

**Making the Canada–U.S. Border
Better for Travel and Trade**

The Path Towards Border Digitization

September 2022



**FUTURE BORDERS
COALITION**

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Introduction

The 2018 [*Beyond Preclearance Whitepaper*](#) proposed a more predictable, secure and integrated vision of the U.S.-Canada border. We offered over 50 solutions with an estimated \$13 billion in direct benefits (annually) for both governments and border stakeholders, including 16 pilot projects in the areas of border clearance, facilitation of legitimate travel and trade, and big data risk management. In this 2022 White Paper update, the [Future Borders Coalition](#) (FBC) is taking stock of changes in border management, technology, and innovation, with particular attention to lessons learned from COVID-19.

This update, *The Path Towards Border Digitization*, is the first of a multi-part publication leading up to the 2022 Transportation Border Summit to be held in Washington D.C in October. Taken together, this series will create the framework of FBC's renewed vision of the U.S.-Canada border. Proposals are derived from industry and stakeholders' input through the FBC Task Forces as well as research conducted by InterVISTAS Consulting.

Context & Vision

The implementation of digital border solutions is challenged on a variety of fronts: from [proposals to eliminate travel apps for land border crossings due to unreasonable waiting times](#), to [industry concerns on the relevance of apps due to the ongoing duplication of screening processes during peak times](#), as well as concerns around [privacy protection and accessibility issues](#).

FBC's view is that lessons learned from the implementation of digital platforms such as ArriveCAN and CBP One during the COVID-19 pandemic point to the need for further bilateral alignment and inter-operability of solutions when tackling external threats and addressing security concerns at the border. More importantly, the deployment of a long-term border strategy – supported by the public and private sectors in both countries – is essential to a more integrated vision that enables greater trust and resilience across the U.S.-Canada travel and trade ecosystem.

Time savings and human factors are key areas that need to be addressed in order to maximize the benefits and minimize the pitfalls of border digitization going forward. For instance, how can future digital solutions contribute to time savings for both border officers and the traveling public? How can we integrate human factors into the design of those solutions and ultimately improve access and overall usability for travelers? Our main premise is that digital border solutions can be human-centric *and* also contribute to the efficiency of border crossings – from a government and user perspective.

There is an urgency to address current border challenges in the context of multi-modal travel

Focus on Time Savings

Regrettably, the 2022 transition to post-pandemic travel has not been smooth. Cross-border travel has become synonymous with uncertainty and inconvenience. In Canada, close to 50% of flights originating in the U.S. were either cancelled or delayed during the July 4-10 period. Wait times at the land border have also increased, compounded by the implementation of reduced hours at land crossings along the Canada-U.S. border by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S. CBP).

According to the Buffalo and Fort Erie Peace Bridge Authority and Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, revenues collected from land crossings are still at half of pre-pandemic 2019 levels, and estimated processing times for cars entering Canada using ArriveCAN have been reported at 50% longer than pre-pandemic times, negatively impacting the processing time for both cars and trucks.



Travel apps are also associated with uncertainty and stress at the border, in particular for people who are less familiar with technology or simply do not possess a smartphone. More recently, land travelers have been forced into quarantine for failing to update ArriveCan, despite being fully vaccinated. Travelers have also been put into quarantine upon arrival despite having submitted all necessary information through the app, causing anxiety and confusion.

FBC supports the digitization of the U.S.-Canada border, in order to facilitate the smooth processing and unencumbered entry of travelers at all entry points, measured in time savings and associated efficiencies applied across modes of transportation.

In order to achieve our vision, we propose the following:

1. Integrate travelers' data into interoperable apps

Currently both American and Canadian travelers have the obligation to provide health-related records and general immigration information to operators and border authorities, often using different apps. That means that travelers are put in a situation where they have to input the same information twice for the same trip and to two different entities. As FBC's Land Border Task Force has advised, "For governments a cross-border journey requires the oversight of two different sovereign territories, but from the traveler's perspective it's all one trip. Can't we focus our digitization efforts on the needs of travelers rather than the needs of governments?"

In order to avoid duplication, we recommend the integration of travel-related requirements under a single app, or alternatively two interoperable apps that would cover all modes of transportation under the same conditions.



Furthermore, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. We have already developed successful interoperable data sharing programs through NEXUS and FAST.

These are the gold standard of Canada-U.S. interoperability with a single application form, and a single fee and mechanism to process and manage information. What are the lessons learned from the NEXUS/FAST example that we can carry to future applications? Could ArriveCAN functions be integrated with NEXUS/FAST to capture multiple functions in a single user application?

2. Implement fully automated verification methods to reduce processing times at the border

At present, there are a number of time-consuming, in-person inspections that border officers must perform on travelers who have already completed all data entry requirements through the relevant app. Travelers are also required to provide an address at destination even for same-day trips, increasing the amount of time per border transaction. Burdensome requirements and long line-ups create disincentives for travelers.

We recommend moving into fully automated verification methods – e.g., facial recognition systems – in order to facilitate free flows of travelers and processing speeds at border facilities. Automated verification is easy to scale-up and can be used for a wide range of border functions, for instance in cases where it is necessary to verify whether someone has the right to travel across the U.S.-Canada border.

Based on [previous studies](#), we estimate that the implementation of automated verification systems could reduce border times by up to 20–40%, or at least 10 seconds per eligible passenger (measured in time per transaction), with secondary inspections for cases that are ranked above a certain risk threshold based on pre-established factors and variables (i.e., point of origin, travel history, existing criminal records, immigration status, etc.).



Consider Human Factors

Digital access, technological literacy, and user-experience matter for the future of border digitization. Inadequate internet access, or a lack of understanding of mobile technologies are just some of the factors that can impede the proper use of digital border solutions, potentially resulting in people opting-out from cross-border travel. According to a survey conducted by PEW Research Center in January 2022, [96% of adults between the ages of 18-29 own a smartphone compared with 61% of those who are 65 and older.](#)

Additionally, general public awareness of border processing apps remains low. FBC's Land Border Task Force confirms that [ArriveCAN is not well-known in the U.S.](#) This creates chokepoints at land entry points because cars are physically unable to move out of the line causing unnecessary delays for U.S. visitors to Canada as well as generating media [horror stories](#) that put a chilling effect on future cross-border travel.



The digitization of the U.S.-Canada border should guarantee universal access and usability of technologies for travellers, based on the UN sustainability principle of “no one left behind.” The rules for where, when, and how digital apps will be used should be understandable and accessible by all stakeholders.

In order to achieve our vision, we propose the following:

1. Launch targeted awareness campaigns with a focus on priority groups

The deployment of communication and information campaigns to priority groups – e.g. the elderly and travelers whose first languages are not English or French – is needed to increase overall public awareness and demystify digitized border processes. While airlines and cruise lines are helpful sources of information for Canada-bound passengers, travelers in personally owned vehicles (auto and marine) do not have this extra support and are more likely to arrive at the border unprepared.

2. Allow paper-based alternatives and create staffed help desks at or near border crossing sites

For those travelers who are not tech-savvy or perhaps less comfortable using digital border technologies, access to paper-based alternatives should be considered and be equally valid as a means of border verification if backed up by traditional IDs. Moreover, governments must invest in education and support initiatives that help to bridge the digital divide. FBC members in the cruising industry report that many of their shipboard staff have been diverted to provide ArriveCAN technical support to passengers

who lack smart phones or even email addresses. Another example of necessity-driven innovation is a [feed store in Maine](#) that offers ArriveCAN registration support for northbound travelers headed for New Brunswick. While great examples of community spirit, such ad hoc measures underscore the need for a deliberate and comprehensive approach to user support.

3. Implementation of voice-recognition technologies to ensure smoother journeys and multiple language capabilities

The implementation of voice-recognition technologies can reduce screening times and support the implementation of remote clearance for vehicles crossing the land border. Additionally, these technologies can help vision-impaired travelers have a smoother border experience. Another limitation identified by FBC members who are marketing North America as a global travel destination is the need to move app functionality to Mandarin, Hindi, Arabic, and other of the world's [most spoken languages](#).

Increase Public Trust

The deployment of digital solutions is often associated with data collection, storage, and potential sharing of personal information to third parties, with direct implications for public trust in new border technologies. According to a recent study published by the University of Amsterdam, [perceptions about risk, privacy and trust are important considerations in accepting digital solutions proposed by governments.](#)

With the [proliferation of cyber threats](#), governments are challenged to take the necessary steps to ensure that the public's adoption of border technologies is supported by a legal framework to ensure that personal data will be protected in cases of unwanted system intrusion and security breaches. This framework includes both administrative and technical tools that can be deployed as preventive, detective and corrective tools.

The digital transformation of the border must be supported by a framework for cyber security and identity project. Moreover, to be successful, the public must fully understand the risks and protections inherent to the use of new technologies.



Principles for Building Border Technologies

In order to save time, reduce costs, and improve the experience for all travelers, FBC recommends seven principles to guide the development of border technologies:



Call to Action: A Bilateral Border Digital Roadmap

The coordinated use of digital border technologies can serve Canada and the United States by eliminating redundancy, thereby expediting border crossings. Other benefits include: more accurate and complete data on border risks for both countries, greater certainty for travelers, and a greener border resulting from a significant reduction of paper forms and more efficient deployment of carbon-intensive resources away from low-traffic areas.

There is no shortage of will among border stakeholders for the adoption of technologies that will provide more efficient border crossings and no shortage of tools for digital optimization. Political will is the necessary ingredient to bringing about the necessary improvements. However, a pre-requisite for informed political decisions is bilateral consensus on a roadmap for border digitization.

The Future Borders Coalition is uniquely positioned to create this roadmap and validate its proposals through our network of more than 200 businesses, think tanks, and experts in Canada and the United States. The Bilateral Border Digital Roadmap (BBDR) will address the themes set out in this briefing including: border efficiencies, accessibility, security, and public trust, and will provide recommendations for public-private and intergovernmental coordination and governance.

The BBDR initiative will launch during our 2022 Transportation Border Summit and with practical responsibilities allocated to our new Border Technology Taskforce. A series of quarterly stakeholder calls and written reports will culminate in the release of a draft roadmap in Fall 2023.

FBC's Vision: Cooperation between the United States and Canada to improve and expand the uptake of digital border tools in order to promote an optimized passenger experience, and barrier-free trade.

About The FBC

The Future Borders Coalition (FBC) is dedicated to building a better U.S.-Canada border for travel and trade. We are a bi-national organization with a multi-year mandate to promote a cohesive vision of the Canada-U.S. border based on the principles of efficiency, safety, and security, supported by continuous improvements in technology, processes, facilities, and innovation.

Our membership is diverse and cross-sectoral, covering all modes of transportation (i.e., air, land, rail, maritime), cargo and logistics, the tourism sector, and the academic research community. Together we bring practical experience and resources to generate evidence-based recommendations vetted by industry leaders. This combination is a powerful tool for constructive engagement with key decision-makers on the most pressing issues affecting the U.S.-Canada border.