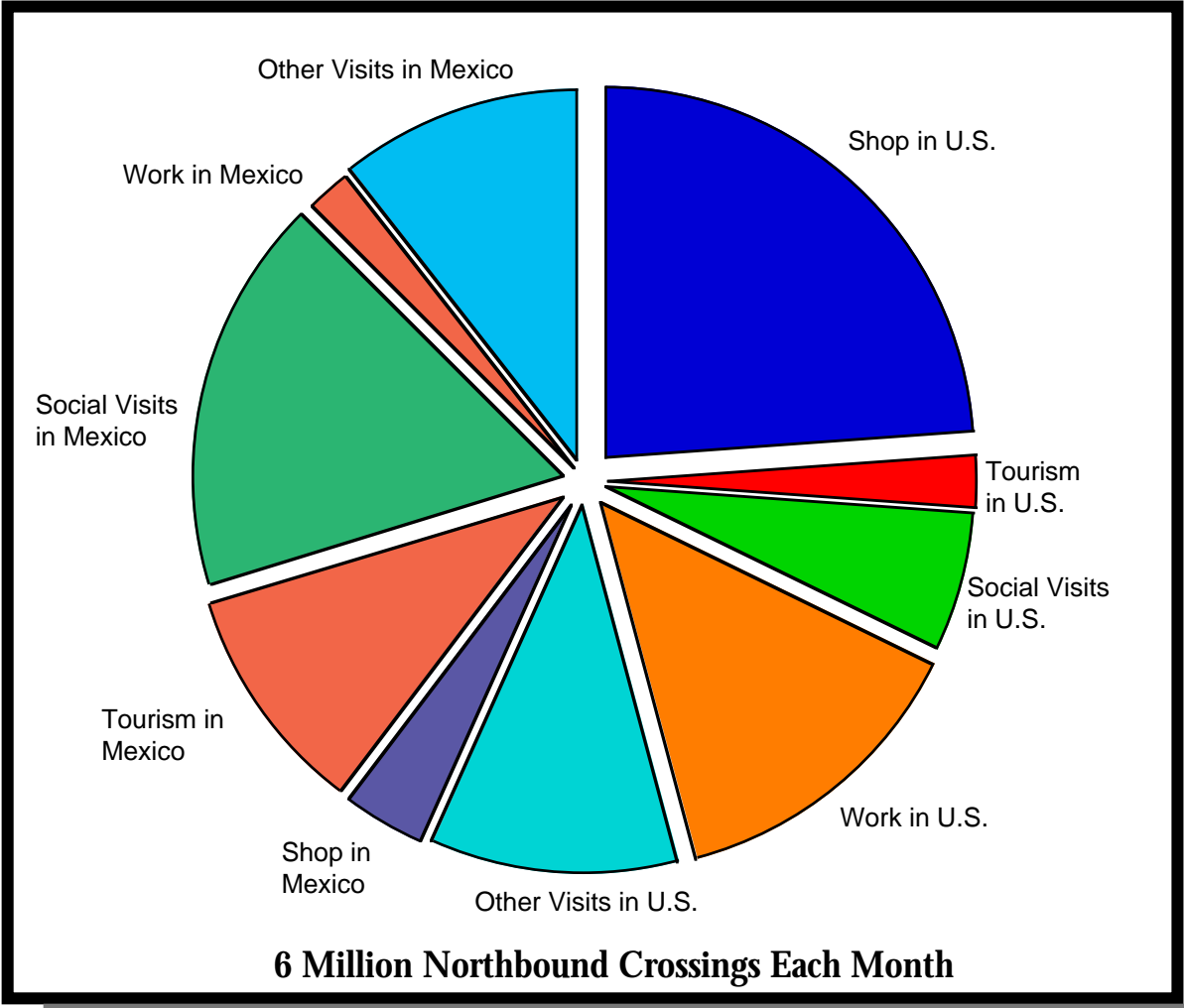


# WHO CROSSES THE BORDER: A View of the San Diego/Tijuana Metropolitan Region



**A Report of San Diego Dialogue  
April 1994**

\$12.50

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## INTRODUCTION

This booklet reports on two years of San Diego Dialogue research and discussion on border crossers as an element in the life of the San Diego/Tijuana community. The Dialogue is a community-based public policy program at the Division of Extended Studies and Public Service of the University of California, San Diego. Our research and public education mission encompasses all aspects of the economic, social, and political development of the San Diego/Baja California region.

In the summer of 1992, the Dialogue undertook a comprehensive survey of border crossers at the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry. Although five to six million northbound crossings were occurring each month at these facilities, almost no data existed on either the purpose of the crossings or the characteristics of the crossers.

With the assistance of students from the School of Communications at Universidad Iberoamericana in Playas de Tijuana, the Dialogue conducted nearly 6,000 interviews at all hours of the day and on all days of the week in the northbound vehicle and pedestrian lanes. A preliminary report of findings was issued in September 1992. This sample was designed to permit generalization of the results to all crossings. (See Appendix A for a full description of the process.)

Following this report, on October 14th, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) undertook a one-day experiment with the Dialogue to measure the impact on wait times of fully staffing the primary vehicle inspection gates at San Ysidro. The result was a day of "easy" crossings with a reduction in typical wait time per crossing from more than 20 minutes to less than 5 minutes. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Customs Service announced that it would provide increased staffing on a routine basis at both the Otay Mesa and San Ysidro facilities.

In the spring of 1993, while continuing to analyze our survey data, the Dialogue began a companion study on the contribution of Tijuana residents to taxable retail sales in San Diego county. One aim was to determine whether increased staffing and reduced wait times at the border in the fourth quarter of 1992 had a noticeable effect on retail sales. Another aim was to develop an econometric model for routine monitoring of the relationship between border crossings and retail sales. A preliminary report on this study was issued in November 1993.

The present report serves three purposes. First, it provides a convenient summary of previous reports along with important new findings. Second, it uses the Dialogue's border crossing studies to identify the many ways in which San Diego and Tijuana are becoming an integrated metropolitan community. Finally, it recommends several steps which would make it easier to cross the border to the great benefit of the region as a whole and the hundreds of thousands of individuals who are frequent crossers.

### **Acknowledgments:**

Dr. Millicent Cox, the Dialogue's Research Associate, designed and supervised the survey of border crossers. She also developed the econometric model for measuring the impact of border crossers on taxable retail sales in San Diego County and conducted this research. We are also grateful for the assistance of a large number of people on both sides of the border, including Lic. Agustín Rozada Rebollar, Rector of Universidad Iberoamericana; Lic. Cecilia Castellanos Barone, chair of the Department of Communications at Iberoamericana; the district offices of the Mexican Customs Service and Immigration Service; the district offices of the U.S. Customs Service and Immigration and Naturalization Service; the police department of the City of Tijuana; and the following students from Iberoamericana: Maritza Ivonne Corrales Beltrán, Anna Claudia Torres Bonagura, Cynthia Ramírez Comparán, Fernanda Fontes Góngora, Saida Celia Muriel Hid, Ada Lorena Oliver, Nora E. Pérez, Francisco Javier Hernández Quezada, Luisa María Gómez de Silva Rodríguez, Sayola Ruvalcaba Ruvalcaba, Roxana Di Carlo Vega, and Sonia Lorena Arellano Zamora.

The Weingart Foundation generously supported all of the Dialogue's research on border crossers. The Greater San Diego Chamber of Commerce underwrote the cost of publishing this report. Luce, Forward, Hamilton & Scripps underwrote the cost of distribution.

## Part I

# Crossing the Border: An Overview

## **Sunrise to Sunset. Weekday to Weekend. The shifting pattern of border crossings reveals a bi-national community at work and play.**

Two land ports of entry provide legal access between San Diego and Tijuana. The port of entry at San Ysidro has 24 gates for vehicles and 16 for pedestrians, at least some of which are open 24 hours a day. Otay Mesa opens at 6:00 A.M. and closes at 10:00 P.M. Thirteen vehicular gates and 6 pedestrian gates are available at Otay Mesa but not always open.

Depending on traffic and staffing by agents of the U.S. Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, wait times can range from a few minutes to two hours or more. Experienced border crossers use day long traffic reports on the radio to estimate the best times for crossing.

The vehicle lines start to form at San Ysidro at about 5:00 A.M. on weekdays. These vehicles are occupied primarily by workers crossing to a variety of jobs in San Diego. At Otay Mesa, workers seeking to be first in line arrive at 4:30 A.M., napping or playing cards until the gates open an hour and a half later.

As the day progresses, the crossers shift from those going to jobs to those crossing primarily for other reasons — shopping, school, and errands. By mid-afternoon at Otay Mesa, San Diegans who are managers and engineers from the maquiladora plants start their return home. At San Ysidro, Mexican families headed to Chula Vista to shop mingle with Americans who have spent the day in Mexico.

On weekday evenings, the social and leisure activities offered by both cities attract large numbers of border crossers.

On Saturday and Sunday in the early hours, crossers are likely to be returning to San Diego from dates and parties. As the day wears on, entire families coming to the zoo or to shop are prominent among those waiting to cross. At dusk on the weekend, the line is dominated by Americans who have visited Mexico for recreational and leisure activities, sprinkled with a few hardworking maquiladora managers.

The pedestrian lanes undergo similar changes, especially on Saturday and Sunday afternoons at San Ysidro when they are crowded with Americans who have parked their cars in the lots just north of the border and walked in to Tijuana.

The Otay Mesa pedestrian lanes are used primarily by passengers in cross-border buses who are required to disembark and then reboard on the American side. The few true pedestrian border crossers who use the Otay Mesa crossing are persons who work in the businesses just north of the border or for the maquiladora plants.

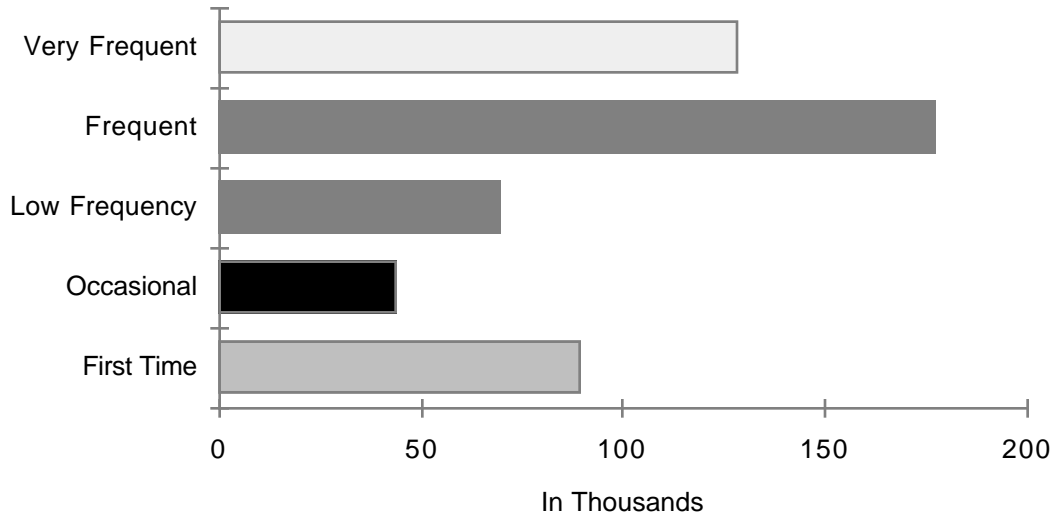
## **The vast majority of all crossings at Otay Mesa and San Ysidro are made by residents of the San Diego/Tijuana metropolitan area.**

- In a typical month, there are 5 to 6 million legal crossings northbound at Otay Mesa and San Ysidro. A “crossing” is defined as one person making a one way trip, whether on foot or in a vehicle. For example, two people in a car equals two crossings.
- 96% of these crossings are made by residents of the greater San Diego/Tijuana region.

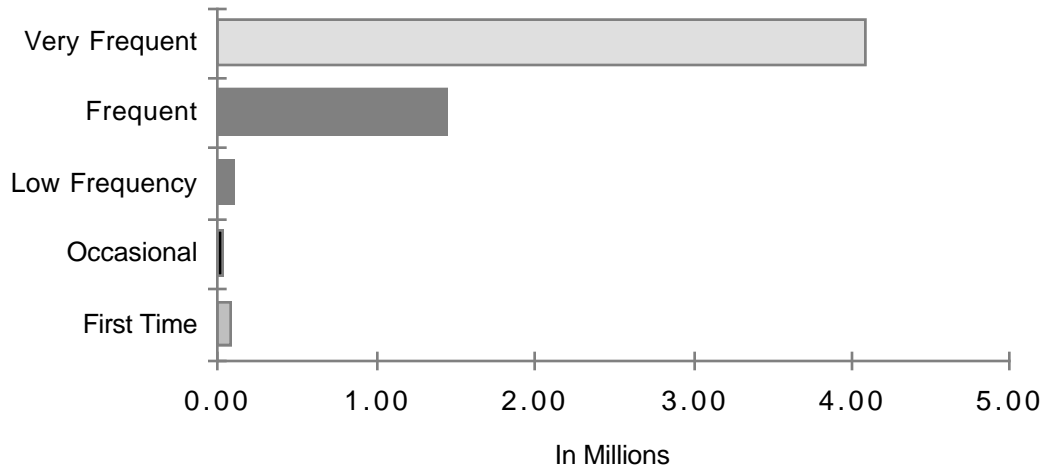
## **Most of the crossings are made by frequent crossers.**

- The 5 to 6 million monthly northbound border crossings are made by approximately 521,000 individuals.
- The largest group are frequent crossers, or people who cross the border between 4 and 19 times per month. There are 182,000 frequent crossers.
- The second largest group are very frequent crossers, or people who cross the border at least 20 times per month. There are 131,000 very frequent crossers.
- Together, the frequent and very frequent crossers comprise 60% of all crossers and account for 96% of all crossings.
- The remaining individuals are first time crossers (90,000), occasional crossers — less than one time per month (46,000), or low frequency crossers — 1 to 3 times per month (72,000). Together, they account for only 4% of the crossings.

### Number of Individuals by Frequency of Crossing



### Number of Monthly Northbound Crossings Accounted for by Frequent Crossssers





## **Mexican citizens who use the land border crossings to enter San Diego cross more frequently on average than American citizens.**

- Mexican citizens cross on average 15 times a month. American citizens cross on average 8 times a month.
- 56% of the individuals who cross the border each month are Mexican citizens. They account for 69% of the crossings.
- 41% of the individuals who cross the border each month are American citizens. They account for 29% of the crossings.

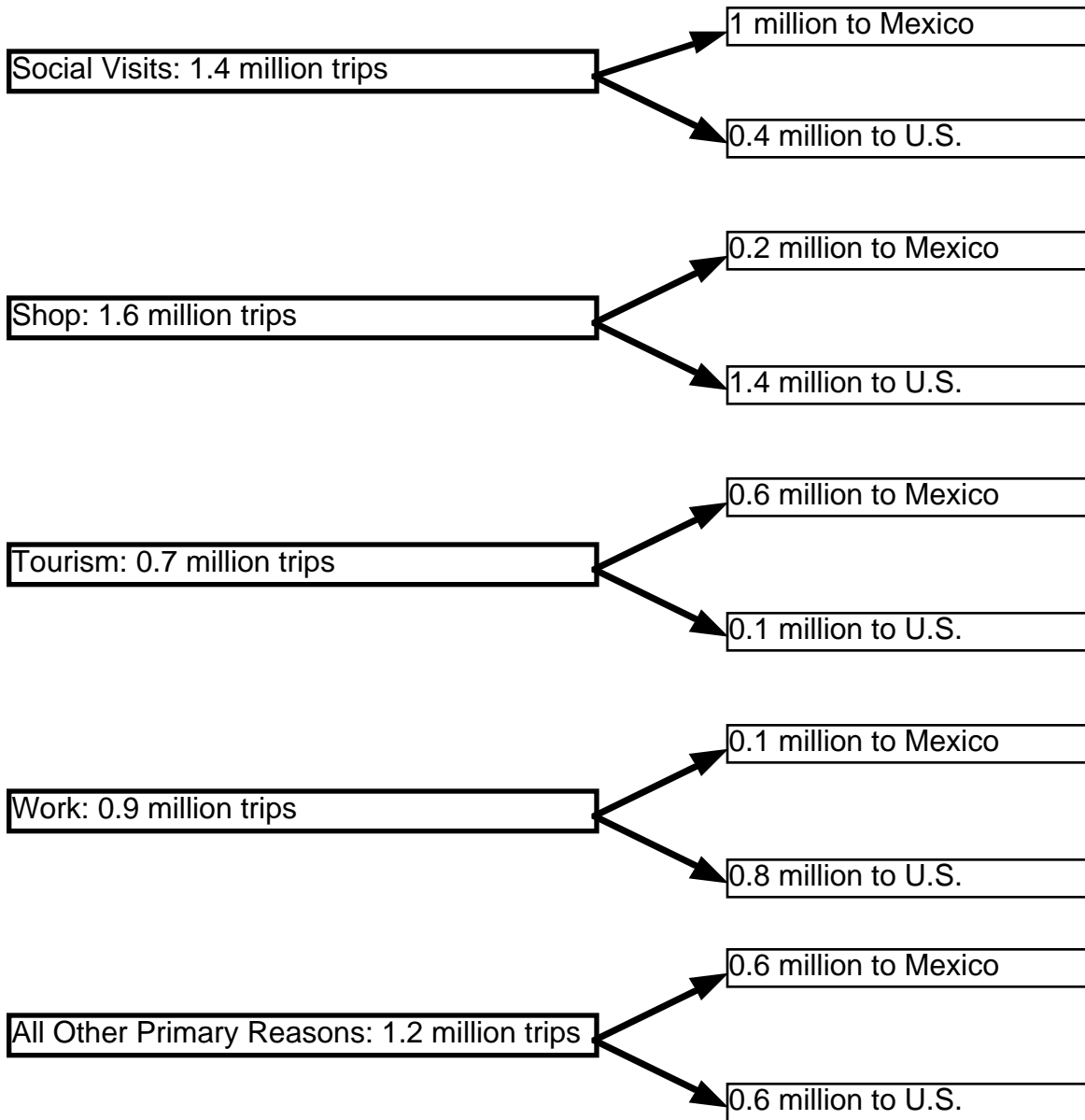
## **Most crossings are made by residents of Mexico visiting the United States.**

- Mexican residents make 3.4 million visits to the U.S. through the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry each month. These visits account for 56.5% of all crossings.
- U.S. residents make 2.6 million visits to Mexico through the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry each month. These visits account for 43.5% of all crossings.

## **The desire to visit with family or friends is the single most frequently given reason for crossing the border.**

- Social visits are associated with 2.4 million trips each month, and are the primary reason for 1.4 million of these trips.
- Shopping is associated with 1.8 border crossings per month, and is the primary reason for 1.6 million crossings.
- 700,000 trips are for tourism.
- 500,000 trips are for work.
- 1.2 million trips are for miscellaneous other purposes.

## Primary Purpose for Crossing the Border

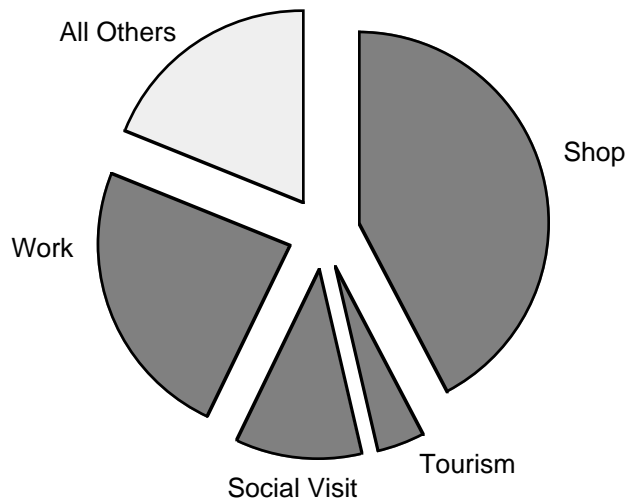


Total Monthly Northbound Crossings: 5.8 million trips

**The primary purpose stated for crossing the border to visit the U.S. is shopping.**

- 42% of these trips are for shopping.
- 24% are for work.
- 4 % are for tourism.
- 11% are for social visits.
- 19% are for all other purposes.

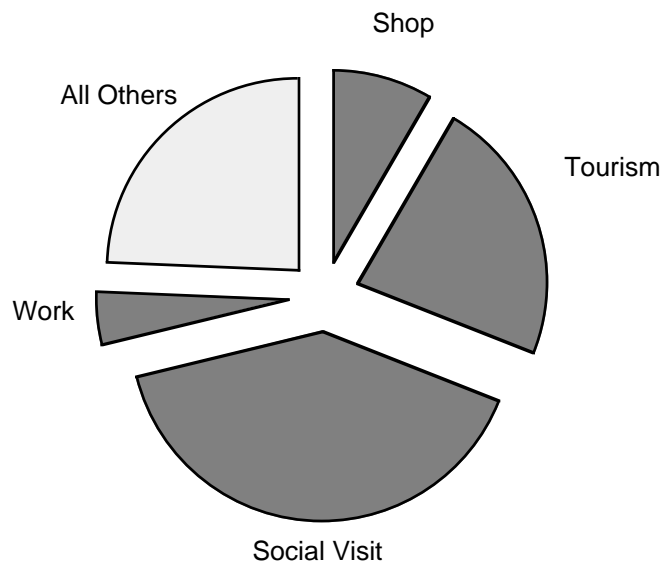
**Purpose for Trip to U.S.**



## The primary purpose stated for crossing the border to visit Mexico is to make a social visit.

- 40% of these trips are for social visits.
- 23% are for tourism.
- 9% are for shopping.
- 4% are for work.
- 24% are for all other purposes.

**Purpose for Trip to Mexico**



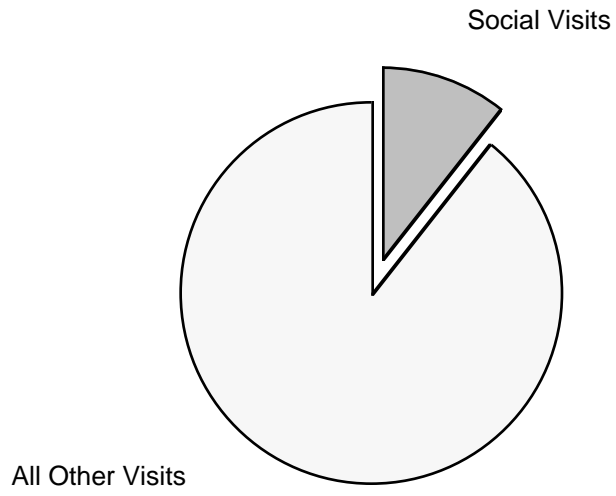
## **Part II**

### **Crossing the Border To See Family and Friends**

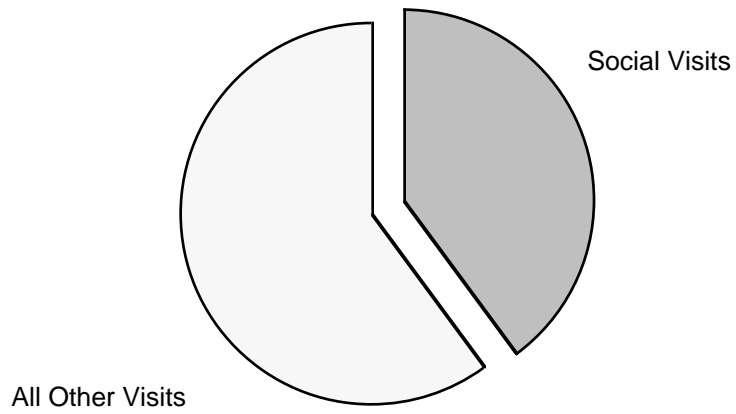
**The desire to visit with family or friends is the single most frequently given reason for crossing the border. It plays a role in 2.4 million of the 6 million monthly trips, and is the primary reason for almost one and a half million of these trips.**

- There are approximately one million social visits southbound and 400,000 visits northbound each month.
- The imbalance in the direction of social visits is due primarily to the fact that Mexican citizens living in Tijuana cannot readily acquire documents to cross the border northbound. The task of traveling to maintain family and social ties therefore falls mainly upon Mexican-Americans and Mexicans with work permits living in San Diego and points north.
- Social visits to the U.S. are only 15% of all northbound border-crossing trips. They are typically short visits of less than 6 hours, and are likely to be associated with other reasons for crossing the border such as shopping and entertainment.
- Social visits to Mexico are 40% of all southbound border-crossing trips. They are typically long visits often lasting more than a day. They are also likely to be associated with gifts of money to relatives.

**Social Visits as a Share of All Visits to the U.S.**



**Social Visits as a Share of All Visits to Mexico**



## **Cross-border ties of family and friendship generate a complex pattern of border crossing activities. The complexity is illustrated by the following stories:**

- It is Tuesday morning about 11:00 A.M. at Otay Mesa. A friendly woman in her forties explains that she lives with her family in Carlsbad. Her husband was born in California and his parents are American citizens. She was born in Mexico and is a naturalized citizen. Her children were all born in California. She says that it is important to her that her children continue to know their heritage, so she drives to Tijuana every Tuesday to buy Mexican bread. “The bread from Mexico really does taste different,” she says.
- On a Thursday evening waiting to cross at San Ysidro, a blond mother is in a Volvo station wagon with her husband and two children. They explain that they live in Escondido, went to Mexico to have dinner at the home of family friends, and spent no money. “I hope you do believe me,” the mother says. “We **really** do have friends who live in Tijuana. We visit in each other’s homes a lot. I feel a little guilty about not spending any money to help the economy here. But friendships are also very important across the border.”
- In the bustle of a warm Tuesday afternoon at the San Ysidro crossing, a well-dressed Mexican woman with hat and gloves stands out. She says she crosses the border once a week to have coffee with a sister who lives in Chula Vista. “It is special to be able to have a pleasant hour alone with your sister once a week,” she says, “but the time it takes to cross the border sometimes means that I do not have as long as I would like to spend with her.” She tries to combine the visit with important errands for her family, she says, since the border wait can be long and “nobody wants to sit in the car that much.”

- One Saturday noon in slow-moving traffic at the San Ysidro crossing, a young American man has time to explain what he will be doing that day. He lives with his family in Chula Vista, and they are all American citizens. Today is his sister's *quinceañera* celebration. Because of all the festivities associated with a Mexican girl's fifteenth birthday, he will have to make at least 5 or 6 northbound crossings before the last one at 2:00 or 3:00 A.M. Sunday.

The church service will be in National City, and the party in Tijuana. There are many last minute details to attend to at both sites. The helpful brother's first trip to Tijuana early in the morning had been to pick up his sister's dress and deliver some party goods. At noon, he is returning from delivering his sister to have her make-up done. He will return to Tijuana in a few hours to pick up his sister and some relatives and take them to the church in National City. After the church service, he expects several trips helping people to get back and forth from church to party to home. He plans to stay until the very end of the party himself despite at least a 1 hour wait at the border returning to the U.S. early Sunday morning.

- For many young people in San Diego and Tijuana, crossing the border is part of dating. Weekend afternoons and evenings at both San Ysidro and Otay Mesa, young men tell of crossing to meet dates in the north or returning from dates in the south. One said he was relieved that his blind date failed to show up. Several young women explain that they would rather try to meet boys in Mexico because "they are nicer than the boys in San Diego." Many say that a date or party commonly involves activities on both sides of the border.
- One Sunday afternoon at Otay Mesa, a family of six from Los Angeles is on their way home after visiting the children's grandparents in Ensenada. "The waits at the border are often as long as the entire trip from the border to our home," the mother says. "This is very hard on the children. We wish we could visit the grandparents more."

## **Part III**

# **Crossing the Border To Work in San Diego**

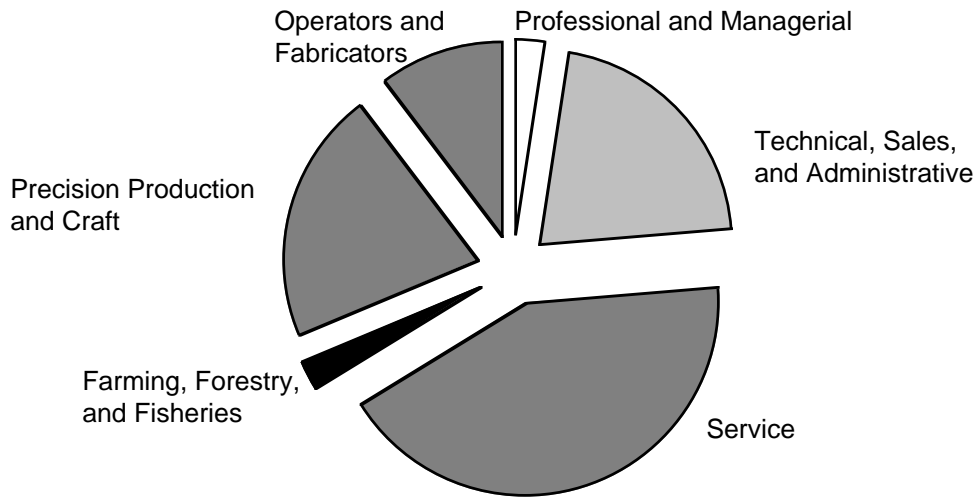
## **Crossing the border to work in San Diego is a significant factor in the economies of both San Diego and Tijuana.**

- 800,000 crossings are made each month by approximately 40,000 people coming to work in the San Diego area.
- These workers earn an estimated \$650 million a year in wage and salary income.

## **Border crossers are employed in a wide variety of positions in San Diego.**

- The largest group of job crossings are by workers in the service sector (44%). These crossers — nearly 18,000 people — include firefighters, security guards, cooks, bartenders and waiters.
- Technical, Sales and Administrative Occupations account for 20% of the job crossings. These crossers — about 8,000 individuals — include cashiers, sales people, draftsmen, laboratory technicians, and computer programmers.
- Precision Production and Craft Occupations account for another 20% of the job crossings. These crossers — about 8,000 people — include carpenters, skilled construction workers and shipbuilders.
- Operators and Fabricators account for 10% of the job crossings; these crossers — about 4,000 people — include truck drivers and carpet layers.
- Farming, Forestry, and Fisheries account for only 2% of the job crossings. These crossers — about 800 people — include fishermen, nurserymen and landscapers.
- Professional and Managerial Occupations account for only 2% of the job crossings. These crossers — about 800 individuals — include architects and business owners.

## Border Crossing Events for Work by Occupation of Crosser



## Increasingly, U.S. citizens are choosing to live in Tijuana while working in San Diego.

- Approximately 10,000 of the 40,000 individuals who cross to work are American citizens, based on an analysis of border crossing documents used by early-morning weekday crossers.
- Some of these American citizens have flextime schedules and travel greater distances to their job sites. One example is a programmer who worked in Anaheim 3 days a week and enjoyed surfing at Rosarito the other 4 days.

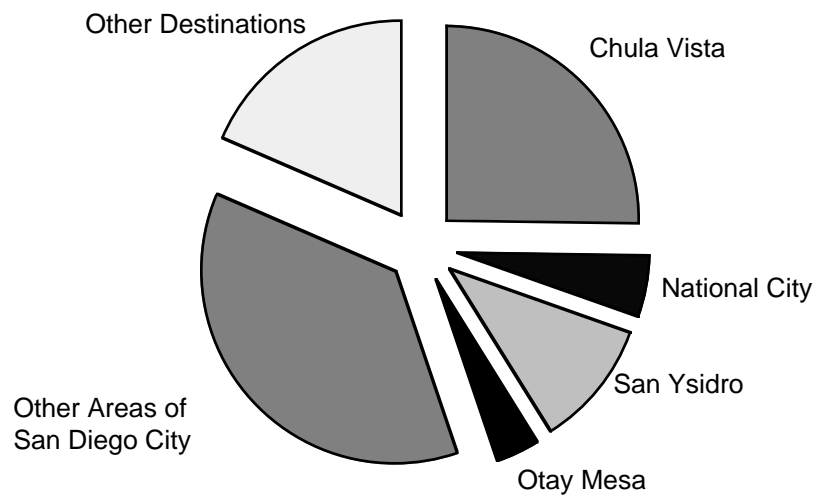
## **People coming to work in San Diego are a significant share of the border crossers on weekdays in the mornings.**

- 40% of the visits to the U.S. on weekday mornings are people coming to work.
- Coming to work accounts for less than 10% of the crossings to visit the U.S. on weekday afternoons and on weekends.

## **Tijuanans work in all areas of San Diego.**

- While the primary destinations for workers who cross the border are in the South Bay area, a significant number are farther north in San Diego County. A few crossers reported work destinations in Orange County with flex-time work schedules and some telecommuting.
- The City of San Diego is the destination for just over one half of the crossings to work. San Ysidro receives 11% and Otay Mesa receives 5% of the trips, accounting together for a third of the work trips to the City of San Diego. Other frequent destinations within the city limits include La Jolla, Point Loma, Sorrento Valley, Mira Mesa, and Kearny Mesa.
- Chula Vista is the destination for one quarter of the trips for work.
- National City receives 5% of all trips north to work, with the remaining 20% spread across the county and farther north.

### Destinations of Crossings for Work



## Part IV

### Crossing to San Diego For Shopping and Recreation

**Shopping in San Diego is an integral part of the life of many Tijuans, and they in turn are an important part of the San Diego economy.**

- Mexican residents make one and a half million trips into the San Diego area each month for the primary purpose of shopping.
- Approximately one million of those trips are made *solely* for the purpose of shopping.
- There are at least 50,000 and probably closer to 150,000 residents of Mexico who visit San Diego on a regular basis to shop, crossing the border at Otay Mesa or San Ysidro.

**Tijuana area residents expect to spend \$2.8 billion in the U.S. annually. This is a conservative estimate.**

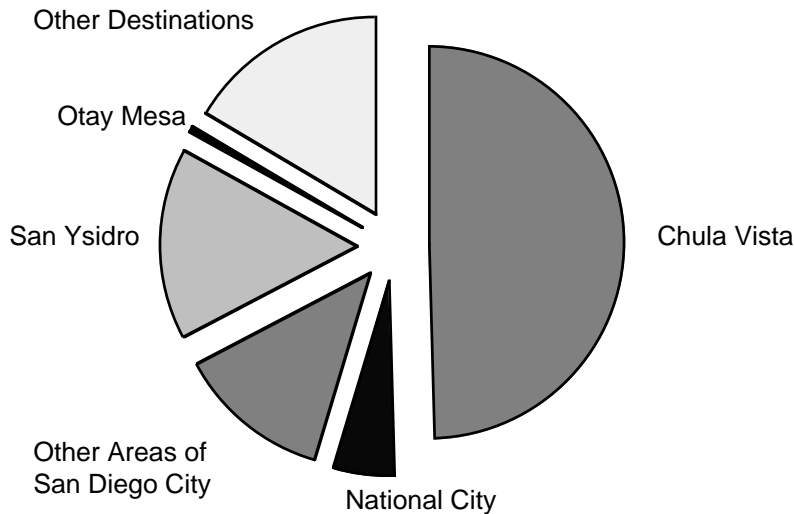
- The \$2.8 billion estimate includes not only retail store shopping but also expenditures for parking, snacks or coffee, school tuition and books, medical and dental expenses, meals in restaurants, tickets for admissions to events and museums, and purchases of gasoline. Border crossers also buy other services during their trips to San Diego, including legal, actuarial and postal services.
- When asked at the northbound ports of entry as part of a survey undertaken by San Diego Dialogue, those on their way to destinations in the U.S. occasionally reported very high expected expenditures, up to \$100,000. All amounts over \$10,000 were excluded from this tabulation.
- Border crossers who cross for work or other regular activity frequently did not report expected expenditures for a tank of gas or a cup of coffee, contributing to the conservative nature of this estimate.
- \$50 was frequently given as the expected expenditure, which recognizes the official Mexican Customs limit on what can be brought back duty-free.

- Some of the largest expenditures were expected to be made in distant places, including Los Angeles and Arizona; however, the vast majority of the border crossings are to destinations close to the border with expenditures in the immediate border region.

**The primary shopping destinations for northbound cross-border shoppers are in the South Bay area of San Diego County, along the two northbound freeways.**

- Chula Vista is the most frequent destination for shoppers who cross the border, with almost 50% of the shoppers anticipating a first stop in Chula Vista.
- 16% of the shopping trips involve plans to go to San Ysidro.
- Other major shopping destinations include the stores of National City and Otay Mesa and the regional malls closest to the border, including Plaza Bonita, Horton Plaza, Fashion Valley and Mission Valley.

**Border Crossing Events by Shopping Destination**



**Border crossers are a very significant element in the South Bay economy, increasing the size of the market by perhaps 50%.**

- The population of the South Bay region of San Diego is 300,000 people.
- This region receives one million shopping visits from border crossers each month from perhaps as many 150,000 different individuals.

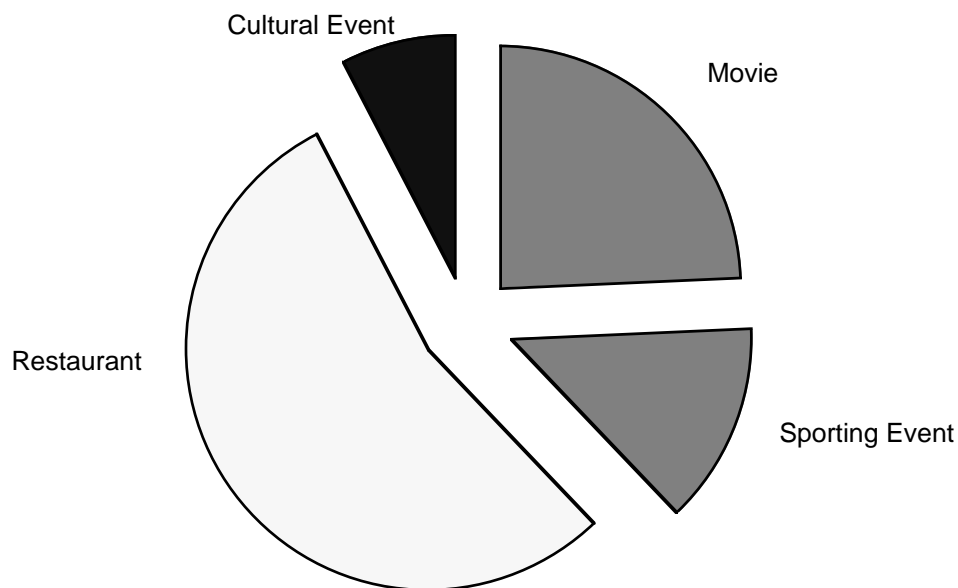
**San Diego is attractive as a consumer market to residents of Mexico for a combination of reasons.**

- Some stores in San Diego have a greater variety of goods readily available. For example, the auto parts stores in Otay Mesa and San Ysidro benefit from customers who like to take advantage of the quick distribution of parts from the main warehouse instead of waiting two weeks in Tijuana for a \$20 item.
- For some items, perceived quality is an important part of the purchase decision: high quality meat, fresh produce without pesticides, and good quality toilet paper, for example, are more readily available in San Diego than in Tijuana.
- For some shoppers, price combined with availability and quality provides a strong incentive to put up with the waits at the border to come to San Diego to buy. The Price Club in Chula Vista estimates that 70% of its sales are to residents of Mexico.
- The three most commonly cited shopping attractions, reflecting the above combination of advantages, are the Price Club, Ralph's and Von's.

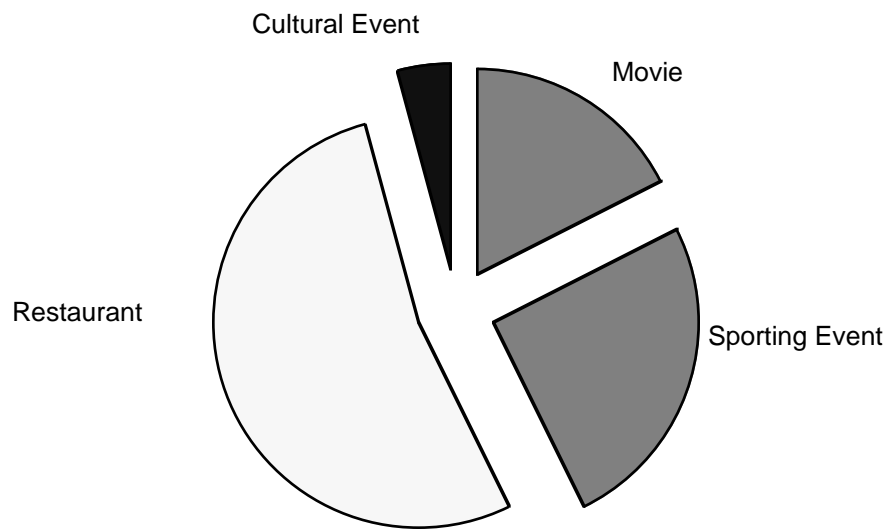
## Leisure and recreational attractions in San Diego regularly draw large numbers of Tijuanaans across the border.

- Tijuanaans make 200,000 northbound crossings each month where the primary or secondary purpose is to attend cultural, sporting, and other entertainment events, including dining out.
- These 200,000 crossings account for 2% of the weekday and 6% of the weekend crossings.
- The most frequently mentioned type of attraction is a sporting event, typically on the weekend.
- Crossing to see a movie is more likely to happen on the weekends.
- Crossing for cultural events, such as visiting an art gallery or museum or attending a concert or play, is more likely to be a primary purpose on the weekdays, and a secondary purpose on weekends.

### Special Events as a Primary Reason for Visiting San Diego



## Special Events as Primary and Secondary Reasons for Visiting San Diego



## Reducing waits at the border can increase sales in San Diego.

- \$5 to \$7 million in additional taxable retail sales in the South Bay region can be attributed to reduced wait times at the border in the fourth quarter of 1992, according to a San Diego Dialogue study.
- This represents a 5% increase above what would have been expected. While the Dialogue study did not measure the countywide impact, it is not unreasonable to expect similar results.

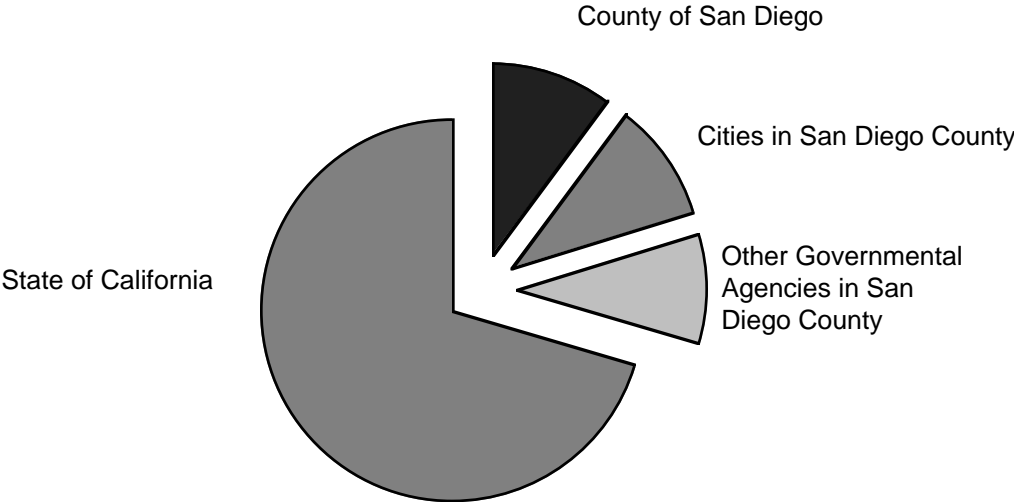
## **Cross-Border shoppers pay over \$100 million a year in sales taxes on the goods they purchase in San Diego County.**

- Approximately \$1.5 billion is spent in San Diego County on goods subject to California sales tax by border crossers who are visiting the U.S.
- Sales tax revenue for all levels of government in California from those purchases is \$120 million.
- Other governmental agencies which receive revenue from sales taxes include transportation and mental health agencies.

### **DISTRIBUTION OF SALES TAX REVENUES FROM BORDER CROSSERS**

|   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| <b>State of CALIFORNIA</b>                  | <b>\$93 million</b>   |
| <b>County of SAN DIEGO</b>                  | <b>\$ 2 million</b>   |
| <b>City of SAN DIEGO</b>                    | <b>\$ 7 million</b>   |
| <b>City of CHULA VISTA</b>                  | <b>\$ .7 million</b>  |
| <b>City of NATIONAL CITY</b>                | <b>\$ .6 million</b>  |
| <b>All other cities in San Diego County</b> | <b>\$ 5.7 million</b> |
| <b>Other governmental agencies</b>          | <b>\$12 million</b>   |

**Distribution of Sales Tax Revenues Attributed to Border Crossers**



## Part V

# Crossing the Border To Tijuana

## **Tijuana and its environs are an important facet in the economic, social and leisure life of San Diegans.**

- The reasons for border crossing trips to Tijuana are the same as the reasons for border crossing trips to San Diego: social visits, tourism, work, shopping, child care, schooling, research, business or political meetings, attending cultural, sporting or religious events, visiting the doctor or the dentist, and chauffeuring to the airport. These are also the same reasons for trips within any major metropolitan area.
- Overall, 2.6 million trips are made to visit the Tijuana area each month through Otay Mesa and San Ysidro.
- Approximately one-half million trips are made each month from San Diego to Tijuana for work and business-related activities.
- Approximately two million crossings each month are made in order for San Diego residents and visitors to participate in leisure and recreational activities in Mexico. The availability of these opportunities enhances the quality of life in our region.

## **As compared to trips from Tijuana to San Diego, trips from San Diego to Tijuana are made by a greater number of different individuals who are also on average less frequent crossers.**

- 30% of the trips to Tijuana are made by individuals who are crossing the border for the first time or less frequently than once a month. Only 2% of the trips to San Diego are made by individuals who are crossing for the first time or less frequently than once a month.
- Very frequent crossers (those crossing at least 20 times or more each month) account for only 15% of the visits to Tijuana but 40% of the visits to San Diego.
- Trips to Tijuana are made by more different individuals than are trips to San Diego. There are approximately 300,000 different individuals crossing the border each month to Tijuana from San Diego and

200,000 different individuals crossing to San Diego.

## **Expenditures reported by visitors returning from Mexico totaled at least \$2.6 billion a year.**

- This is a conservative estimate. Extremely large reported expenditures were excluded from the analysis. Unlike the estimate for expenditures in the U.S., however, this estimate benefits from being the report of a completed expenditure, not an expected one.

## **The desire “to see Mexico” accounts for less than one-quarter of all southbound trips across the border.**

- General tourism (that is, seeing the sights) is given for 23% of the southbound trips. More specific tourist-related activities — eating in restaurants, attending sporting events, gambling — accounts for an additional 12% of the trips.
- Frequent crossers rarely give general tourism or tourist-related activities as their reason for crossing.
- The duration of tourist visits ranges from 15 minutes to as long as 2 weeks. Median visit times for those crossing at San Ysidro are very short: one-half hour on weekdays, and 1 hour on weekends. Tourists crossing at Otay Mesa have median trip times of 10 hours, which is significantly longer than for those crossing at San Ysidro.
- Tourists visiting Mexico dominate the pedestrian inspection lanes at San Ysidro on weekend afternoons. These tourists fit the classical stereotype of one-time visitors to Mexico. Tourists in automobiles are more likely to have made a prior border crossing.

**The development of the maquiladora industries in Tijuana is associated with San Diego as an attractive residential community for managers and engineers who cross regularly to their jobs.**

- Approximately 100,000 northbound trips across the border are made each month by workers returning from jobs in Mexico.
- A typical trip to Mexico for work is not associated with expenditures of any money.
- Americans report a “wait time burnout” for employees who need to cross the border daily. Some firms provide van service from the Otay Mesa crossing to the plant and returning to the crossing in the afternoon. This reduces the wait times at the border for employees returning home to San Diego, who then walk across the border.

**As reported in a previous section, social visits are the most significant reason for trips to Mexico.**

- Over one million crossing events each month are primarily for social visits. An additional 30,000 crossings are made primarily for other purposes but include a social visit as a secondary reason.
- More than 50% of the trips for social visits each month are associated with expenditures of less than \$25 in Mexico. Because there are so many social visits to Mexico, the total money spent as part of such trips is approximately \$1.5 billion a year.
- Frequent crossers (individuals crossing at least 4 times a month but not more than 19 times a month) account for nearly 45% of the social visits. Individuals who cross the border 1 to 3 times a month account for 25% of the social visits, and individuals crossing less than once a month account for 17% of the social visits.

## **San Diego Dialogue's survey of visits from San Diego to Tijuana was not able to include several important questions.**

- Survey data do not include information on the occupation or place of work for work-related trips, or a shopping destination if the trip purpose was to shop.
- Better information is needed about the first time crossers. Are they likely to become frequent crossers and under what conditions? Are they residents of San Diego or of the Los Angeles area? Or are they visitors to Southern California? The same kind of information is needed about occasional crossers.

## **Part VI**

# **Border Crossing And Law Enforcement Issues**

## **Most countries defend their borders by asserting the right to examine those who seek entry.**

- The 16 mile stretch of land border from the Pacific Ocean to the Otay Mountains is the busiest sector of the U.S. land border.
- This region has 14 miles of fence and two legal ports of entry. The U.S. Border Patrol currently employs 1,000 agents in the San Diego Sector to patrol the border outside of the ports of entry. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the U.S. Customs Service share operating authority at the primary inspection gates and have a total staff of approximately 600 for their local offices.

## **In order to cross an international border, an individual is normally required to demonstrate citizenship of the receiving country or permission to visit.**

- In the case of entering the U.S. from Mexico, American citizens are frequently permitted to return to the U.S. without demonstrating proof of citizenship — just verbally asserting it.
- Mexican nationals are required to have some form of visa (permission to visit the U.S.).

## **At San Ysidro and Otay Mesa, most border crossers carry some form of citizenship or travel documentation.**

- 27% of all crossings are made by individuals who hold a “Green Card,” or Permanent Resident Alien status, which permits the holder to reside and work in the U.S.
- 21% of all crossings are made by individuals who hold a Border Crossing Card, a form of visa issued by the INS to Mexican residents of the immediate border area who have demonstrated “stable residency” in the area. This visa permits the holder to travel within 25 miles of the border and remain for up to 72 hours. This visa does not allow the holder to work in the U.S. (Upon application, “permits” may be issued at the ports of entry for trips farther into the U.S. or of

- greater duration.)
- 16% of the crossings are accomplished by individuals who carry a passport. Depending on the issuing country and the purpose for visiting the U.S., the passport may or may not include a visa for the visit to the U.S. Some American citizens carry passports as their identification for the authorities.
  - 11% of the crossings are accomplished by individuals who rely upon other documents, including “amnesty cards,” naturalization cards, birth certificates, citizenship documents issued by the U.S. State Department, and a variety of temporary papers.
  - 25% of the crossings are accomplished by individuals who do not carry any sort of travel document or rely on their “American ID.” Typically, they use a driver’s license although fishing licenses, school ID’s, and voter cards are also common.

**It is estimated that in a typical month fewer than 10,000 people will be denied admission or arrested at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa. This is fifteen hundredths of one percent (0.15%) of the number permitted entry.**

- Denial of admission, as distinct from arrest, can be for a variety of reasons and can result in the admission of the individual legally to the U.S. later in the day or on the next day. The primary reasons for denial of admission are lack of adequate documentation, carrying forbidden agricultural products, or public health concerns.
- Arrests at the ports of entry are typically associated with failed attempts to smuggle people or drugs. There are an estimated 1,000 or fewer incidents of arrest each month. This is sixteen thousandths of one percent (0.016%) of the number of individuals permitted entry.
- Individuals denied admission may be detained for further processing. Some are arrested, but there are no good records of the number.

## **Using fake documents is a reason for denial of admissions to the U.S.**

- Eight hundredths of one percent (0.08%) of the attempts to enter the U.S. at the Otay Mesa and San Ysidro involve the confiscation of fraudulent documents.

## **Halting the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S. is a significant goal in inspections at the land border ports on the southwestern border.**

- In the period from October 1991 through September 1992, there were 1,452 drug seizures at all the San Diego and Imperial county ports of entry, including airports and seaports. Public records do not reveal how many of these seizures occurred specifically at the San Ysidro or Otay Mesa ports of entry. Nor do the records distinguish between seizures at the commercial, private passenger vehicle, or pedestrian inspection sites.
- The Border Patrol and Customs Service in San Diego and Imperial counties account for one-half of all the cocaine and two-thirds of the marijuana seized by federal agencies in California. These quantities represent 7% of the cocaine and 9% of the marijuana seized nationally by federal agents.
- Some of the largest drug seizures occur at the inspection sites for commercial truck crossings and in the mountainous border-crossing trails east of Otay Mesa.

## **Halting smuggling of individuals into the U.S. is also a significant goal in inspections at the legal ports of entry.**

- The Immigration and Naturalization Service reports the apprehension each month of approximately 300 “people smugglers” attempting to smuggle approximately 400 undocumented aliens at the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry.

## **Between the ports of entry, the Border Patrol makes approximately 50,000 apprehensions each month of undocumented aliens in the San Diego Sector.**

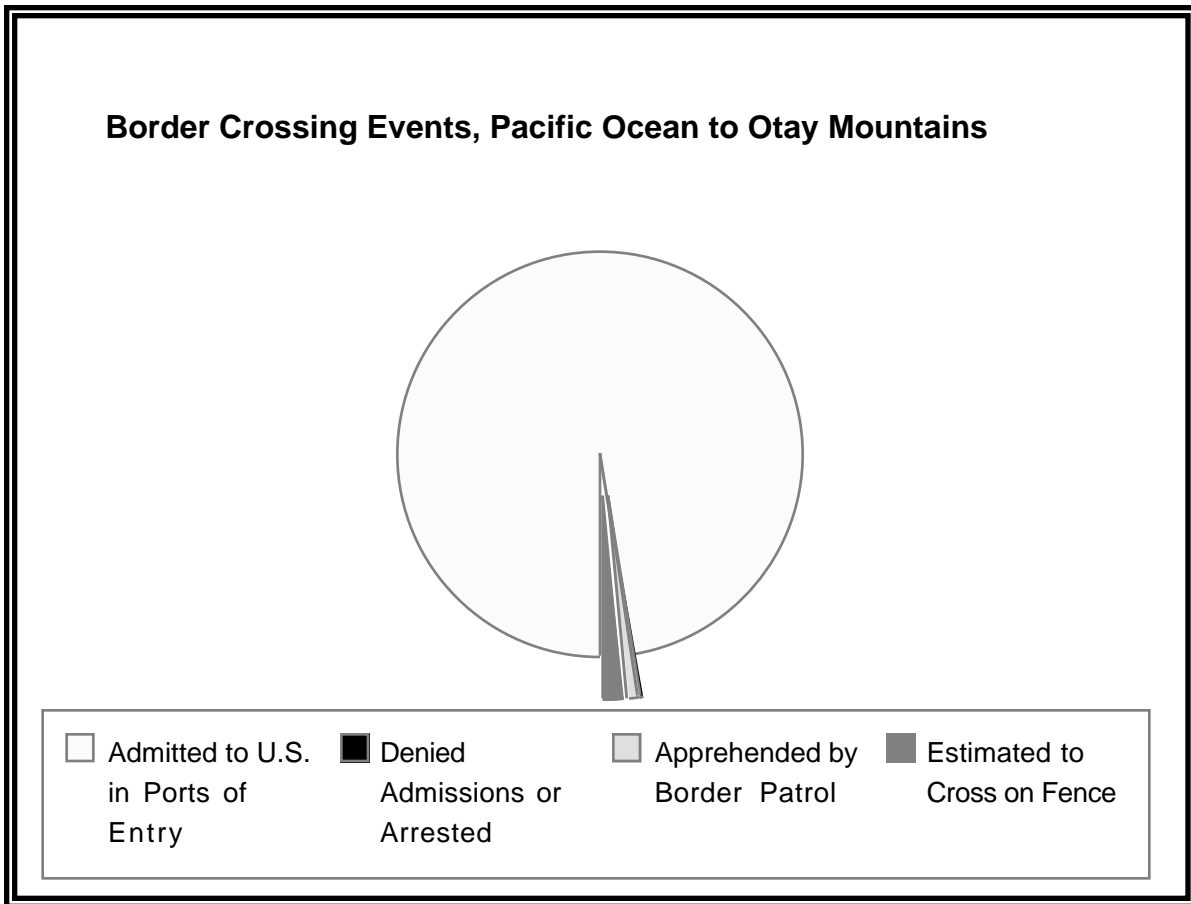
- Various estimates exist for the number of undocumented aliens who are successful at crossing the border along the fence. The Border Patrol's current estimate is one to two successful crossings for each apprehension. At this rate, there would be 50,000 to 100,000 completed crossings into the U.S. without documents each month.
- Undocumented crossings in the San Diego area are attempted for the following five reasons: 1.) Criminal activity, such as smuggling drugs or people across the border, which is currently estimated to characterize 5% of the undocumented crossers. 2.) Seeking permanent illegal residency somewhere in the U.S., or returning to an established illegal residence in the U.S. after visiting one's homeland. 3.) Seeking temporary work in the U.S. or Canada and expecting to return to Mexico after a period of time. 4.) Living in the Tijuana area with regular, illegal employment in San Diego but without proper documentation to make legal crossings. 5.) Brief visits with friends or relatives in the U.S. but without the required visas.
- The Border Patrol's estimate of successful crossings "on the fence"<sup>1</sup> is the highest such estimate available. Social service workers familiar with undocumented crossers suggest that as many as 8 to 10 apprehensions may happen before a person successfully crosses "on the fence" for the first time. If all apprehensions were of persons who were apprehended even 5 times before making one successful crossing, then the number of successful crossers would be 9,676 (rather than 48,381), or approximately the same number as those denied admissions or arrested in the legal ports of entry.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase "on the fence" refers to those persons who do not cross in the ports of entry. In many sections of the border, they are literally climbing the fence to enter the U.S.

### Border Crossing Events, August 1992, Pacific Ocean to Otay Mountains

| Events Resulting in                                | Number    | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Legal admission to the U.S.                        | 5,931,791 | 97.46   |
| Denied admission or arrested in the ports of entry | 9,056     | 0.15    |
| Apprehended by the Border Patrol                   | 48,381    | 0.79    |
| Estimated to cross "on the fence"                  | 96,762    | 1.60    |
| Total  | 6,085,990 | 100.00  |



## **Part VII**

# **Making It Easier To Cross the Border**

**Better use of technology can help to make San Diego/Tijuana a “user-friendly, binational city” for residents and visitors while improving cross-border law enforcement.**

- A cross-border **electronic bulletin board** would allow San Diego and Tijuana to share information easily about business and entertainment opportunities and civic affairs.
- A **Technologically Assisted Crosser Entry Program (TACE)** in designated lanes would reduce wait times at the border and make the inspection process more effective.
- **Computerization** of border crossing documents would facilitate the regulation of their use and, when appropriate, permit a wider distribution of border crossing privileges.

**An electronic bulletin board would provide interactive, multi-media information to facilitate activities of border crossers on both sides of the border.**

- With access to an electronic bulletin board from a personal computer or conveniently located kiosk, a potential border crosser would receive information about the other side of the border, including concerts, plays, museum and art shows, sporting events, amusement parks, sales, business opportunities, restaurants, and resorts. The bulletin board could also provide access to government reports and regulations, permits, licenses and official directories. Information could also be made available on medical services, schools and course catalogs, religious services, and job training programs.
- The multi-media and interactive features of the system would permit potential border crossers to hear and/or see their options for entertainment and restaurants; to purchase tickets with a view of the actual seats; to make reservations at a restaurant or resort knowing the menu, decor and facilities; and to receive maps and parking instructions in their preferred language.

- A business person considering opportunities on the other side of the border could learn about the governmental rules and regulations affecting the establishment of a new business and the location of the regulatory agencies. Preliminary applications could be submitted electronically.
- With Internet access, all the above information could be shared globally, encouraging those in the rest of the world to explore what is available in the region for business and recreation.

### **The Technologically Assisted Crosser Entry Program (TACE) would be especially attractive to frequent crossers.**

- The purpose of the TACE program is to eliminate waiting times for participants while easing congestion in all the regular vehicle lanes.
- TACE would also allow more efficient deployment of current inspectors and more efficient use of existing facilities.
- The program would require participants to clear a background check and pay a fee to cover costs for equipment at the inspection gates, background checks, machine readable identity cards and any other identification devices required in the vehicle itself.
- Technology now available would permit primary inspection without requiring the vehicle to stop and without compromising the law enforcement and inspection missions.
- Rapid computer search techniques could display “profile” information well before the vehicle crosses the inspection gates, flagging candidates for secondary inspection either randomly or by predetermined protocols.

## **San Diego Dialogue's survey indicates that frequent crossers are willing to pay for a program that reduces wait times.**

- Of the 600 frequent crossers who were asked if they would be willing to pay a fee of any kind to reduce waiting time, 92% said yes.
- 69% of these respondents said they would pay \$50, but no more.
- 10% of the respondents said they would pay more than \$50 per year.
- 14% of the respondents said the maximum they would pay annually was \$25.
- 97% of the respondents willing to pay a fee were also willing to be pre-cleared (or subject to a background check).

## **A TACE program would significantly reduce wait times in the vehicle lanes at Otay Mesa and San Ysidro.**

- Mexican citizens holding Green Cards and American citizens would be the easiest of the largest groups of crossers on which to do background checks for a pilot program.
- San Diego Dialogue estimates that Green Card holders and American citizens who cross the border at least 4 times a month number 129,000 people and account for 2.5 million crossings.
- Placing these groups of border crossers in a TACE program and removing them from the regular vehicle inspection lanes would dramatically reduce the lines.
  - Before 8:00 A.M. on weekdays at San Ysidro, 16% of the crossers are American citizens without travel documents and 36% hold Green Cards.
  - Before 8:00 A.M. on weekdays at Otay Mesa, 19% of the crossers are American citizens without travel documents and 42% hold Green Cards.

- At San Ysidro on the weekends, 6% of the early morning crossers are American citizens without travel documents and 44% are holders of Green Cards. On weekend afternoons, when the wait times are consistently long, 35% of the crossers are American citizens and 38% hold Green Cards.
- At Otay Mesa on the weekends, 12% of the early morning crossers are American citizens without travel documents and 37% are holders of Green Cards. On weekend afternoons, American citizens without travel documents are 25% of the waiting crossers and holders of Green Cards are 38% of the crossers.

### **Implementing a TACE would be a defense conversion project.**

- Many of the technologies that can assist border agents in monitoring the border are derived from military applications.
- Designing, manufacturing and installing these high-technology tools can create jobs for workers displaced by Defense Department reductions.
- Some of the jobs created by the implementation of such a program will be ongoing jobs: monitoring the functioning of the system, processing renewals, and new enrollments.

### **Using computers to record information about a document holder and the use of the document would allow inspectors to detect irregularities in crossing patterns more readily.**

- Computers can be used to check documents which are bar-coded, including many passports and visas. The current procedures used at the air and sea ports could be readily adapted to the pedestrian inspections at Otay Mesa and San Ysidro.

- Computers can be used to document patterns of use for individual cards and assist agents in recognizing a suspicious change in the use of a particular card.
- Computers can be used as well to record information about applicants for cards.

**In May 1992, the U.S. State Department and the Mexican Foreign Ministry discussed the issue of Border Crossing Cards and concluded that it was desirable to explore ways in which the U.S. could make it easier for Mexicans to obtain such cards.**

- Border Crossing Cards confer on residents of the immediate border area the privilege of crossing the border for a limited time and to a limited distance without a passport and visa. For a variety of reasons, they have not been very easy to get in the past. Additionally, statistics on the number of Border Crossing Cards issued and the number of applicants are not readily available.
- The process for obtaining a Border Crossing Card is straight forward: the resident of the area demonstrates that he/she is a “stable resident” of the border area with a variety of papers. The Immigration and Naturalization Service issues the card, which is good for 10 years. (Older cards had no expiration.)
- Recording information about the Border Crossing Card holder in the computer and using the bar-coded card to call that information up on the screen at inspection points is one way to monitor the use of the card while issuing them more widely.

- Other ways of regulating the use of border crossing cards include random checks of vehicles returning to Mexico (as is now done searching for stolen cars); using the computer to tabulate the frequency of presentation of the card as documentation for crossing the border; tracking the cars of cardholders by randomly issuing transponders at the inspection gates and collecting them when the car returns to Mexico.
- One benefit of these procedures would be greater public understanding of the granting of Border Crossing Cards.

### **The purpose of improving the cross-border commute and communications is to create a user-friendly, binational city.**

- The survey conducted by San Diego Dialogue has revealed the depth of cross-border social and business connections in the San Diego/Tijuana region.
- The border crossing experience is a deterrent to further development of these relationships and a significant burden for those who must actually make the crossing frequently.
- Improving the crossing experience for everyone by implementing a Technologically Assisted Crosser Entry Program and using technology more effectively at the inspection gates would be a step to improving cross-border relationships.
- Developing electronic means of sharing information about government, business and leisure activities on both sides of the border will contribute to an expanded regional perspective and result in more cross-border communication and travel.
- Greater interaction of residents from both sides of the border will contribute to a better understanding of the region.



# Appendix A

## Survey Methodology

San Diego Dialogue's survey of border crossers was conducted between June 9 and August 23, 1992, in the northbound lanes approaching the Otay Mesa and San Ysidro Ports of Entry. At the request of the U.S. Customs Service, all interviews were conducted on the Mexican side of the international boundary so as not to interfere with the U.S. inspection process.

A total of 5,663 interviews were held in either English or Spanish, depending on the preference of the respondent. Respondents included the drivers and passengers of private passenger vehicles, motorcyclists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Occupants of buses were not included as they are discharged at a special door leading directly into a pedestrian interview area which was not accessible to the interviewers. The occupants of buses are approximately 8% of all crossers.

**Random sampling process:** To ensure a random sample, interviewers followed a protocol for selecting respondents. Each interviewer was assigned a safe starting spot within one of the vehicle lanes where traffic was moving slowly and there were not significant lane changes. After completing the interview at that designated spot, the interviewer selected the vehicle at a comparable spot in the next lane, and so forth across all the lanes. If the waiting lines were too short to accomplish the interview without entering U.S. territory, then the interviewer moved to the last vehicle to enter the lane.

The protocol also included a procedure for selecting the respondent within a vehicle. In the first car approached, the designated respondent was the passenger farthest away from the driver; on subsequent interviews, the designation moved progressively closer to the driver. If there were no passengers, the driver was interviewed, and then on the next interview the designated respondent was again the passenger farthest away from the driver. If a child was selected as the respondent, the adult's permission was sought or the adult was asked to respond for the child. If the respondent was not willing to participate, the interviewer moved to the next vehicle.

In the pedestrian lanes at Otay Mesa, pedestrians were approached as they appeared since the flow of pedestrians was very low. At San Ysidro, a convenient starting point was selected, and 10 people heading to the crossing were counted, with the 10th one selected. The interviewer accompanied the pedestrian to the border to conduct the interview, then returned to the starting point and counted to 10 to select the next respondent. If a respondent declined to be interviewed, the interviewer returned to the starting place to select the next individual to be interviewed.

**The questionnaire:** To reduce the time required to complete the questionnaire, the questions were prepared in two groups: the “qualifying variables” or questions to be asked of all respondents, and the “analysis variables” or questions which could be asked of one group of respondents or another. Thus two instruments were created, and they were handed to the interviewer stacked in alternating order, to be completed in the same order. Questionnaires were printed in English and Spanish.

**Interview effort and schedule:** The interview effort was established on the basis of the wait times provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service for each hour of each day of the week for one week in June 1991. An hour of a day with a longer wait time was targeted for more interviews to ensure that the survey population accurately reflected the flow of traffic. After the data were collected, wait times were obtained for the time of the survey to develop a factor used to create a sample weight for each observation.

**Data and “logic” checks:** The data from the interviews were entered into a spreadsheet and randomly checked for data entry errors. Additionally, logic checks were performed on the data to be sure that it was “clean.” This process involved checking the data entered for consistency. All interview forms were checked in the field for logic errors or incomplete responses. The computerized logic checks were a second check of that process and also a means of isolating data entry errors. The data were tabulated using the SYSTAT statistical analysis package. After the data were tabulated, the responses were assigned weights by time of day, and the final tables were produced in a spreadsheet.

## Appendix B

### A Method for Monitoring the Impact of Border Crossers on Taxable Retail Sales in San Diego

Border crossers from the Tijuana area have a significant impact on economic activity in San Diego County. San Diego Dialogue sought to quantify this impact and report it on a regular basis. One of the major impacts is on the level of retail sales. However, no regular data is reported on total retail sales. Furthermore, there is no readily available way to separate sales to residents, sales to visitors from Mexico, and sales to visitors from the rest of the world. Second, while Chula Vista and National City can be separated from county retail sales data, San Ysidro and Otay Mesa cannot be separated from reported data for the City of San Diego. San Ysidro is a significant shopping destination for border crossers, and Otay Mesa also probably has a significant share of the sales related to border crossings.

**Taxable** retail sales are reported quarterly by the California Board of Equalization for counties and incorporated cities. Our analysis of taxable retail sales had two components: an analysis of countywide data and an analysis of recent data specific to the South Bay area of the county.

The data reported in the quarterly reports, *Taxable Sales in California*, exclude sales of nontaxable items, which include food for home consumption. While total retail sales would be a more desirable variable to use, taxable retail sales do include many of the major purchases of border crossers, including building materials, automotive parts, clothing, liquor, and gasoline. During the time period covered by this analysis, the snack food tax was initiated and ended.<sup>1</sup> For the long run, the major drawback of using taxable retail sales is that the definition of a taxable sale can change, and it may not be possible to construct a consistent data series.

These data were analyzed with the other quarterly variables available for San Diego County to estimate the share of sales attributable to border crossers. This analysis was also useful in understanding the city and community data for South Bay. We first derived an estimate for the county of the share of taxable retail sales that **could not** be explained by the traditional variables of population, income, and labor force participation. This relationship was estimated by a simple

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<sup>1</sup> The “snack food” tax was started on July 15, 1991, and ended on December 1, 1992.

regression model. Some of the “residual,” or sales that the model does not explain, could be attributed to visitors to the county. Some of those visitors are border crossers. This residual then provided a control number that could be used to better understand the levels of taxable retail sales in South Bay.

South Bay includes two communities of the city of San Diego, Otay Mesa and San Ysidro. It also includes 4 cities: Chula Vista, Coronado, Imperial Beach, and National City. From our survey of border crossers, we were able to identify Chula Vista, National City, Otay Mesa and San Ysidro as major shopping destinations for border crossers. Coronado and Imperial Beach have very small retail sectors and were not named as shopping destinations by border crossers.

Next, a second model was constructed to understand the extent of the impact of border crossers on the level of retail sales in South Bay. A sample of 100 stores was selected for the 4 communities to include the major destinations mentioned by border crossers and a random sample of other stores. Because total retail sales are not available for these areas on a regular basis, taxable retail sales were used in the model. To the extent that border crossers purchase groceries for home consumption, this model underestimates the extent of their total dollar impact on business in these communities.

For these 4 communities as a whole, the San Diego County model was used to estimate the expected changes in taxable retail sales due to economic and demographic changes. When this expected change is factored out of the changes observed in the South Bay data, the result is the amount to be explained by “other factors,” including changes in the number and characteristics of border crossers and differences in the impact of demographic and economic changes for that subregion of the county. Because detailed demographic and economic information is not available for these cities, and because shoppers have many options outside their immediate neighborhoods, it was necessary to estimate a percentage of the change in taxable retail sales attributed to these “other factors.” This percentage is based on the model of the county as a whole and the unexplained variation when border crossings are included in that model.

The data for the two incorporated cities from the sample were compared with the results for those two cities from published data in the quarterly reports. These results were found to be consistent: the direction of change and relative magnitude for the sample was the same as for the whole city. Such a procedure could not be used for the communities of San Ysidro and Otay Mesa because there is no data available except the Dialogue’s sample.

San Diego Dialogue recommends the establishment of a regular reporting system on border crossings and related statistics. This monitoring system would include monthly data on the number of border crossing events at each of the San Diego county ports of entry as well as data on the traditional economic variables for San Diego county, including visitors, reported waiting times at the border, and a regular, quarterly tabulation of taxable retail sales for the sample stores. With this monitoring system, the basis would exist for developing a more exact and timely measure of the impact of border crossers on the level of retail sales. The monitoring system would also provide information to help San Diego businesses understand the role of border crossings in the local economy.