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Regional Cross-Border Collaboration Between the U.S. & Canada

Border Policy Research Institute

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Regional Cross-Border Collaboration Between the U.S. & Canada

Volume 13, Fall 2018

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BPRI FORUM

Each of the three panels included regional experts from Canada, the U.S., and outside the region for a comparative perspective.

Transportation/Infrastructure

Bruce Agnew, *Cascadia Center at Discovery Institute*

Bill Anderson, *Cross-Border Institute, University of Windsor*

Todd Carlson, *WA Department of Transportation*

Hugh Conroy, *International Mobility and Trade Corridor Project*

Lina Halwani, *BC Ministry of Transportation*

Business/Economics

Chris Sands, *Center for Canadian Studies, Johns Hopkins University*

Hana Doubrava, *Microsoft Vancouver*

Kathryn Friedman, *State University of New York at Buffalo*

Matt Morrison, *Pacific Northwest Economic Region*

Solomon Wong, *Inter VISTAS Consulting*

Environment

Don Alper, *Western Washington University*

Ginny Broadhurst, *Salish Sea Institute, Western Washington University*

David Marshall, *Fraser Basin Council*

Katrina Radach, *The Nature Conservancy*

Margit Säre, *Center for Transboundary Cooperation (Estonia)*

Introduction. On October 24th, 2018, the BPRI hosted a one-day forum to assess the state of cross-border collaboration between British Columbia and Washington State.¹ The forum brought together regional experts from government, academia, and private industry to discuss the successes, barriers, and opportunities for cross-border collaboration across three ‘sectors’: transportation/infrastructure, business/economics, and the environment (see sidebar). U.S. Congressman Rick Larsen provided opening remarks about the region and Canadian Coast Guard Regional Director Brian Wootton gave a keynote address on collaboration in the marine environment. This Border Policy Brief highlights some of the findings from the forum, which illustrate the need for stronger and more structured mechanisms to support cross-border collaboration.

Background. The U.S. and Canada have developed many successful and innovative cross-border partnerships. Despite current tensions at the national scale, these partnerships continue to flourish at the regional scale. This is especially true in the BC-Washington region, where there is a long history of cross-border collaboration. These efforts have largely focused on the western region, also known as ‘Cascadia,’ which is home to busy transportation networks and ecosystems that span the Canada-U.S. border. Subnational efforts to collaborate across the border range from formal policy agreements to the recent Cascadia Innovation Corridor effort, spurred by the private sector.² Non-governmental organizations and civil society are also active, particularly in transboundary environmental collaboration. While a comprehensive analysis of cross-border collaboration in this region is beyond the scope of this Brief, it is important to note that regional efforts, while strong at times, remain largely informal and ad hoc. That said, the BC-WA region is consistently identified as a model for cross-border collaboration, both in North America and globally.

State of Cross-Border Collaboration. On October 10th, 2018, the Governor of Washington and the Premier of BC signed a renewed memorandum of understanding (MOU), titled *Advancing the innovation economy, environmental protection and transportation connectivity*.³ The MOU provides a formalized statement of intent to support more cross-border collaboration. The BPRI forum highlighted the challenges and opportunities for agency officials, policy professionals, academics, and private industry to engage in collaborative efforts across the three sectors identified in the MOU. Key challenges include misalignment of funding, lack of data harmonization, and different governmental structures and jurisdictional authority. While some champion the benefits of collaborating across the border, for others it can be challenging to identify resources or political imperatives for engaging in cross-border work.

Focus	Institutions and Agreements
Multi-Sectoral	Border Policy Research Institute (https://wp.wvu.edu/bpri/)
	Pacific Northwest Economic Region (http://www.pnwer.org/)
	Cascadia Innovation Corridor (http://connectcascadia.ca/)
Transportation	Joint Transportation Executive Committee (http://leg.wa.gov/JTC/Pages/default.aspx)
	International Mobility and Trade Corridor Program (http://theimtc.com/)
Environment	Salish Sea Institute (https://wp.wvu.edu/salishsea/)
	BC-WA Environmental Cooperation Council (https://www2.gov.bc.ca)
	Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference (https://wp.wvu.edu/salishseaconference/)

Table 1: Key agreements and institutions supporting subnational cross-border collaboration in the BC-WA region

Findings. Each panel at the forum focused on a single domain of cross-border collaboration: 1) transportation/infrastructure planning; 2) business/economic integration; and 3) transboundary environmental cooperation. Panelists identified specific collaborative structures (See Table 1 above) and evaluated collaborative processes (See Table 2, next page).

Some **common themes** emerged across the three panels about the nature of cross-border collaboration in the region, including:

Informal structures. Much of the region's cross-border collaboration is built upon informal structures rather than highly formalized agreements or processes.

Relationships. The most important element of collaboration is strong relationships and communities of practice: people who share a profession or professional role working to learn and problem-solve together.

Catalysts. Major events, such as the 2010 Vancouver Olympics or the recent death of an Orca calf in the Salish Sea, energize spurts of cross-border collaboration.

Geography & Identity. Shared lands and waters in the Cascadia/Salish Sea region promote a common identity and this alone can necessitate and/or mobilize collaboration.

In addition to sector-specific issues (see Table 2), common **barriers/challenges** identified by each panel include:

Compartmentalization. Silos remain, and we need to start cross-pollinating ideas from one mode to another.

Shifts in policy and personnel. Federal policy guidance is inconsistent and typically changes with different administrations. As administrations change, personnel and staffing arrangements are affected, making professional relationships challenging to sustain.

Different structures and scales. Different funding cycles between countries inhibit alignment. Jurisdictional authority is also different on each side of the border, and while there is sometimes interest in regional collaboration, federal barriers can be difficult to overcome.

The role of tech. The region's tech prowess could be better connected to both cross-border ecosystem management and transportation planning.

Many components of **successful** cross-border collaboration are also the same:

A "culture of collaboration" in the region. The value of collaboration is recognized, and cross-border relationships and projects are seen as advantageous rather than politicized or territorial.

Regional governance structure. There is a precedent and practice for regional governance in the BC-WA relationship, particularly at the Governor-Premier level and among some agencies.

Research-based decisions. Cross-border collaboration in the region is depoliticized and focused on data and evidence-based policy making.⁴

Personal relationships. The collaborative process creates opportunities for practitioners to build personal relationships with one another, and this relational network in turn creates pathways for ongoing and future collaborative projects to emerge.

Innovation. The region is a global showcase for well-developed cross-border relationships and systems. Cultures and economies span the border, the political systems work fairly well together, and there is a desire to engage in projects with shared value, such as conservation. This creates an optimum environment for further innovation in collaborative processes. The growing tech sector in the region also contributes many new tools to the collaborative toolbox.

Policy Implications and Recommendations. In addition to panel discussions, the forum also included a break-out session for different groups to tackle questions about working towards shared priorities, developing collaborative structures, and the role of universities. The following section summarizes these recommendations:

Formal structures. Informal collaborations have strengths and have resulted in some great accomplishments. However, more structure, such as regular meetings or formal agreements with designated task groups can ensure more sustained and functional collaborative processes. Although innovation and creativity do not necessarily arise from formal institutional structures, a lack of formal structures or institutions leaves cross-border collaboration vulnerable as people change roles. Furthermore, without structure, cross-border collaboration can be too ad hoc and sector-specific. Issues, events, and specific projects can bring together stakeholders across the border, but an institutional framework is needed to support longevity.

Cross-sectoral approaches. Cross-border collaboration in the region tends to be segmented, with collaborative processes and projects existing within silos. A coherent cross-sectoral approach does not exist, either in policy or in practice. A comprehensive collaborative agreement could create more opportunities to learn from other sectors and innovate through sharing ideas and best practices.

Sector	Successes	Barriers/Challenges	Goals/Opportunities
Transportation/ Infrastructure Planning	Strong personal and institutional relationships Local and regional scale projects with key leadership, core funding, and professional relationships	Funding and agency support vulnerable to federal turnover and policy shifts Different US/Canadian federal funding cycles and priorities No new federal policy direction in U.S.	Acquire funding to sustain IMTC Dedicated border infrastructure funding in the next U.S. federal transportation funding program Tech sector collaborations Preclearance implementation
Business/ Economic Integration	Private sector involvement in policy, infrastructure projects Culture of collaboration through shared cross-border economies	Administrative turnover Identifying counterparts across the border Slow speed of collaborative process, data collection, and implementation Jurisdictional complexities Restricted cross-border labor mobility	Continued alignment of regional goals Growing Cascadia as a distinct economic ecosystem Leverage universities Multi-sectoral approach: binational partnerships between public, private, and non-profit entities Hi-tech solutions and big data applications
Transboundary Environmental Cooperation	Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference First Nations and tribal participation	Efforts not integrated with private sector	Update 1992 BC-WA Environmental Cooperation Council agreement Engage with tech sector for solutions

Table 2: Evaluation of cross-border collaboration by sector.

Integrated model of governance. A multi-sectoral approach to cross-border issues should include multiple nations, various scales of government, and non-profits. Representatives from all of these sectors need to be at the table to contribute their perspectives and help identify priorities. This is critically important for finding common ground and moving forward with practical solutions.

Role of universities. There is an important role for universities to play in supporting cross-border collaboration. Universities have the ability to produce unbiased research and serve as neutral conveners.

While the forum did not include a specific focus on the creative economy and cross-border cultural networks, these issues arose in discussions as important components to cultivating a shared identity in Cascadia. For example, there is a vibrant music and arts scene in both Seattle and Vancouver, yet the border remains a major impediment to cross-border pollination within the music industry.⁵ The recent announcement that Seattle will have a National Hockey League team was met with excitement in Vancouver, which will now have a long-desired regional rival for the Vancouver Canucks, contributing to a potentially more integrated entertainment industry and deepened social networks across the border.

Conclusion. Regional leaders, policy makers, and agency officials can build on past and current cross-border efforts to develop an integrated strategy and practice for regularly working together across the border. An emerging opportunity is the Cascadia Innovation Corridor effort, which was initiated in 2016 to create a coordinated and comprehensive approach to cross-border collaboration in the region. While the concept of a unique Cascadia region has existed for decades and integrated planning was discussed in the 1990s,⁶ the Cascadia Innovation Corridor initiative is aided by strong private sector support and keen interest by state and provincial government in both BC and Washington. In addition, the goals and purpose of the Cascadia Innovation Corridor (and cross-border collaboration in general) are currently aligned with state and provincial goals. Whether or not the effort can form a “single sustainable region, with a shared sense of identity, growth, employment and connectivity”⁷ remains to be seen. However, the concept alone has already developed new cross-border partnerships and elevated the visibility of cross-border collaboration and its importance. Increased support from multiple levels of government on both sides of the border would help stakeholders to remain engaged in these efforts.

Numerous channels of cross-border collaboration exist at multiple scales, but their successes, challenges, and opportunities are not widely known, which limits their impact on parallel efforts. As the region moves toward increased integration and cross-border connections, it will be important to document the lessons learned (both within the region and elsewhere) and identify the key principles that constitute effective and successful collaboration. The BPRI forum was one initial effort to contribute to this goal, which will enhance the region’s reputation for innovative leadership in transboundary collaboration.

Endnotes

1. See <https://wp.wvu.edu/bpri/policy-forum-cross-border-collaboration/>. Funding for the forum was provided by the [Borders in Globalization](#) project at the University of Victoria.
2. For more on the Cascadia Innovation Corridor, see <http://connectcascadia.ca/>.
3. The full MOU is available at: https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/BCWA_MOU_10.05.2018.pdf.
4. The depoliticized environment was identified as unique to the region, and stands in contrast to some other cross-border regions discussed at the forum.
5. A forthcoming BPRI Border Policy Brief will analyze cross-border issues related to the music industry in Cascadia.
6. For more background on the Cascadia effort, see <http://www.america2050.org/cascadia.html>.
7. For more on the Cascadia Innovation Corridor, see <http://connectcascadia.ca/>.