RITA Bureau of Transportation Statistics

Special Report

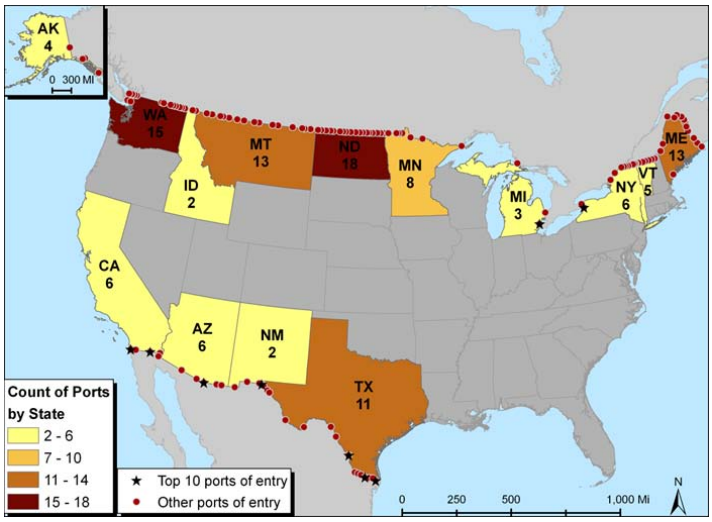
U.S. Department of Transportation
Research and Innovative Technology Administration

February 2011

A Decade of Decline in Person Crossings From Mexico and Canada Into the United States

by Jenny Guarino

Figure 1: Ports of Entry[1] Along the U.S.–Canada and U.S.–Mexico Borders



NOTE: There are 3 ports of entry in California in the top 10, but 2 are marked with 1 star as they are within 6 miles of one another: San Ysidro and Otay Mesa.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

Nationwide Person Crossings

The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) has been maintaining the Border Crossing/Entry Database[1] since 1995 with data provided by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) for inbound visitors.[2] Similar data is not currently available for departing travelers.

The number of persons crossing into the United States through its ports of entry[3] along the Canadian and Mexican borders has been declining since 2000. Recently, researchers have proposed various reasons for the decline in person crossings, including (but not limited to) the economies of the three nations[4] and increased security at the borders.[5] This report does not examine reasons for the decline in person crossings, rather the trends in person crossings by mode are investigated.

In 2009, there were approximately 252 million person crossings into the United States from Mexico and Canada. The majority of those crossings (75 percent) took place along the Mexican border. Along both the northern and southern borders, a large proportion of crossings were with personal vehicles (77 percent; see table 1). An additional 17 percent of total crossings were by pedestrians.[6]

Table 1: Person Crossings by Mode, 2009

Mode	Percent
Personal vehicle	77.25
Pedestrian	16.56
Truck	4.15
Bus	1.96
Train	0.09

NOTE: Numbers may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

[1] See Border Crossing/Entry Database for more information: http://www.bts.gov/programs/international/transborder/TBDR_BC/TBDR_BC_Index.html

[2] Data does not include vessel passengers other than ferry or individuals entering into the United States by air (approximately 18.7 million persons entered the United States from Canada or Mexico by air in 2009).

[3] A port of entry is a place along the U.S. borders where one may lawfully enter the country (http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/toolbox/ports/).

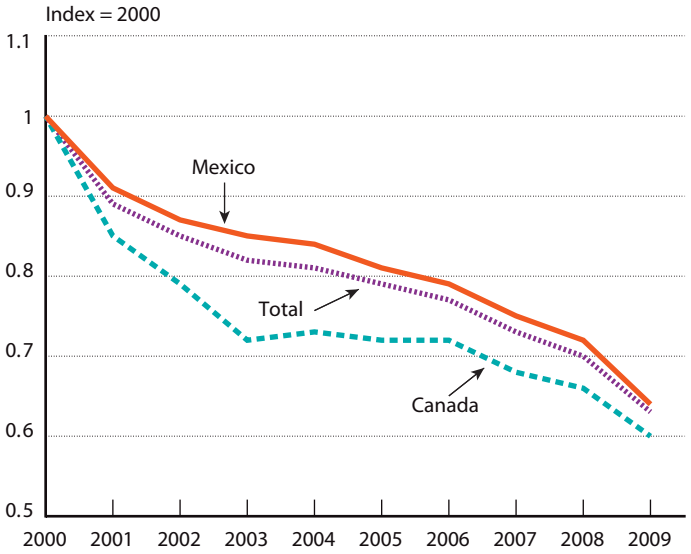
[4] For more information on the economy and border crossings refer to: http://www.wwu.edu/bpri/files/2010_Summer_Border_Brief.pdf or http://www.sandag.org/programs/borders/binational/projects/2006_border_wait_impacts_execsum.pdf

[5] For more information on security at the borders refer to: http://www.sandiegodialogue.org/pdfs/Asa_Paper_June_03.pdf

[6] Pedestrian counts include the number of persons arriving on foot or by certain conveyances (e.g., bicycles, mopeds, or wheel chairs).

Figure 2 illustrates yearly crossing variation between 2000 and 2009 (indexed to 2000[7]). As seen, person crossings have steadily decreased since 2000. Nationally, person crossings along U.S. land borders declined 37 percent (figure 2) from 2000 to 2009, from approximately 400 million persons to 252 million. Person crossings at the Canadian border declined most rapidly, falling 40 percent from 2000 to 2009. Person crossings along the Mexican border also decreased, falling 36 percent.

Figure 2: Incoming Person Crossing Index Through U.S. Land Borders, 2000-2009



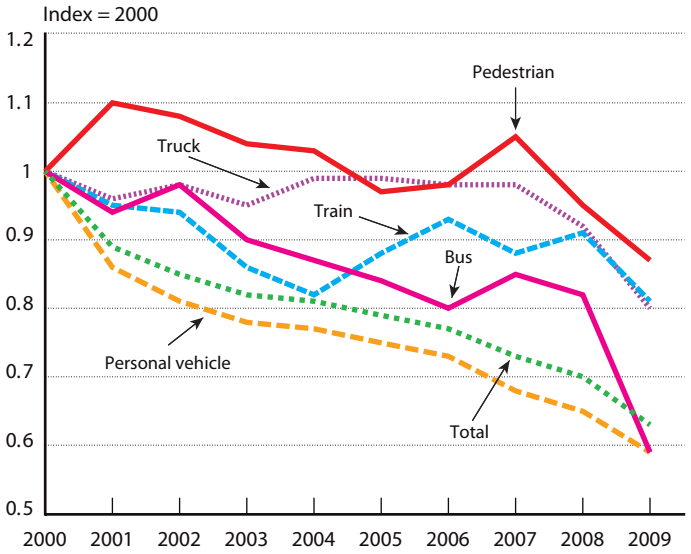
NOTE: "Total" includes all person crossings into the United States from Mexico or Canada.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

To examine trends in person crossings at the U.S. land borders, figure 3 reviews crossings by mode of travel (e.g., truck, bus, train, personal vehicle, or pedestrian). While BTS documents the total number of persons crossing in each train, bus, and personal vehicle, total persons by truck is not currently recorded in the Border Crossing/Entry Database. To estimate the number of persons crossing into the United States by truck, the average number of passengers per truck was derived from data provided by the CBP.[8]

As shown in figure 3, person crossings by personal vehicles decreased 41 percent from 2000 to 2009, the greatest decline of any mode. Border crossings by personal vehicle was the only mode without a prominent increase during the time period studied.

Figure 3: Incoming Person Crossing Index Through U.S. Land Borders by Mode, 2000-2009



NOTE: "Total" includes total person crossings (e.g., by all modes) into the United States from Canada and Mexico.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

In contrast, only pedestrian crossings increased above the 2000 level at any time in the subsequent 9 years. A 10 percent increase occurred in 2001 followed by a steady decline until 2007. In 2007, pedestrian traffic increased briefly, by 7 percent, before declining in the following years. By 2009, 13 percent fewer pedestrian crossings occurred than in 2000.

Table 2: Person Crossings by Mode at the Canadian Border, 2009

Mode	Percent
Personal vehicle	85.45
Truck	9.60
Bus	4.00
Pedestrian	0.61
Train	0.35

NOTE: Numbers may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

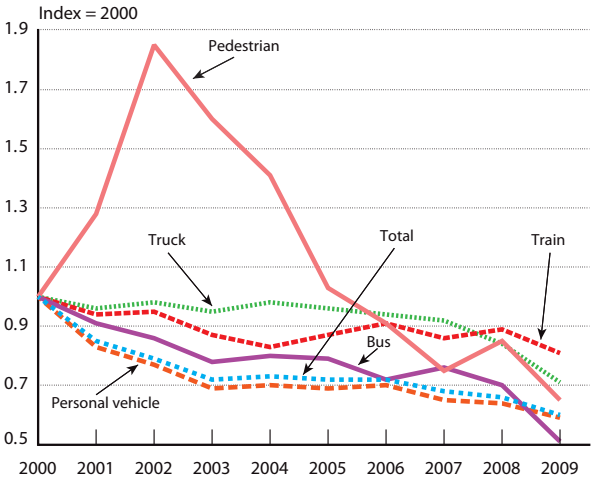
Person Crossings at the Canadian Border

In 2009, approximately 62.6 million persons crossed into the United States utilizing ports along the U.S.–Canadian border. As seen in table 2, the majority of these persons (86 percent) crossed by personal vehicle.

[7] An index is used to see how person crossings have changed over the years. Year 2000 is used as a baseline and all subsequent years are compared against it. Numbers less than 1 represent a decrease in person crossings (as compared to 2000), while numbers greater than 1 represent an increase in person crossings above the 2000 rate.

[8] An average of 1.197(with a range of 1.155–1.341) passengers per truck was derived for crossings along the Canadian border. For crossings at the Mexican border, an average of 1.033 (with a range of 1.002–1.091) passengers per truck was used.

Figure 4: Incoming Person Crossing Index at the Canadian Border by Mode, 2000-2009



NOTE: "Total" includes total person crossings (e.g., by all modes) into the United States from Canada.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

As seen in figure 4, a decrease in person crossings is present for all modes of travel in recent years. A notable exception occurred from 2000 to 2002, with an increase in pedestrian crossing (85 percent). On average, less than 1 percent of persons crossing along the Canadian border are pedestrians.

In 2002, approximately 497,000 more pedestrians crossed into the United States along the Canadian border than in 2000 (1.3 percent of total crossings – 2002). As pedestrian crossings are a small proportion of total crossings, such fluctuations are not present in the overall crossing trend line for the Canadian border (see figure 4). In contrast, personal vehicle crossings account for 84 percent (on average) of total crossings. As person crossings by personal vehicle account for such a large proportion of total crossings, total crossings tend to rise and fall in tandem with personal vehicles.

Table 3 displays changes in person crossings at the State level. As seen in the table, person crossings at the Canadian border have been steadily decreasing since 2000, with few States (e.g., Alaska) experiencing an increase in crossings. Since 2000, Michigan experienced the greatest

Table 3: Incoming Person Crossing Index at the Canadian Border by U.S. State, 2000-2009

(Index = 2000, values in parenthesis are total crossings in millions of persons)

Year	Total, all Canada gateways		Alaska		Washington		Idaho		Montana	
2000	1.00	(104.2)	1.00	(0.5)	1.00	(15.9)	1.00	(0.6)	1.00	(1.8)
2001	0.85	(88.5)	0.95	(0.44)	0.89	(14.1)	0.95	(0.57)	0.91	(1.6)
2002	0.79	(82.8)	0.96	(0.44)	0.72	(11.4)	0.82	(0.50)	0.89	(1.6)
2003	0.72	(75.1)	0.97	(0.45)	0.68	(10.8)	0.73	(0.44)	0.89	(1.6)
2004	0.73	(76.5)	1.02	(0.47)	0.73	(11.5)	0.71	(0.43)	0.91	(1.6)
2005	0.72	(75.3)	1.02	(0.47)	0.72	(11.5)	0.74	(0.45)	0.97	(1.7)
2006	0.72	(75.2)	0.99	(0.46)	0.76	(12.1)	0.78	(0.47)	1.03	(1.8)
2007	0.68	(70.4)	1.02	(0.47)	0.72	(11.5)	0.79	(0.48)	0.85	(1.5)
2008	0.66	(65.6)	0.97	(0.45)	0.76	(12.1)	1.02	(0.61)	0.80	(1.4)
2009	0.60	(62.6)	0.98	(0.46)	0.77	(12.2)	0.89	(0.54)	0.77	(1.3)

	North Dakota		Minnesota		Michigan		New York		Vermont		Maine	
2000	1.00	(2.2)	1.00	(3.3)	1.00	(36.9)	1.00	(30.5)	1.00	(3.7)	1.00	(8.8)
2001	0.93	(2.1)	0.91	(3.0)	0.71	(26.3)	0.96	(29.2)	0.95	(3.5)	0.87	(7.6)
2002	0.95	(2.1)	0.84	(2.8)	0.62	(22.7)	1.01	(30.9)	0.93	(3.4)	0.78	(6.8)
2003	0.91	(2.0)	0.87	(2.9)	0.57	(20.9)	0.85	(26.0)	0.87	(3.2)	0.77	(6.8)
2004	0.93	(2.1)	0.93	(3.1)	0.56	(20.7)	0.85	(25.9)	0.86	(3.2)	0.85	(7.5)
2005	0.93	(2.1)	0.89	(2.9)	0.57	(20.9)	0.82	(25.1)	0.71	(2.6)	0.86	(7.6)
2006	0.92	(2.0)	0.83	(2.8)	0.54	(20.0)	0.81	(24.9)	0.88	(3.3)	0.84	(7.4)
2007	0.91	(2.0)	0.70	(2.3)	0.52	(19.1)	0.79	(24.2)	0.86	(3.2)	0.64	(5.6)
2008	0.94	(2.1)	0.70	(2.3)	0.47	(17.3)	0.76	(23.2)	0.94	(3.5)	0.63	(5.5)
2009	0.81	(1.8)	0.67	(2.2)	0.40	(14.7)	0.70	(21.3)	0.82	(3.1)	0.57	(4.9)

NOTE: All data in the above table is indexed to year 2000 and depict the change in border crossings each year relative to the traffic observed in 2000. For example, the 0.85 in 2001 for the U.S.–Canada Border means that person crossings were 15 percent lower in 2001 than in 2000. A number above 1 (e.g., 1.02 in 2004 at Alaska) represents a number of person crossings above the 2000 rate.

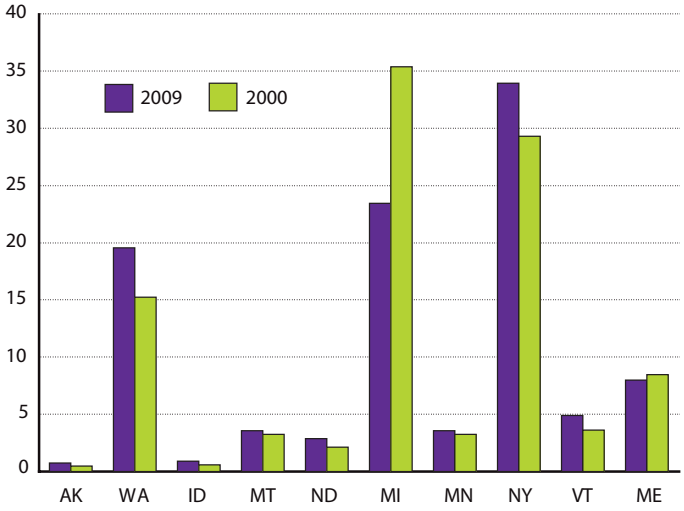
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

decline in person crossings, falling 60 percent by 2009. Crossings at Alaska points of entry declined the least, down only 2 percent by 2009.

As seen in figure 5, the proportion of crossings at many States was similar in 2000 and 2009. Since 2000, the proportion of person crossings increased the most in New York and Washington. In 2009, Michigan, New York, and Washington saw the greatest percentage of person crossings on the Canadian border, accounting for 76.96 percent of all person crossings (23.46, 33.97, and 19.53 percent respectively).

Figure 5: Proportion of Person Crossings at the Canadian Border by U.S. State, 2000 and 2009

(as a percent of total person crossings in Canada each year)



NOTE: Idaho and Alaska were removed from above figure as they account for less than one percent of total person crossings each year.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

Person Crossings at the Mexican Border

In 2009, approximately 189.2 million persons crossed into the United States through 25 ports of entry along the Mexican border. As seen in table 4, the majority of persons crossing into the United States along the Mexican border in 2009 did so with personal vehicles. A large proportion (22 percent) of total traffic is due to pedestrian crossings.

Figure 6 examines the variation in person crossings by mode along the Mexican border since 2000. Similar to person crossings at the Canadian border, total person crossings at the Mexican border have been declining since 2000. While all modes experienced a decrease in person crossings, person crossings by train experienced the greatest fluctuation (see figure 6). This can be attributed to the relatively small proportion of person crossings that take place by train, on average less than 1 percent. The majority of trains crossing into the United States from Mexico are freight trains, carrying only crew and operators.[9]

Table 4: Person Crossings by Mode at the Mexican Border, 2009

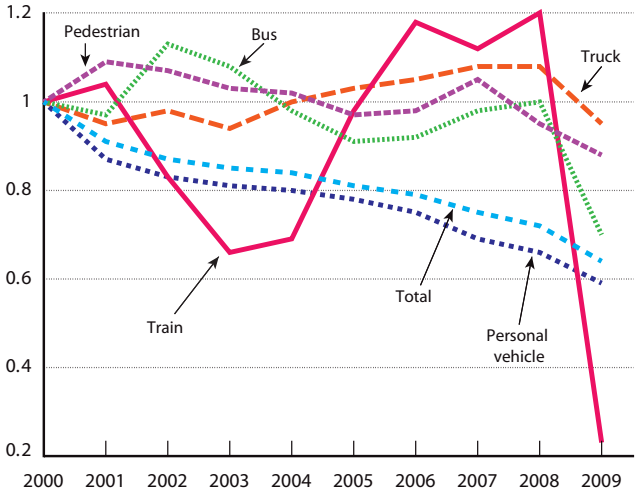
Mode	Percent
Personal vehicle	74.53
Pedestrian	21.84
Truck	2.34
Bus	1.28
Train	—

NOTE: — = less than one-hundreth of one percent.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

The sharpest drop (81 percent) in person crossings by train took place from 2008 to 2009, with only 4,187 persons crossing by train in 2009. This drop can be attributed to a crew change that occurs at Texas ports of entry. Beginning in 2009, Mexican crews exit trains before entering the United States. At the border, American train crews replace the Mexican crews and take over operations. While the Mexican crews previously were processed by U.S. Customs, the U.S. crews are not considered to be entering the United States. Therefore, at those locations train crew crossings are not recorded in the CBP database.

Figure 6: Incoming Person Crossing Index at the Mexican Border by Mode, 2000-2009



NOTE: "Total" includes total person crossings (e.g., by all modes) into the United States from Mexico.

In 2009, there were no incoming rail passengers or crew entering the United States from Mexico through the land border ports in Texas. Mexican crews on U.S. bound freight trains currently do not cross the border into the United States or go through U.S. Customs processing.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

[9] There are no regularly scheduled passenger trains across the U.S.-Mexico border — only some excursion and irregularly operated special trains.

Table 5: Incoming Person Crossing Index at the Mexican Border by U.S. State, 2000-2009

(Index=2000, values in parenthesis are total crossings in millions of persons)

Year	Total, all Mexico gateways		Arizona		California		New Mexico		Texas	
2000	1.00	(295.0)	1.00	(35.8)	1.00	(95.9)	1.00	(1.8)	1.00	(161.5)
2001	0.91	(268.4)	0.93	(33.2)	0.95	(91.6)	0.87	(1.6)	0.88	(142.0)
2002	0.87	(257.8)	1.04	(37.1)	0.94	(89.7)	1.10	(2.0)	0.80	(129.0)
2003	0.85	(250.5)	0.95	(34.1)	0.95	(96.1)	1.06	(1.9)	0.76	(122.9)
2004	0.84	(247.1)	0.97	(34.8)	0.91	(87.1)	1.06	(1.9)	0.76	(123.3)
2005	0.81	(239.9)	0.93	(33.2)	0.89	(85.4)	1.20	(2.2)	0.74	(119.1)
2006	0.79	(233.6)	0.91	(32.5)	0.87	(83.5)	1.30	(2.4)	0.71	(115.3)
2007	0.75	(225.5)	0.90	(32.1)	0.80	(77.0)	1.60	(2.9)	0.68	(110.6)
2008	0.72	(211.3)	0.83	(29.6)	0.74	(70.5)	1.29	(2.3)	0.67	(108.9)
2009	0.64	(189.2)	0.73	(26.2)	0.68	(64.7)	1.45	(2.6)	0.59	(95.6)

NOTE: All data in the above table is indexed to year 2000 and depict the change in border crossings each year relative to the traffic observed in 2000. For example, the value of 0.95 at California in 2001 depicts a 5-percent drop in person crossings relative to the 2000 numbers along the California/Mexico border. Likewise, 1.45 at New Mexico in 2009 represents a 45-percent increase in crossings relative to the 2000 numbers along the New Mexico/Mexico border.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

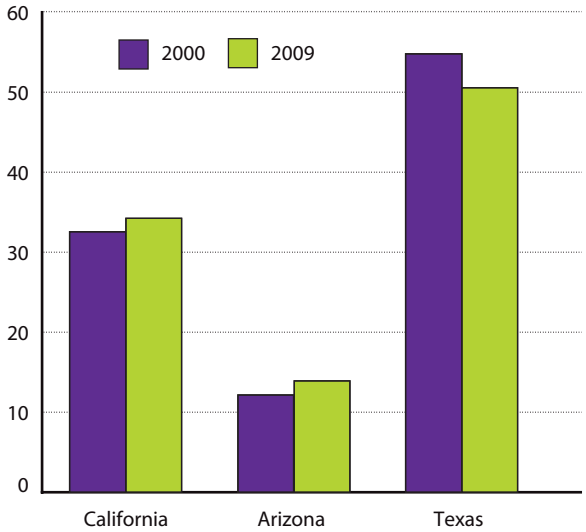
While the largest percentage decline in person crossings by any mode from 2008 to 2009 was by train due to the change in operating practices regarding the crew changes, all modes saw a percentage reduction in the number of person crossings since 2008. Pedestrian crossings and private vehicle passenger crossings decreased the least; falling 8 and 11 percent respectively. Additionally, truck passenger crossings were down 12 percent and crossings by bus dropped 30 percent from 2008 to 2009.

From 2000 to 2009, the number of person crossings into California and Texas decreased at a steady rate (see table 5). The largest increase in person crossings took place in New Mexico in 2007; at this time crossings were 60 percent higher than 2000. Aside from a brief increase in person crossings in Arizona (2002), New Mexico was the only State along the Mexican border to experience a growth in total person crossings (relative to 2000).

Although New Mexico has seen an increase in the number of person crossings in recent years, it represents a small proportion of total crossings along the Mexican border. Person crossings into New Mexico are, on average, 0.9 percent of total Mexican border crossings, with more than half (51 percent) taking place at ports of entry in Texas (see figure 7).

Figure 7: Proportion of Person Crossings at the Mexican Border by U.S. State, 2000 and 2009

(as percent of total person crossings in Mexico each year)



NOTE: New Mexico was not included in the above graph as it accounts for less than two percent of total crossings in 2000 and 2009.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing/Entry Database; based on data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, OMR database, August 2010.

About This Report

This report was prepared by Jenny Guarino, a Mathematical Statistician in the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS). BTS is a component of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA).

Theresa Firestine, an Economist in BTS, provided special assistance in creating the map. Special thanks to Steve Beningo, an International Transportation Specialist at BTS, for his rigorous reviews and assistance.

For questions about this, or other BTS special reports, call 1-800-835-1351, email answers@bts.gov, or visit www.bts.gov.

Data

- http://www.bts.gov/programs/international/transborder/TBDR_BC/TBDR_BC_Index.html

Publications

- *Transportation Statistics Annual Report (TSAR)*