



United States General Accounting Office  
Washington, DC 20548

April 22, 2002

The Honorable John C. Conyers  
The Honorable Carolyn C. Kilpatrick  
House of Representatives

Subject: Customs and INS: Information on Inspection, Infrastructure,  
Traffic Flow, and Security Matters at the Detroit Port of Entry

In your November 6, 2001, letter, you expressed concern about the post-September 11 environment of heightened security along our nation's borders, particularly regarding passenger and cargo delays at the two Detroit Port of Entry land-border crossings. As agreed with your offices, we obtained information on U.S. Customs Service and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) inspection resources, traffic flow patterns, inspection infrastructure issues, security issues, and potential long-term solutions and options to increase traffic flow and enhance security at the bridge and tunnel.

On February 20, 2002, we briefed your offices on the results of our review. This report transmits the material from that briefing.

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## Background

The Detroit area has two land-border crossings: the Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel between Detroit, Michigan, and Windsor, Ontario. Daily, thousands of cars and trucks cross over the bridge or use the tunnel. Fiscal year 2001 traffic volumes over the bridge averaged approximately 10,800 passenger vehicles and 4,300 trucks each day, and the tunnel averaged about 11,600 passenger vehicles and 240 trucks each day. Trade values between the United States and Canada total about \$1.2 billion per day, 27 percent of which is accounted for by merchandise crossing the Ambassador Bridge alone. Both the bridge and tunnel are operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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## Summary

Immediately after September 11, Customs and INS increased the number and thoroughness of inspections and questioned all bridge and tunnel travelers. This effort resulted in truck wait times of over 10 hours in the

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first few days.<sup>1</sup> In an effort to decrease wait times, Customs and INS extended shifts, curtailed vacations, and brought in additional staff and obtained assistance from the National Guard and local law enforcement. By the end of October, wait times had generally been reduced to about 20 minutes. However, Customs officials and bridge and tunnel officials said that delays occur for other reasons, such as a limited number of bridge and tunnel lanes, too few inspection booths, and various choke points, such as the bridge cargo inspection plaza on the U.S. side. Increased security to both structures was also implemented. Among the actions taken, bridge and tunnel officials stopped allowing vehicles from queuing up on the bridge or inside the tunnel. The vehicles are now held at either end of the facilities until backups have diminished before they are allowed to cross the bridge or use the tunnel.

Balancing enforcement of border security and facilitating travel and commerce is a major challenge for Customs and INS inspectors assigned to our borders. Some solutions are planned to be implemented to help reduce traffic wait times. For example, Customs and INS expect to increase personnel. According to the bridge and tunnel company officials, long-term enhancements are possible at both locations. For example, the Detroit International Bridge Company, a private company that owns the bridge, also owns land near the bridge that could be used for expanded inspection space on the U.S. side of the border. Company officials said, however, that negotiations with the General Services Administration (GSA)<sup>2</sup> for one parcel of land have been unsuccessful. Also, according to tunnel company officials, the city of Detroit owns unused land adjacent to the tunnel that could possibly be used to expand inspection facilities. However, no negotiations had been completed at the time of our review.

A plan to make the border more secure without impeding travel flow and trade has been agreed to in principle by the U.S. and Canadian governments. This plan is the Canada-U.S. Smart Border Declaration, which was signed on December 12, 2001, by the Office of Homeland Security Director and the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The plan focuses on four primary areas: the secure flow of people; the secure flow of goods; secure infrastructure; and information sharing in the enforcement of these objectives. The plan has listed 30 items for action to

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to September 11, 2001, no data exist about extent of delays.

<sup>2</sup> GSA is generally responsible for acquiring, leasing, and maintaining property for use by U.S. government agencies.

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improve border security and traffic flow. Many of the officials we interviewed have suggested solutions for consideration that they believe would facilitate the movement of traffic across the border and maintain security of the bridge and tunnel.

Besides increasing personnel and improving technology to expedite the flow of traffic, officials are also considering other procedures to improve traffic flow and security. These include pre-approval of low-risk traffic and reverse inspections. Pre-approved low-risk traffic would pass through thus allowing for inspection efforts to concentrate on high-risk traffic. Reverse inspections would involve U.S. inspectors clearing cargo and travelers in Canada and vice-versa. Currently, vehicles leaving Canada are not inspected until they reach the U.S. side of the border. Inspections, under this plan, would be performed before trucks and travelers cross the bridge or enter the tunnel instead of afterwards. However, proposals such as reverse inspections are not without concerns and issues, and these are being discussed at high U.S. and Canadian government levels.

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## Scope and Methodology

To obtain information, we visited the Ambassador Bridge and Detroit-Windsor Tunnel from January 28 to January 31, 2002, and obtained pre- and post-September 11 Customs and INS workload data. We met with Customs and INS officials at their headquarters in Washington, D.C., and in Detroit; bridge and tunnel operators; Detroit, Windsor, and Canadian Chambers of Commerce officials; auto industry officials; and Canadian Consulate officials. Overall, our work was conducted from December 2001 to February 2002 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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The enclosed slides contain additional details on Customs and INS resources, traffic volume at the ports of entry, security issues, and proposals for long-term solutions. We provided Customs and INS with a draft of the slides and incorporated their comments as appropriate. As agreed with your offices, this report concludes our work on the Detroit Port of Entry border crossings.

Copies of this report are available to other interested parties. This report will also be available on GAO's home page at <http://www.gao.gov>.

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If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 512-8777 or by e-mail at stanar@gao.gov or Darryl W. Dutton, Assistant Director, at (213) 830-1000, or by e-mail at duttond@gao.gov. Key contributors to this report were Holly Ciampi, Cheryl L. Gordon, Bonnie D. Hall, and Maria Romero.



Richard M. Stana  
Director, Justice Issues

Enclosure

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# Enclosure



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## Areas of Interest Concerning Detroit Port of Entry

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Briefing of Results of Work Requested by:  
Representative Carolyn C. Kilpatrick  
Representative John C. Conyers

February 20, 2002

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## Objectives

To provide information on the following areas of interest concerning the Detroit Port of Entry specifically

- Customs and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) inspection resources.
- Traffic flow patterns.
- Inspection infrastructure issues.
- Security issues.
- Long-term solutions and options to increase traffic flow and enhance security.



Objectives, Scope, and  
Methodology (con't.)

Scope:

- Ambassador Bridge and Detroit-Windsor Tunnel.

Methodology:

- Obtained pre- and post-September 11 Customs and INS workload data when available.
- Met with Customs and INS officials; bridge and tunnel operators; Detroit, Windsor, and Canadian Chambers of Commerce; auto industry officials; and Canadian Consulate officials.

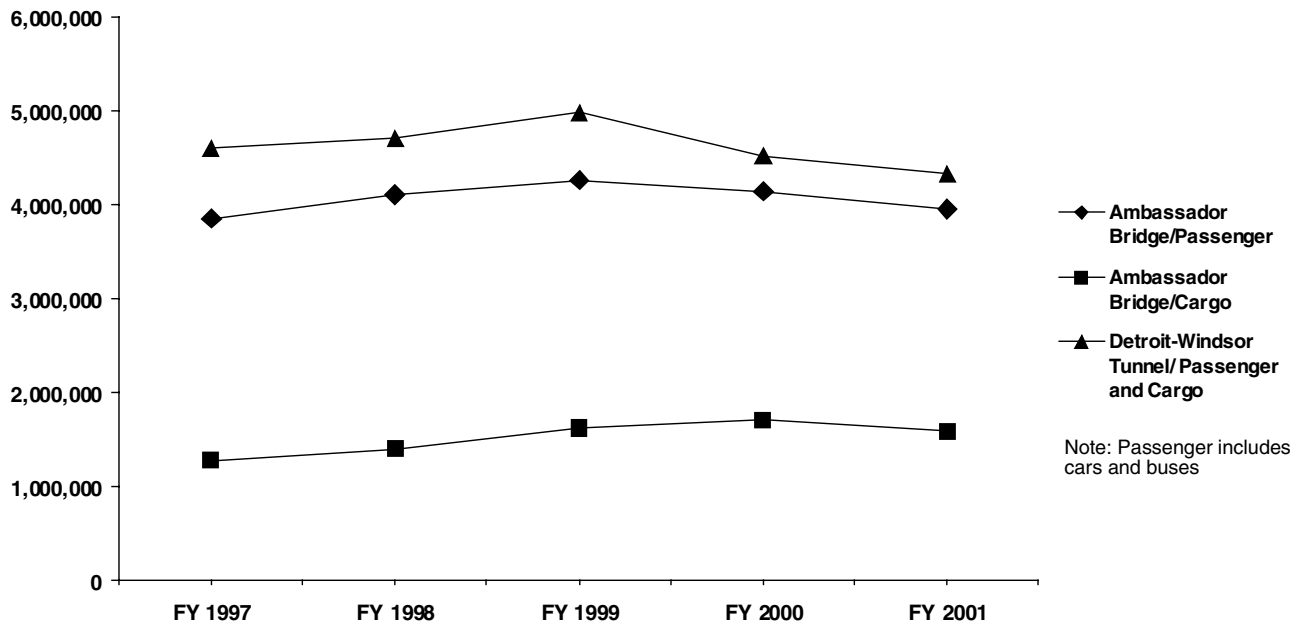


- United States and Canada are the world's largest trading partners
  - Value of trade about \$1.2 billion per day.
  - 27 percent of all merchandise trade crosses the Ambassador Bridge.
  
- FY 2001 average traffic volume
  - Bridge – 4,300 trucks; 10,800 passenger vehicles per day.
  - Tunnel – 240 trucks; 11,600 passenger vehicles per day.
  - Both bridge and tunnel operate 24 hours, 7 days a week.  
(See chart on page 9)





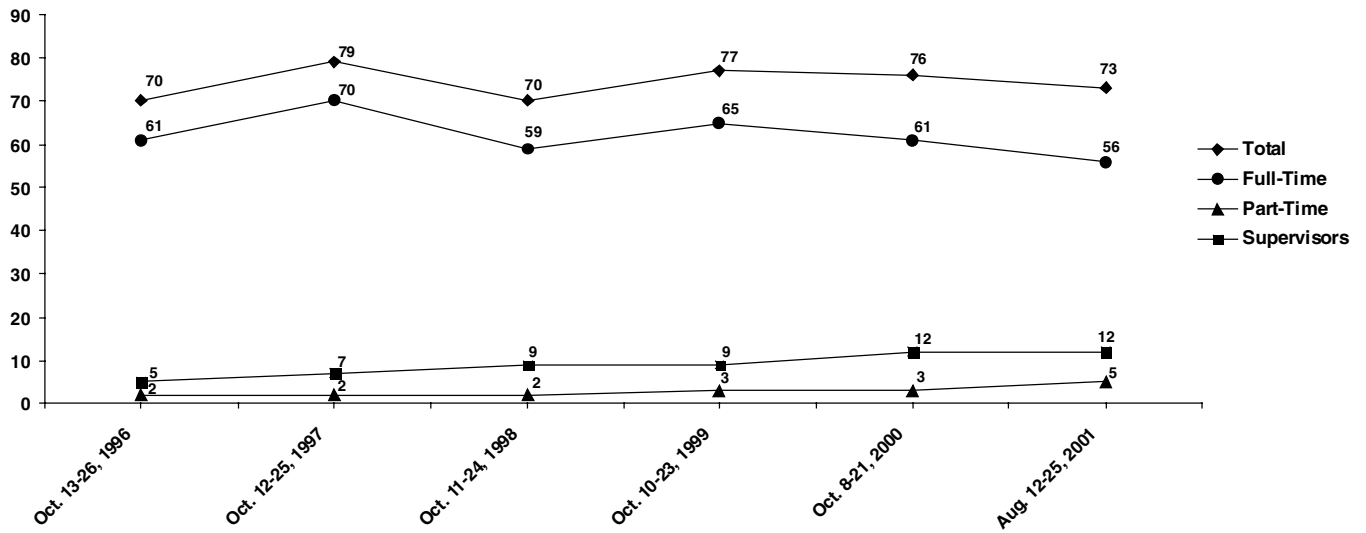
### Number of Vehicles Processed at Detroit Border Crossings FYs 1997–2001





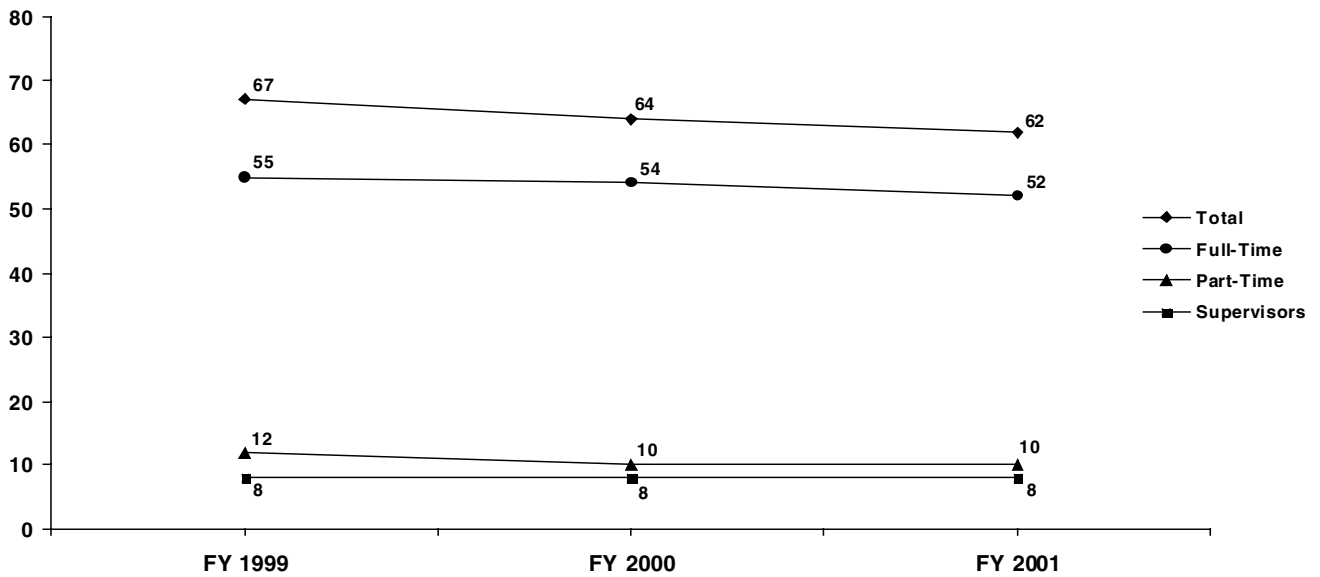
Customs and INS  
Inspection Resources

### Number of Customs Inspectors On-Board at Bridge and Tunnel Border Crossings Prior to September 11





### Average Number of INS Inspectors On-Board at Bridge and Tunnel Border Crossings





Customs' response to September 11 events and supplemental resources.

- Increased examinations and questioning of all travelers at bridge and tunnel.
- 73 inspection staff on board supplemented by
  - Increased overtime (inspectors and supervisors work 12-hour shifts) and curtailed vacations.
  - 40 inspectors from airport and elsewhere.
  - 12 administrative personnel.
  - About 21 National Guard soldiers.
  - Local law enforcement volunteers.
  - About 26 inspectors from other ports for temporary duty (TDY).



## INS's response to September 11 events and supplemental resources

- 2 inspectors per lane.
- All car trunks and glove compartments checked.
- All passengers asked for identification.
- 62 inspection staff on board supplemented by:
  - Increased overtime (inspectors and supervisors work 12-hour shifts) and curtailed vacations.
  - Other INS personnel from adjudications and investigations.
  - Local law enforcement volunteers.
  - 16 Border Patrol agents detailed to bridge and tunnel for 60 days to conduct primary inspections, traffic management, and port security.



Recent adjustments to staffing as of January 31, 2002

**CUSTOMS**

- Returned inspectors and administrative personnel to normal duties.
- Returned to 8-hour shifts.
- Reduced overtime hours.
  - some inspectors nearing overtime cap
- Allowed limited vacations.

**INS**

- Returned inspectors and other personnel to normal duties.
- Reduced inspector shifts to 10 hours.
- Reduced overtime hours.
  - some inspectors nearing overtime cap
- Allowed limited vacations.



Customs/INS additional resources planned for the bridge  
and tunnel

**CUSTOMS**

**INS**

- 70 new inspectors
- 2 canine enforcement teams
- Recruiting process currently ongoing
- Goal: to have new hires operable by September 30, 2002

- 49 new inspectors (additional inspectors possible)
- Recruiting process currently ongoing
- Goal: to have new hires operable by December 2002



## Traffic Flow Patterns

Traffic flow prior to September 11:

- No record of traffic wait times was maintained.
- Although not documented, back-ups during peak commute hours did exist.

Traffic flow after September 11:

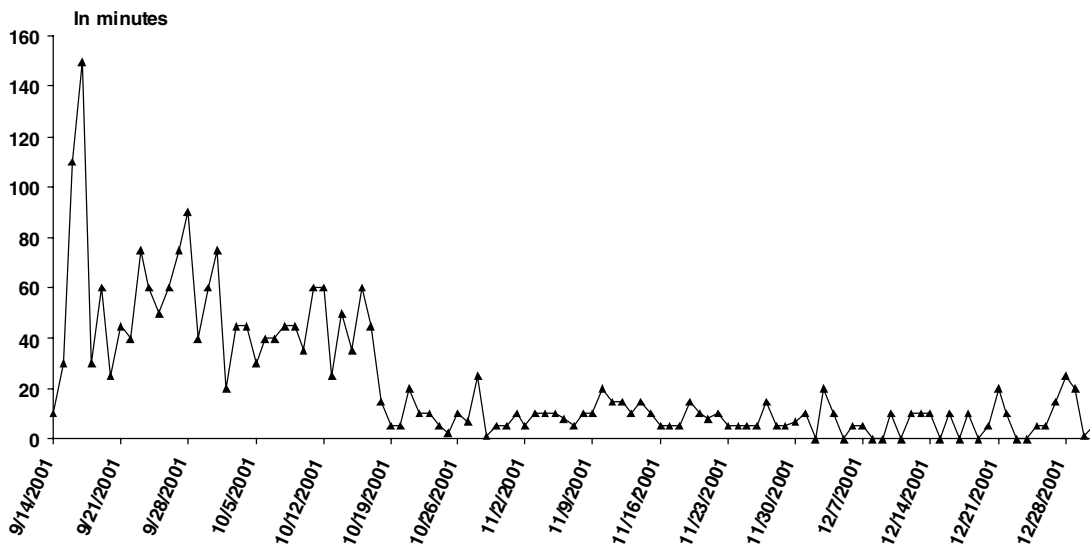
- Truck wait times of over 10 hours from September 11 to 14.
- Wait times decreased to generally less than 20 minutes by the end of October 2001.

(Refer to pages 17 and 18.)



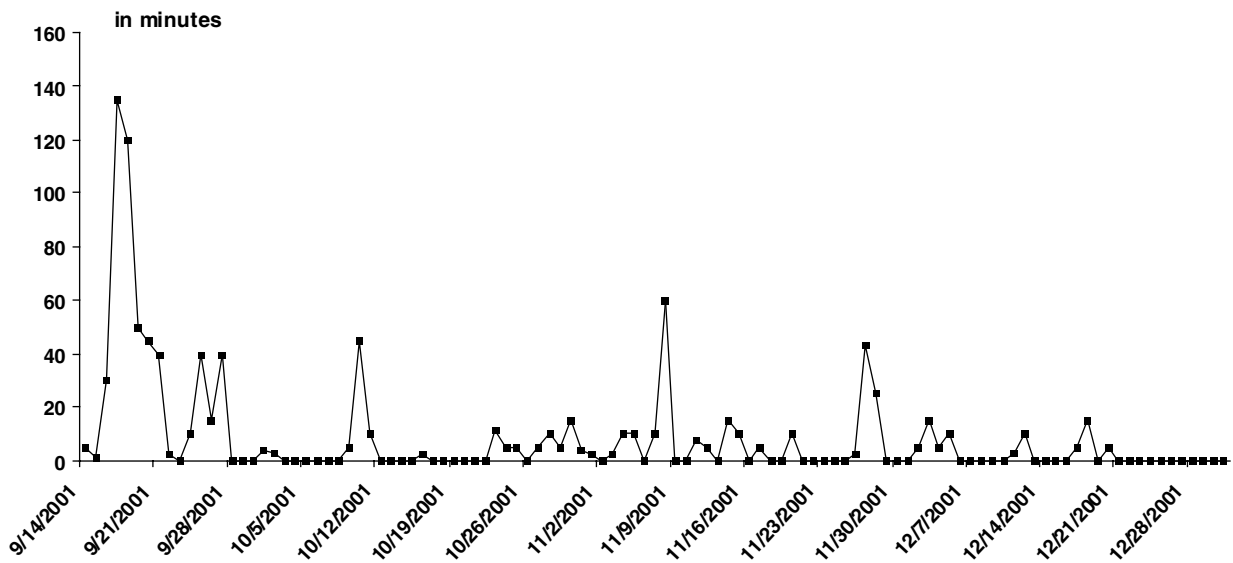


### Passenger and Truck Maximum Wait Times at Detroit-Windsor Tunnel: September 14–December 31, 2001





### Truck Maximum Wait Times at Ambassador Bridge: September 14–December 31, 2001



Note: For the two delay spikes that occurred after the end of October: November 8, 2001, was caused by vehicles being held in a staging area to prevent them from sitting on the bridge, and the other delay in November could not be explained by a Customs official.



### Bridge and tunnel infrastructure concerns

- Too few lanes
  - 2 each way on the bridge
  - 1 each way in the tunnel
  
- Inspection plaza has too few inspection booths, particularly on U.S. side of bridge and tunnel (e.g., 6 booths for trucks on U.S. side of bridge vs. 10 booths on Canadian side).
  
- Choke points in traffic flow, particularly at bridge cargo inspection plaza on U.S. side.
  
- Little room for short-term expansion of limited inspection facilities, particularly on the U.S. side.



## Ambassador Bridge Cargo Inspection Plaza





## Long-term enhancements to bridge and tunnel infrastructure

- Expand bridge inspection plaza on U.S. side
  - Detroit International Bridge Company owns land for expansion
  - Negotiations with General Services Administration for one parcel of land have failed.
  
- Expand tunnel inspection plaza
  - City of Detroit owns unused land adjacent to the tunnel.



Bridge and tunnel enhancements to increase security.

Private contractor conducted bridge and tunnel threat assessments immediately after September 11. As a result:

- Bridge Company installed fencing to contain areas around the bridge's base and hired private security; Windsor Police Department provides tunnel security.
  
- Vehicles are not allowed to queue up on the bridge or inside the tunnel.



Long-Term Solutions and Options  
to Increase Traffic Flow and  
Enhance Security

The following solutions and options come from government, nongovernment, and private industry:

- Change the system for license plate reading from manual to automated (similar to equipment on southern border).
  - Currently have no automation: license plates must be manually keyed in and read backwards through a mirror.
- Expand NEXUS (two-way movement of pre-approved travelers): item #3 in the Canada-U.S. Smart Border Declaration. Is currently being pilot-tested at Sarnia-Port Huron.
- Permanent truck x-ray; have mobile one now on U.S. side.



- Pre-examination of cargo at plants of origin.
  
- Pre-clearance/reverse inspections
  - Item #15 in the Canada-U.S. Smart Border Declaration would have U.S. inspectors clear cargo on Canadian side and vice-versa.
  
  - Nationalistic and sovereignty problems with pre-clearance/reverse inspections are being discussed at high U.S. and Canadian levels.
  
  - Pre-clearance/reverse inspection expansion capabilities exist per bridge and tunnel officials.





Some opinions on reverse inspections:

- INS is concerned about reverse inspections:
  - lack of secure road between inspection point and bridge
  - firearm issue in Canada: Canada does not allow inspectors at border to carry firearms, but INS inspectors carry firearms.
- Customs is open to discussing reverse inspection ideas.
- Bridge company will not invest in enhanced facilities without reverse inspection commitment, which addresses the traffic flow choke points.
- Detroit, Windsor, and Canada Chambers of Commerce advocate reverse inspections; the Canadian Consulate is open to discussing reverse inspection ideas.