

regularly cross the border to move quickly through customs and immigration, and in most cases, bypass inspections altogether. This system will eliminate much of the inconvenience associated with crossing the border and will create what one government official refers to as a "seamless border." Other infrastructure improvements taking place include road improvements to accommodate increased traffic (such as the widening of U.S. 395 in eastern Washington) and the recent reemergence of AMTRAK passenger train service between Seattle and Vancouver. All of these events suggest that free trade has had more impact on the northern borderland in the past decade than anything else since 1846, as the following brief slide presentation suggests.

#### **Conclusions: The Rebirth of Columbia?**

Some of the more obvious conclusions to be drawn from the preceding survey of borderland retail trade flows derive directly from the difficulty of predicting sudden economic changes in the unique borderland environment. Foremost among these are the simple fact that areas that "overbuild" their retail sector during a period of intense activity will suffer during the downswing. Nowhere has this been more obvious than in smaller border towns on the U.S. side, where many Canadian-oriented activities have failed to stay in business. This has been less of a problem in the Spokane-Coeur d'Alene corridor because of a more stable consumer base. Another aspect of market downswings in the border region are large sales with more than a hint of desperation to them. For instance, in October 1994, just as the collapse of the Canadian dollar was apparent, the merchants of Coeur d'Alene and Post Falls had a month-long sale in which 63 firms took Canadian currency at