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Border Policy Research Institute

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Goals of the Truck Pre-Inspection Pilots:

Phase 1: Blaine

Launched in June 2013, this phase was designed as a “proof of concept” to test technologies and operating procedures. If a USCBP inspection booth were placed on Canadian soil...

» Would the length of an inspection be greater given the need to access networked databases using technologies other than those present in a typical booth?

» Once inspected in Canada, could a truck move nonstop through a downstream USCBP facility?

» Could occurrences such as radiation alerts be handled in Canada?

Phase 2: Ft. Erie (Peace Bridge)

Scheduled for 2014, this phase is intended to result in *reduced truck wait-times*.

Background. The *Beyond the Border Action Plan* called for USCBP to implement “a truck cargo facilitation pilot project in at least one location in Canada,” and agencies settled upon a two-phase approach, as described in the left sidebar. USCBP invited our institute to gather field data in Blaine during the phase 1 pilot.

Figure 1 shows the southbound customs plaza at the Pacific Highway crossing in Blaine. *In baseline operation prior to the test*, trucks approached the plaza in a truck lane parallel to and slightly west of BC Highway 15. Non-FAST trucks used the east lane (identified as “Standard lane” in Fig. 1), which leads to a signal that disperses the trucks within 11 individually signalized staging lanes. Meanwhile, FAST trucks used the west lane, bypassed the dispersal signal, and were staged in lane 12. Trucks were released from the staging plaza via a first-in, first-out scheme, with highest priority given to the FAST trucks. Once released from the plaza, all trucks turned sharply west and made use of any one of the three USCBP booths.

Figure 1. Southbound Plaza Configuration, Pacific Highway, Blaine, WA

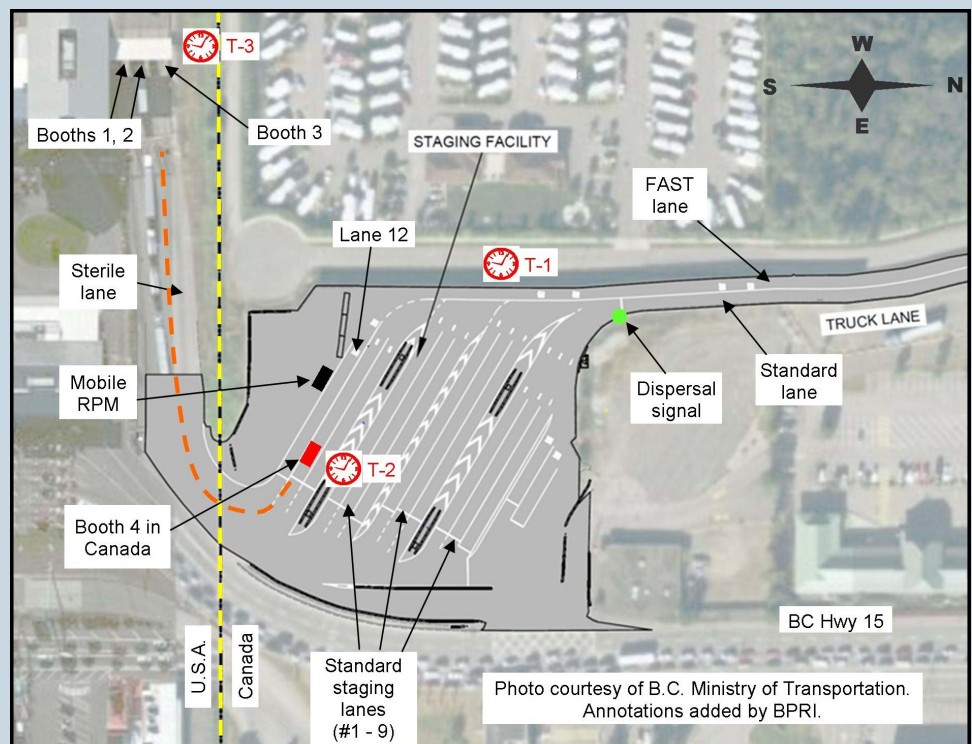


Figure 2. Metrics of FAST Lane Usage: Pilot Configuration vs. Baseline

	Baseline		Pilot			
	August '12	June '13	July 2/3, '13		July 23/24, '13	
At Primary Inspection Booth						
No. of trucks in sample	272	86	94		148	
Avg. inspection duration	62 sec.	64 sec.	89 sec.		62 sec.	
No. of "valid" trucks in sample	?	?	?		135	
Avg. duration for "valid" trucks	?	?	?		50 sec.	
At "Exit Booth"						
No. of "roll-through" trucks			40	43%	85	59%
No. of "stop-n-go" trucks			27	29%	46	32%
No. of reinspected trucks			27	29%	13	9%
Total no. of trucks			94	100%	144	100%

During the pilot test, the same basic traffic flow was maintained. A new USCBP booth was installed within a footprint that occupied two lanes of the staging plaza (thus reducing the number of lanes available for standard trucks to nine). This pre-inspection booth (“Booth 4” in Fig. 1) was used for *primary inspection on Canadian soil of only those trucks using the FAST lane*. A radiation portal monitor (RPM) was installed upstream of the new booth, mimicking the infrastructure found at a typical USCBP facility. Additionally, portable orange jersey barriers were used to establish a “sterile” path to booth 3 from the new booth. Booth 3 was conceptually repurposed as an “exit booth” in order to determine whether trucks successfully inspected in Canada could be allowed to proceed nonstop through the downstream facility. The number of booths available to standard trucks during the pilot was thus reduced to two. With fewer staging lanes and inspection booths available to southbound non-FAST traffic, it was known that this phase 1 pilot—this “proof of concept”—would actually lead to increased wait times. The phase 2 pilot in Ft. Erie will tackle the objective of *reducing* wait times.

Results. We stationed students at three locations within the plaza (the “clock” symbols in Fig. 1) and timed the progress of every truck traversing the port via lane 12, the FAST lane. We collected baseline data in June 2013, just prior to launch of the pilot, and found inspection durations comparable to what we had seen the prior year—i.e., about 63 seconds per truck, as seen in the “Baseline” columns in Figure 2. We returned on July 2 and 3, one week after the pilot’s launch, and observed that the average duration of primary inspections had increased to 89 seconds. We also found that 29 percent of the trucks processed at the pre-inspection booth encountered significant delays at booth 3. An additional 29 percent engaged in “stop-n-go” behavior, coming to a halt just long enough to be told to proceed. The stop-n-go pattern was tied to the shift schedules of the staff in booth 3—i.e., some inspectors were better able to see the license plate of an approaching truck, enter the value into a computer, note that the truck was clear to proceed, and signal the truck to do so.

After our July 2/3 outing, USCBP informed us of a previously unknown fact: many trucks using lane 12 were non-FAST, possibly seeking to traverse the port more rapidly by avoiding the staging area. For such trucks, USCBP was issuing a compliance briefing at the pre-inspection booth and performing the actual inspection at booth 3. On our next outing (July 23/24) we placed a student within the pre-inspection booth so as to segregate the data pertaining to “valid” trucks from that of the non-FAST trucks. The average inspection duration for the *mingled* stream had dropped to 62 seconds, while the average for valid trucks was just 50 seconds. Only 9 percent of trucks encountered significant delay at booth 3. Operations in the pilot configuration were achieving parity with baseline conditions.

While USCBP can proceed to phase 2 with confidence that the concept of pre-inspection is viable, stakeholders at Blaine are left with a challenge: how to exclude non-FAST trucks from the FAST lane once the pre-inspection booth is removed, leaving no agent in lane 12 to ensure compliance.