



R. Gil Kerlikowske
Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20229

Subject: Letter of Support to Expand Travel Zone in Arizona for Holders of Border Crossing Cards

Dear Commissioner:

As members of the *Ari-Son Megaregion Council*, we are writing to request your consideration for initiating a rulemaking process to revise the 75-mile limit on travel within the State of Arizona for Mexican citizens who are holders of Border Crossing Cards (BCC).

The *Ari-Son Megaregion Council* is a binational council of local elected officials from Arizona and Sonora who work with stakeholders from all levels of government and the business community to advance key binational initiatives of local and regional significance. Its purpose is to elevate the voice of local government on both sides of the border and identify key areas of opportunity. The goal is to increase dialogue and strengthen strategic cross-border economic development efforts.

For decades, communities along the Arizona and Sonora border have experienced the daily movement of goods and people and transacting business, shopping and entertainment activity. More than 46 million people, 17 million cars, and 760,000 trucks crossed the Arizona-Mexico border in two-way traffic in 2015¹. Both states have long considered the border a potential gateway to shared economic growth. Trade volume between Arizona and Mexico reached \$16.8 billion in imports and exports in 2015 (up almost \$1 billion from 2014). In addition, total trade between Arizona and Sonora through all ports and all modes of transport reached approximately \$6.1 billion in 2015².

The existing 75-mile limit on travel inside Arizona has been in effect since 1999 when it was last changed to expand it from the original 25-mile zone. This expansion enabled Mexican citizens to travel and shop as far from the border as Tucson. Those holders of a BCC who wish to travel beyond the 75-mile limit, however, are currently required to stop at the border to obtain an I-94 Visa. The BCC holder has already gone through a screening process more rigorous than the I-94 visa requirements. Eliminating this step could create a more expedited flow of tourism and business visitors holding BCCs. It would also ease long waiting times as well as the burden of redundant administrative processing.

¹ http://www.aztownhall.org/resources/Documents/108%20Arizona%20_%20Mexico%20Background%20Report.pdf

² http://transborder.bts.gov/programs/international/transborder/TBDR_QA.html



Tourism is Arizona's largest economic sector with 171,500 jobs statewide and an economic impact of \$20.9 billion. The majority of Mexican visitors to Arizona come from the state of Sonora. Economies in Arizona and Sonora could benefit greatly from an expanded travel and shopping zone. It would also allow more tourism from Mexico throughout the state of Arizona. A recent University of Arizona study identified that an expanded zone would generate an estimated \$181 million in additional spending, bringing the total spending of Mexican visitors to Arizona to nearly \$3.1 billion and a jobs impact of 31,856 jobs.

Together, we recognize that building greater connectivity between our communities and regions will help realize economic prosperity on both sides of the border. The Arizona-Sonora megaregion is globally competitive. By partnering, there is great opportunity to expand the development of key clusters and supply chains, tap into advanced research and development alongside world class manufacturing, and leverage neighboring logistical and business friendly ecosystems that will attract industry and allow us to compete effectively with other regions around the world.

This proposal is supported by regional planning agencies throughout Arizona, including the Maricopa Association of Governments and Pima Association of Governments—and significantly—those planning agencies and the City of Nogales that are already within the permitted travel zone. It is also supported by the Intertribal Council of Arizona and business groups such as the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

We hope you will give this proposal favorable consideration and that you will initiate a rulemaking for this change.

Sincerely,

Members of the *Ari-Son Megaregion Council*

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