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2019 California-Baja California Border Crossing and Trade Highlights

Introduction

The San Diego region counts itself as part of a larger-interrelated cluster of metropolitan areas that, together, function as one economic megaregion. The Cali-Baja binational megaregion encompasses San Diego County and Imperial County in the U.S., and the state of Baja California in Mexico. The daily exchange of economic and cultural activity through crossborder travel and bilateral trade are characteristics setting the California-Baja California region apart and provide the necessary elements for economic competitiveness and binational cooperation that the region leverages to advance its quality of life.

Taking into account border crossing activity in terms of both crossborder trips and commercial trade is critical to understanding the impacts on our local transportation system and economy, as well as informing border related planning and modeling efforts.

Discussion

The information below includes notable trends and statistics related to crossings of people, vehicles, and commercial trade through the seven land ports of entry (POEs) between California and Baja California. The analysis is based on publicly available data from the U.S. Department of Transportation – Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), which provides annual information on northbound (U.S. inbound) border crossings and bilateral trade statistics dating back to 1998.

People crossings:

- General trends over the last two decades show that total crossings of people through California-Baja California POEs saw their peak years between the late 1990s and early 2000s and were followed by a period of decline from the mid-2000s to the early 2010s. Since reaching a two-decade low in 2010, total crossings of people have been growing and are nearing the peak volumes recorded in the early 2000s.
- In 2019, more than 77.2 million people crossed northbound as pedestrians or in personal vehicles (POVs) – the highest in over a decade. Most notably, the 21.8 million pedestrian crossings in 2019 (which includes crossings through Cross Border Xpress) was the highest in any of the 22 years of available data and 8.4 percent more than the year prior. The growth in pedestrian crossings carried the positive overall person crossing trend in 2019, as the volume of people crossing via POV fell slightly from 2018 to 2019.
- Crossings of people through the California-Baja California border accounted for 32 percent of all crossings into the U.S. via land POEs along the U.S.-Mexico and U.S.-Canada border in 2019.

Vehicle crossings:

- The two-decade trend for POV crossings shows that the peak was reached in the mid-2000s and has since rebounded to within 10 percent of the peak year volume in 2005.
- The 31.4 million POVs that crossed northbound through the region in 2019 was 20 percent higher than the estimated total number of automobiles registered in the state of California.¹

¹ California Department of Motor Vehicles Forecasting Unit – Estimated Vehicles Registered by County (2019)

- Truck crossings through the state’s commercial POEs broke a new record in 2019, processing more than 1.4 million northbound trucks. The Otay Mesa - Mesa de Otay and Calexico East - Mexicali II POEs are the second and fifth busiest ports in terms truck crossings along the U.S.-Mexico border – respectively.

Crossborder trade:

- Over 98 percent of crossborder trade that moves through California’s border region travels via commercial truck through the Otay Mesa - Mesa de Otay, Tecate - Tecate, and Calexico East - Mexicali II POEs. Binational trade via truck through these facilities has continued to grow at a steady pace, despite declining briefly between 2008 and 2009 during the Great Recession. In just three years following the recession in 2008, trade via truck rebounded and, in fact, surpassed the annual trade totals seen in the years pre-recession.
- In 2019, California’s commercial land POE facilities processed more than \$65.86 billion in total bilateral trade via truck, which is a new record high. California, with the highest gross domestic product (GDP) of any U.S. state, relies heavily on trade with Mexico – its largest export market in 2019 by a margin of 67 percent over its second largest export market – Canada.²
- A key development in 2019 was that Mexico became the top overall trade partner for the U.S. This highlights the importance of the existing crossborder trade relationships supported by the CaliBaja megaregion.³

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² U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis – GDP by state (2019)

³ U.S. Census Bureau – USA Trade, Top Trade Partners (2019)