

Canada–U.S. Border Co-operation

Growth in two-way trade between Canada and the United States under NAFTA has averaged 11 per cent per year since 1993. Canada–U.S. border co-operation has also expanded rapidly over the last decade in light of this tremendous growth in bilateral trade and travel as well as other international challenges. Several key initiatives undertaken since 1995 have stimulated commercial and people-to-people ties between the two nations and enhanced the security of Canadian and U.S. citizens. These initiatives include air travel and air transport agreements, the Canada–U.S. Shared Border Accord and the Canada–U.S. [Border] Partnership.

Shortly after the horrific events of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien met in Washington to explore ways of enhancing the security of the shared border while ensuring that the flow of legitimate people, goods, services, capital, ideas and technology — essential to the economies of both countries — remained unhindered.

Following this meeting, U.S. Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge and then Foreign Affairs Minister John Manley, Chair of Canada's Ad Hoc Committee on Public Security and Anti-Terrorism, were directed to engage private and public sector stakeholders of both countries in discussions on border co-operation. The goal was to determine an appropriate response to the increased security and economic challenges posed by the September 11th attacks.

The resulting Smart Border Declaration, which was signed by both countries on December 12, 2001, outlined a 30-point action plan based on four pillars: the secure flow of people, the secure flow of goods, a secure infrastructure, and co-ordination and information sharing in the enforcement of these objectives.

The action plan calls on both countries to collaborate on identifying high risk people and goods while expediting the flow of low risk travellers and goods; to invest in border infrastructure and technological solutions to help facilitate movement across the border; and to provide the tools and legislative framework necessary to ensure that information and intelligence is shared between Canada and the United States in a timely and coherent way.

Since December 2001, the Canadian government and the Bush administration have been implementing the action plan. Mr. Manley and Mr. Ridge have had three meetings since the declaration was signed in December and have committed to ongoing meetings to evaluate progress in implementing and expanding the smart border. Consultations have also taken place with dozens of stakeholders on both sides of the border.