



2020 IMTC PERFORMANCE REVIEW

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Program

INTRODUCTION

The International Mobility & Trade Corridor Program (IMTC) is an award-winning binational multi-agency coalition that works to identify and promote improvements to **mobility** and **security** for the border crossings that make up the Cascade Gateway.

The Cascade Gateway consists of five land border ports-of-entry between Whatcom County, Washington State and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

The goals of the IMTC program are to:

- Coordinate planning
- Improve regional, cross-border trade and transportation data
- Support infrastructure improvements
- Support coordinated implementation of U.S. and Canadian border policy
- Improve operations

IMTC stakeholders have been meeting since 1997 and have funded over **\$42.5 million** (USD) of regional border projects.

IMTC is administered by the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG).

ESTABLISHING PERFORMANCE

Performance measurements provide periodic indicators of effectiveness relative to goals and are an important part of the IMTC program. However the challenge of measuring the performance of a forum is that many outcomes the stakeholders strive towards - a reduction in border wait time, an increase in the safe movement of cargo, etc. - are difficult to directly attribute to a single agency's actions. Border operations are managed by multiple agencies and are affected by numerous external variables.

For the past five years WCOG tracked performance of the IMTC coalition using a set of measures to broadly assess effectiveness of IMTC and to answer the following questions:

- 1 How well is IMTC fulfilling its objectives and the expectations of participating agencies?
- 2 How should WCOG spend its resources to provide the greatest public benefit?
- 3 How can results from IMTC validate funding, involvement, and staff time of participating agencies?
- 4 What accomplishments are worthy of celebrating?
- 5 What can be done differently to improve the program?

2020 AND THE IMPACTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Like every other person and organization around the world in 2020, the IMTC forum has been deeply affected by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The closure of the U.S. - Canada border to all but essential travel on March 21, 2020; the shrinking of the economy and the subsequent impacts on cross-border trade; the inability for government agencies and private organizations to meet or to operate within offices; and the ongoing health concerns of their communities and staff have all led to a drastic change to how IMTC has operated this year.

As a result, this performance review is different than in prior years.

PREVIOUS MEASURES

Typically, an IMTC assessment is based on a series of measures broken out into categories as follows:

- **MEETINGS**
 1. Meeting attendance
 2. Meeting topics
 3. National focus
- **DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS & DISTRIBUTION**
 4. Current data
- **COLLABORATION**
 5. Development of the IMTC Project List
 6. Development of collaborative tools
 7. Funding partnerships
 8. Projects undertaken
 9. Project assistance requests
- **DETERMINING EFFECTIVENESS**
 10. Work relating to IMTC purpose, goals, & strategies
 11. Resource allocation
 12. Validating outcomes
 13. CMM assessment

Each of these measures had means of an assessment and a value that could be compared to the previous year to determine whether the coalition was improving, maintaining, or decreasing its effectiveness in achieving its purpose, goals, and strategies.

This method also served as a means of capturing the work completed in the calendar year by the coalition and WCOG on behalf of the stakeholders.

MEASURES FOR 2020

Despite the challenges of this year, the IMTC forum maintained many of its core functions. To evaluate the forum’s performance, a revised set of measures has been developed to show 2020 accomplishments.

Measures have been broken into primary categories with **achievements** and **room for improvement** highlighted for each.

1. MEETINGS

There were seven IMTC Steering Committee meetings in 2020. Only the February meeting was in-person. Given the nature of the online format, meetings were restricted to the Steering Committee to keep participation at a manageable level.

The fact that nearly as many meetings were held in this pandemic year as in 2019 shows that interest in sharing information and participating in the IMTC forum remained strong for all stakeholders.

	Online meetings provided an opportunity for many who could normally not attend due to travel restrictions or distance to participate, leading to higher attendance at meetings than in prior years. It also broadened the range of participants, allowing stakeholders to interact with new individuals and agencies.
	The reduction in regularly-scheduled events increased appetites for information-sharing and the need for updates directly from agency staff. These meetings were often the only way to get information about what was happening at the border crossings.
	The online format, while excellent for presenting information and sharing current event updates, does not lend itself to conversation or dialogue. Given that the function of IMTC is to discuss the operations of our shared border facilities in an open manner, this lack of casual discussion proved that in-person events are better suited for collaborative work.
	Some technology security restrictions for the inspection agencies made their participation online challenging.

Ideas for next year

- Use the webinar tool and other online tools to facilitate larger meetings to allow for Core Group meetings to occur
- Work with U.S. CBP and Canada Border Services Agency to identify better meeting platforms that would allow them to participate online with fewer technical difficulties.
- Look at ways to encourage more dialogue in the meeting with online tools, whiteboarding activities, using cameras, and other ideas.

2. PROJECTS

Several ongoing IMTC projects continued in 2020 and some projects began.

1. COVID-19 Impacts on Cross-Border Freight through the Cascade Gateway

This project seeks to understand how cross-border trade flows have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and if the nature of these changes are short-term, longer-term systematic changes, or some combination of these.

2. Cascade Gateway Border Data Warehouse 3.0

This \$200,000 (USD) project upgraded the existing database that stores passenger and commercial vehicle wait times, volume, and other data relating to vehicle traffic at the four Cascade Gateway land ports-of-entry. The project wrapped up February 2021 with a new website, database, and subscription service accessible at www.borderdata.org.

3. Modeling Pre-Primary NII Inspection

This project uses discrete event simulation modeling to analyze the effects of processing empty commercial vehicles through a non-intrusive inspection (NII) portal as a pre-primary strategy to improve commercial processing rates and increase security.

4. Lynden/Aldergrove crossing assessment

Recently completed improvements at the Lynden/Aldergrove crossing create a heightened need to update information about cross-border travel and trade moving through the system and identify trends that upcoming investments should respond to. The assessment will also look at the Sumas/Abbotsford-Huntingdon port-of-entry that often has changing patterns based on behaviors at Lynden/Aldergrove.



Research and ITS projects were able to continue without much impact in 2020 given that the majority of work could be accomplished from home.



The lack of dynamic current border data impacted some of the testing for the Cascade Gateway Border Data Warehouse project and slowed the Lynden/Aldergrove assessment.

3. DATA SHARING

Data sharing was previously evaluated based on the freshness of the data sets available by mode; data requests from agencies; project assistance requests; and the development and distribution of specific data-related products like the IMTC Resource Manual and the border construction schedule.

For this evaluation, we looked at whether IMTC partner agencies have successfully exchanged data sources, whether those sources of data have increased or improved, and what can be done to advance data resources and sharing next year.



The IMTC Resource Manual, published annually since 2000 as a print document, was converted to an online, dynamic data resource tool called the **2020 Border Data Digest**. This new feature allows users to interact with the visualizations and download specific data from the presentations.



Data collected in previous projects, including the 2015-2016 Border Freight Operations Study and the 2018-2019 IMTC Passenger Intercept Survey, were made available through data visualizations through the 2020 Border Data Digest dashboards.





An analysis of impacts of COVID-19 cross-border restrictions on passenger travel was made available to stakeholders and the public, and a monthly comparison of freight volumes was shared comparing 2020 to 2019.





WCOG assisted the Border Policy Research Institute at Western Washington University to estimate the impacts of the loss of Canadian visitors to Whatcom County and Washington State.



WCOG was asked to provide data to partners on multiple occasions.

	There were less opportunities to share datasets with partner agencies and to find out what other datasets are available.
	No new data collection efforts were undertaken this year.

	There were no Core Group meetings so a new IMTC Project List was not approved in 2020. The 2019 IMTC Project List has continued forward for another year should funding opportunities arise.
	No TBWG meetings were held in 2020.





Ideas for next year

- Find out from IMTC stakeholders what opportunities there might be to collect COVID-19 year specific data in 2021 that could prove valuable.

4. COLLABORATION

In a typical year, IMTC stakeholders are involved in numerous collaborative activities across the border. WCOG staff are also active participants in the U.S. - Canada Transportation Border Working Group, a binational forum of agencies working to improve cross-border efficiencies.

This is the area where COVID-19 has had the greatest impact on IMTC activities, as meetings have all been forced online and larger gatherings for dialogue were cancelled. The list below shows the few examples where WCOG staff were able to work together with partner agencies on cross-border initiatives.

	WCOG worked with B.C. Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure to identify southbound loop detectors in the Advanced Traveller Information System as part of the Cascade Gateway Border Data Warehouse 3.0 Project, and will continue to work with a subset of staff to see if issues regarding data from some of the detectors can be resolved.
	WCOG staff accomplished some tasks as part of the Transportation Border Working Group Border Compendium Subcommittee, completing initial outreach to bridge and tunnel authorities across the U.S. - Canada border.
	WCOG staff attended online border-related meetings including the September, 2020 Cascadia Innovations Border Forum and the November 2020 Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) Conference.
	WCOG and Transport Canada entered a funding partnership to research the impacts of COVID-19 on cross-border freight flows for 2020 and 2021.

Ideas for next year

- Work with the TBWG Steering Committee to have a national level meeting in 2021.

SUMMARY

Despite the notable changes of operating a cross-border forum in a pandemic year where no cross-border passenger traffic has taken place, and cross-border commercial traffic has been notably altered, the IMTC forum has continued to operate, albeit with differences. Collaborative activities have been reduced, but meetings online have improved both reach and attendance; projects have continued and data have been made available through online formats for a more dynamic, interactive experience. And heading into 2021, WCOG staff are looking to improve the way IMTC conducts its online meetings to broaden to Core Groups and engage in many of its former activities in this new format, taking on the challenges of the online interface by finding ways to engage participants with new tools.

Ideas to pursue in 2021 to improve IMTC include:

- Use the webinar tool and other online tools to facilitate larger meetings to allow for Core Group meetings to occur.
- Work with U.S. CBP and Canada Border Services Agency to identify better meeting platforms that would allow them to participate online with fewer technical difficulties.
- Look at ways to encourage more dialogue in the meeting with online tools, whiteboarding activities, using cameras, and other ideas.
- Find out from IMTC stakeholders what opportunities there might be to collect COVID-19 year specific data in 2021 that could prove valuable.
- Work with the TBWG Steering Committee to have a national level meeting in 2021.