



NORA VARGAS
VICE-CHAIR
SUPERVISOR, FIRST DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA ITEM

DATE: October 19, 2021

TO: Board of Supervisors

20

SUBJECT

RESOLUTION TO REQUEST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LIFT ALL RESTRICTIONS ON NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL AT THE SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA PORTS OF ENTRY (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

On March 21, 2020, the United States Department of Homeland Security implemented temporary restrictions that limit entry of people traveling via land ports of entry into the United States from Mexico or Canada regardless of their country of origin, to reduce the spread of COVID-19 between the United States and Mexico. Since then, the travel restrictions have been renewed every month and continue to remain in effect as part of an ongoing effort by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under Title 42 Section 265 of the United States Code.

In September 2021, the Department of Homeland Security announced its extension of non-essential travel restrictions through October 21, 2021, prolonging the negative economic and social impact to the region.

San Diego County's economy, especially in the border communities, is heavily dependent on cross-border trade and consumption, and the economic impact of reduced cross-border mobility cannot be underestimated. San Diego County's retail and hospitality industry has been hit the hardest, with tourists not being able to cross the border to buy goods and services or enjoy entertainment and dining.

Since March 2020, more than 200 small businesses have closed permanently in San Ysidro alone. This represents over 1,900 jobs lost and 72% of revenue loss in that community. 80% of San Ysidro businesses rely on cross-border customers. Furthermore, the economic impact of the border restrictions on non-essential travel expands beyond San Diego County to the rest of California and the Nation.

Another impact of non-essential travel restrictions in the San Diego-Tijuana border region has been on families who have not been able to see each other since March 2020. In a binational region,

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
2021 OCT 11 PM 12:02
CLERK OF THE BOARD
OF SUPERVISORS

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION TO REQUEST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LIFT ALL RESTRICTIONS ON NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL AT THE SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA PORTS OF ENTRY

where families are used to crossing the land ports of entry regularly for birthdays, Sunday gatherings, or to visit family members who are sick, these restrictions have socially marginalized individuals.

While metrics or benchmarks for lifting restrictions have not been established by the federal government, the County of San Diego continues its efforts to reduce the spread and risk of COVID-19, with 79.4% of the eligible population being fully vaccinated countywide and 88.7% having received at least one dose of the vaccine, and in South Region 90.3% of the eligible population is fully vaccinated and 99.2% received at least one dose.

RECOMMENDATION(S)
VICE-CHAIR NORA VARGAS

1. Adopt the Resolution titled: RESOLUTION TO REQUEST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LIFT ALL RESTRICTIONS ON NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL AT THE SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA PORTS OF ENTRY
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to express the County's support for lifting all restrictions on non-essential travel at San Diego/Tijuana Land Ports of Entry, San Ysidro Port of Entry and Otay Mesa Land Port of Entry, and to work with the federal government to seek opportunities for a pilot program lifting such restrictions, thereby, allowing the re-entry of people via those land borders and beginning true economic recovery in our region, consistent with Board Policy M-2.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to identify and pursue economic relief opportunities that address the impact that non-essential travel restrictions have had on the San Diego regional economy, particularly in South County.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Restrictions on non-essential travel at the U.S. Land Ports of Entry have disproportionately affected transborder families and essential workers. While restrictions limit non-U.S. citizens from entering the United States through the land ports of entry, U.S. citizens are free to exit and enter the United States through these same ports. This has allowed for the continued flow of tourism to move South of the border but has limited the reciprocated flow of tourism to enter the United States and contribute to our economic recovery, particularly in the San Diego County. Furthermore, Mexican, and Canadian citizens are allowed to fly into the United States, clearly making the restrictions on the land ports of entry a socioeconomic inequity by limiting access to families who cannot afford airfare into the United States, and strictly limiting families that rely on their vehicles to travel into the United States.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact from today's recommendations. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years. Potential economic relief opportunities will be assessed in terms of County costs and revenues prior to taking further action.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION TO REQUEST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LIFT ALL RESTRICTIONS ON NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL AT THE SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA PORTS OF ENTRY

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

On March 21, 2020, the United States Department of Homeland Security implemented temporary restrictions that limit entry of people traveling via land ports of entry into the United States from Mexico or Canada regardless of their country of origin. Since then, the travel restrictions have been renewed every month and continue to remain in effect as part of an ongoing effort by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under Title 42 Section 265 of the United States Code to deter the spread of COVID-19.

Essential travel through the land ports of entry and ferry terminals along the United States, Mexico, and Canada includes, but is not limited to:

- U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents returning to the United States;
- Individuals traveling for medical purposes (e.g., to receive medical treatment in the United States);
- Individuals traveling to attend educational institutions;
- Individuals traveling to work in the United States (e.g., individuals working in the farming or agriculture industry who must travel between the United States and Mexico in furtherance of such work);
- Individuals traveling for emergency response and public health purposes (e.g., government officials or emergency responders entering the United States to support federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial government efforts to respond to COVID-19 or other emergencies);
- Individuals engaged in lawful cross-border trade (e.g., truck drivers supporting the movement of cargo between the United States and Mexico);
- Individuals engaged in official government travel or diplomatic travel;
- Members of the U.S. Armed Forces, and the spouses and children of members of the U.S. Armed Forces, returning to the United States; and
- Individuals engaged in military-related travel or operations.

The following travel does not fall within the definition of “essential travel”:

- Individuals traveling for tourism purposes (e.g., sightseeing, recreation, gambling, or attending cultural events).

Prior to the pandemic there were over 90,000 daily commuters northbound from the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry, with people crossing every day to work, study, shop, vacation, or dine at local restaurants. San Diego County’s economy, especially in the border communities, is heavily dependent on cross-border trade and consumption. The economic impact of reduced cross-border mobility cannot be underestimated. San Diego County’s retail and hospitality industry has been hit the hardest, with tourists not being able to cross the border to buy goods and services, or enjoy entertainment and dining.

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION TO REQUEST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LIFT ALL RESTRICTIONS ON NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL AT THE SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA PORTS OF ENTRY

Another impact of non-essential travel restrictions in the San Diego-Tijuana border region has been on families who have not been able to see each other since March 2020. In a binational region, where families are used to crossing the land ports of entry regularly for birthdays, Sunday gatherings, or to visit family members who are sick, these restrictions have socially marginalized individuals.

According to findings by the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, the impact of COVID-19 across borders and industries has resulted in:

- 40% estimated economic loss for tourism and retail; and
- 70% of manufacturing and construction businesses economically impacted by the disruption of integrated supply chains.

Since March 2020, more than 200 small businesses have closed permanently in San Ysidro alone. This represents over 1,900 jobs lost and 72% of revenue loss in that community. 80% of San Ysidro businesses rely on cross-border customers. Furthermore, the economic impact of the border restrictions on non-essential travel expands beyond San Diego County to the rest of California and the Nation.

California lifted its restrictions and opened up its economy on June 15, 2021, but small businesses dependent on cross-border consumers continue to be impacted, as the Department of Homeland Security announced in September its extension of non-essential travel restrictions through October 21, prolonging the negative economic impact to the region.

Understanding the economic impact of the non-essential travel restrictions, and to be good neighbors, the County of San Diego (County) created binational interventions to provide vaccine access early on, including a partnership with UC San Diego Health, Mexican Consulate, Baja California Secretary of Health, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and six U.S. subsidiary companies operating in Baja, resulting in over 26,000 vaccinations for maquiladora workers in Tijuana. These efforts proved so successful that they were in turn replicated across the entire Mexico-U.S. border.

With no metrics or benchmark for lifting restrictions provided by the federal government, the County has continued its vaccination efforts, with the eligible population being fully vaccinated at 79.4% countywide and 88.7% having received at least one dose of the vaccine, and in South Region of San Diego County 90.3% of the eligible population being fully vaccinated and 99.2% having received at least one dose. Additionally, the State of Baja California has fully vaccinated 80.46% of individuals 18 and over and in the immediate city of Tijuana: 82% of individuals 18 and over have been fully vaccinated.

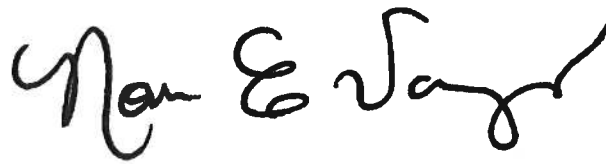
Given the County's COVID response with a focused effort around equity and increased vaccination rates, it is now critical that the federal government lift the non-essential travel restrictions as soon as possible, to allow for a full economic recovery to happen in our binational region.

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION TO REQUEST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LIFT ALL RESTRICTIONS ON NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL AT THE SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA PORTS OF ENTRY

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions support the Sustainable and Thriving Environment Strategic Initiative of the County of San Diego's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan by creating a more vibrant region with planning, development, infrastructure, and services that strengthen the local economy by providing and promoting services that increase the well-being of our residents and increase consumer and business confidence.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nora E. Vargas", written in a cursive style.

NORA VARGAS
Supervisor, First District

ATTACHMENT(S)

RESOLUTION TO REQUEST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LIFT ALL RESTRICTIONS ON NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL AT THE SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA PORTS OF ENTRY