



States Crosswise with Crossing Rules

States and provinces concerned about economic impact of proposed passport requirements for crossing U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico

By Karen Imas

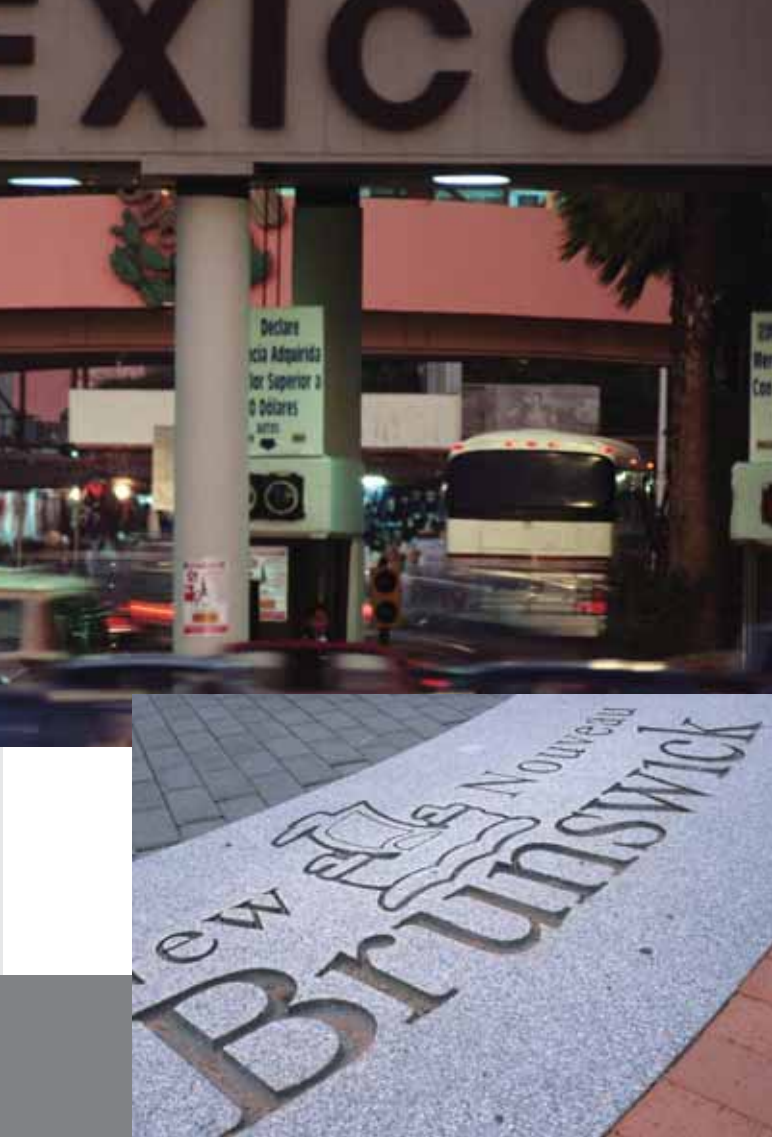
Northeastern state and Canadian Provincial officials are concerned: a rule requiring anyone entering or re-entering the United States to present a passport could wreak havoc at the U.S.-Canada border.

Elected officials on both sides of the northern border contend that the passport requirement, if adopted, would hurt the region's travel and tourism industry, impede trade, create long delays at border crossings and place undue hardship on frequent travelers who cross the border to go to work or visit family or friends.

To implement the U.S. Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, enacted by Congress in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the U.S. Departments of State (DoS) and Homeland Security (DHS) proposed the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), which would establish more secure border identification standards for travelers between the U.S. and other nations and territories in North, South and Central America, and the Caribbean.

On Sept. 1, 2005, the Homeland Security and State departments published an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and opened a 60-day comment period on the requirement for a passport, or alternative documentation. The proposed rule, also known as the WHTI, would take effect Jan. 1, 2008, for travelers entering or re-entering the U.S. at a land border. For travelers crossing the border by air or sea, the WHTI would take effect Jan. 1, 2007.

At the urging of the CSG/ERC Eastern Canadian Provinces Committee officers, the CSG/ERC Executive Committee passed a resolution at its October 2005 meeting in Halifax, Nova Scotia, requesting that the federal government delay implementation of the WHTI. The CSG/ERC resolution, and an accompanying letter to DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and senior members of Congress, urged the federal agencies to consider less onerous and less costly travel docu-



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Economic and Trade Impacts

Canada and the U.S. have the largest non-militarized common border in the world—4,400 miles. The need to maintain a “seamless border” is underscored by the integrated economies of the border region and the frequent trips made by families, students and working people.

Canada and the U.S. have the largest commercial trading relationship in the world. A truckload of products crosses the border every two seconds. Ambassador Frank McKenna, speaking at the CSG Annual Trends and Leadership Forum in Delaware, said Canada is the biggest export market for every state in New England. Economic integration is crucial to the U.S.-Canada relationship and our economic competitiveness abroad. In the auto trade, McKenna noted that an auto part travels across the border six times before the car is put on the lot for sale.

A recent report, prepared by Conference Board of Canada for the Canadian Tourism Commission, estimates that this passport requirement would result in 3.5 million fewer trips into the U.S. from Canada by 2008, resulting in a loss of \$785 million in potential tourism revenue, and 7.7 million fewer trips by U.S. citizens into Canada, resulting in a \$1.7 billion loss in revenues.

Passport Requirement Alternatives

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act mandates that DHS develop a plan to require passport, other documents or a combination of both to be sufficient to denote identity.

During a panel discussion on the WHTI at the CSG meeting in Delaware, Lisa Katz of the Detroit Chamber of Commerce said other options should be considered including:

- Alternative IDs for travelers under 16.
- Northern Border ID Card.
- Enhanced driver’s licenses which feature all the security requirements of passports. (In May 2005, Congress passed the REAL-ID Act which creates more stringent requirements and standards for obtaining driver’s licenses.)

“Options that tip the balance too far away from economic security can be catastrophic,” said Katz.

While driver’s licenses currently do not prove nationality, state DMVs could provide the option of putting citizenship on the card.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff announced Jan. 17 that the U.S. government would start issuing a special ID card later this year allowing frequent U.S. travelers to Canada and Mexico to continue crossing the border without a passport. The ID card, which will cost about \$50, will include a picture of the holder and be equipped with radio frequency identification, allowing it to be read from several yards away.

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mentation than a passport. For families and low-income individuals, passports can be cost-prohibitive. The typical cost is \$97. Passports also take several weeks to process. Because the vast majority of Americans and most Canadians currently do not have passports, elected officials are concerned that if faced with the choice of obtaining a passport or staying home, citizens would simply choose the latter.

The officers of the CSG/ERC Eastern Canadian Provinces Committee were scheduled to meet with federal officials and members of the Northeast Congressional delegation shortly after Congress reconvened in January to discuss the resolution and present alternative documentation options. The CSG National Executive Committee passed a similar resolution in December at its Annual Trends and Leadership Forum in Wilmington, Del.

While ERC Executive Committee members readily acknowledge the national security concerns at play in the development of the WHTI, they argue that lawmakers must find a solution that does not threaten the Northeast region’s economic security and the vital cultural and social relationships that have been established over many years. The economic and social impacts on the border communities would be particularly harsh.

Further, ERC state and provincial officials argue that the WHTI would not protect citizens in the Northeast from another terrorist attack. People who pose a terrorist threat are unlikely to use major border crossings.