border entrance on the U.S. side, as tourists often seem to be confused on how to enter into Mexico. They are resistant to take the path that goes behind the buildings.

Regulate shuttle buses on the Tijuana side

SCEDC recommends that authorities on the Mexican side regulate the shuttle buses that take pedestrians to the front of the line. It has been reported that shuttle bus drivers charge approximately $5 per ticket to enter at the front of the line, rather than standing and waiting. Consequently, wait times are increased for pedestrians who do not use the shuttle buses. Recently, Mexico has reported the busses have been shifted to the Otay Mesa crossing.

Cut Windows into the White Wall to Allow Airflow for Pedestrians

SCEDC recommends cutting windows into the white wall located on the Mexican side of the border, as respondents mentioned that the temperature increases at that section of the line. Cutting windows into the wall would allow for airflow and improve the conditions for pedestrians.
11. Conclusion

CBP offered SCEDC unprecedented access to gather information by conducting surveys outside the San Ysidro Port of Entry Facility. This allowed SCEDC to gather data that reflect actual wait times, border crossing conditions and solid recommendations from pedestrian crossers on improvements.

Border wait times affect business revenue and employment on both sides of the border. A study of the economic impact of border wait times, prepared by SANDAG and Caltrans, calculated a total loss of $7.2 billion for California and Baja California in 2007\textsuperscript{6}. Therefore, longer wait times create obstacles to regional binational prosperity.

In 2016, survey results show that an average Non-Sentri pedestrian waited 61 minutes in line, which is 9 minutes more than in 2011. The increase in the average wait times compared to 2011, demonstrates that actions from authorities of both sides of the border are still required in order to reduce wait times. However the increase in SENTRI participants and the decrease in SENTRI wait times reflect a shift in prioritizing crossing for trusted travelers. SCEDC recommends authorities in United States and Mexico find measures that ensure the co-existence of security and commerce at the San Ysidro Port of Entry. Continued emphasis and marketing of the SENTRI program will continue to reduce wait times for trusted travelers. This should also have a positive impact on other lines as people are taken out of the general lanes and moved to SENTRI lanes.

Finally, the recommendations made in this report are solely made in an effort to reduce wait times, without regards to security concerns, as that area of expertise relies on security officials in the United States and Mexico.

\textsuperscript{6}SANDAG’s Fact Sheet “Economic Impacts of Wait Times in the San Diego-Baja California Border Region”, 2007