

## Ridge and McLellan to Move Forward with Land Pre-Clearance Pilots

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On the 3rd anniversary of the signing of the United States-Canada Smart Border Declaration, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge and Canadian Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan today released the fifth Smart Border Action Plan Status Report. Highlights of the significant progress made include:

- Issuance of a framework to put land pre-clearance in place at the Buffalo-Fort-Erie Peace Bridge and at one other border crossing. The pre-clearance pilot at the Peace Bridge would involve the re-location of all U.S. primary and secondary border operations for both commercial and passenger traffic from Buffalo to Fort Erie. At the second pilot site, Canadian border functions will be moved to the U.S. side of the border, with the two Governments actively exploring crossings where this may be suitable, such as the Thousand Islands Bridge or Queenston-Lewiston;
- The finalization of Canadian and U.S. regulations for the Safe Third Country Agreement. Implementation of the Agreement at the Canada-United States land border will follow shortly;
- The decision to expand U.S. pre-clearance facilities to the Halifax International Airport as soon as the construction of the necessary infrastructure is completed; and
- The expansion of the Free and Secure Trade (FAST) program to seven new high volume commercial crossings along the land border.

"Our two governments have heard the call for urgent implementation of land pre-clearance from American and Canadian stakeholders alike. We are responding today by issuing a framework to put pre-clearance in place at the Peace Bridge and at another location along the land border. This initiative is a true testimony of how our two countries are working together to create a more modern, secure and efficient border," said Secretary Ridge.

Secretary Ridge and Deputy Prime Minister McLellan also met with border stakeholders from the Windsor-Detroit region today to discuss the unique challenges of the Windsor-Detroit Gateway. The Ambassador Bridge and the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel is a critical link in Canada-U.S. trade, and were used by over 13.4 million cars and 1.8 million commercial vehicles in 2003-2004. It is a matter of national and economic security to both countries that there be sufficient capacity to accommodate our expanding trade at these crossings of international importance.

"We are making progress at improving flows across the Windsor-Detroit Gateway, and we are prepared to do more," said Deputy Prime Minister McLellan. "Secretary Ridge and I today met today with bridge, tunnel and ferry operators, and together we have committed to reduce transit times across the Windsor-Detroit Gateway by an additional 25% over the next year."

"The 25% Challenge is an ambitious and an achievable goal. We are committed to providing the leadership and the investments necessary to improving flows through this critical trade corridor," said Secretary Ridge.

In recognition of the critical need to make additional resources available at the busiest land border crossing between Canada and the U.S., Minister McLellan added that the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) will begin immediately hiring an additional 30 officers. This move will increase capacity to process commercial traffic at Windsor by approximately 20%.

"Hiring more officers demonstrates the Government of Canada's commitment to reducing border wait times, said Minister McLellan. It will also enable the CBSA to optimize usage of the current infrastructure in Windsor. The community, industry and our two economies will all benefit as a result."

Finally, Secretary Ridge and Deputy Prime Minister McLellan tasked officials to finalize the development of a next generation Smart Border agenda, as committed to by Prime Minister Martin and President Bush in the New Partnership in North America joint statement, released following their meeting in Ottawa on November 30, 2004.