

20 July 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf

Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Under Secretary of the DHS Office of Strategy, Policy and Plans (PLCY)
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Re: A Phased Approach for Easing Travel Restrictions on the U.S.-Canada Border

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf,

We are writing on behalf of the Future Borders Coalition, a bi-national initiative composed of more than 60 member organizations from all modes of transportation, the business community, and industry groups. Our objective is to promote the efficiency and security of the U.S.-Canada border while also developing a cohesive vision around improvements in technology, processes, facilities and innovation to support economic prosperity, safety, and security.

Since March 2020, all non-essential travel between the United States and Canada has been curtailed due to the imminent risks of contagion related to the COVID-19 virus. We commend the federal government for maintaining close and transparent communications with our members on this issue, and for continuing to allow commerce and essential industries to cross our borders, keeping our vital commercial supply chains intact during the ongoing pandemic.

Closing the U.S.-Canada border during the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak was an important step to contain the spread of the virus in our communities. In response to this collective effort, our members have stepped up to protect the lives and livelihood of millions of U.S. and Canadian citizens and residents through a series of health-related measures. However, we note that the border closure has been extended four times – most recently to August 21.

As we enter the peak summer season and the prospects of recovery remain elusive, the question then becomes, given the health data currently available, what is the path forward for both countries to responsibly and safely ease travel restrictions on the U.S.-Canada border?

Our view is that a phased approach informed by the best science and factual health considerations should be implemented. This is why we are proposing the creation of a Joint Task Force – composed of government officials, public health experts, and supported by an Advisory Committee of private sector leaders – to begin working on a set of risk-mitigating measures and health-related protocols with a view to establish a balanced regulatory framework for the orderly, safe and gradual easing of borders restrictions.

While recognizing that health protocols and standards will become an integral part of all border crossings in the future, the Future Borders Coalition would like to propose four key principles to support the implementation of a phased approach by the Joint Task Force:

- 1. A bi-national and coordinated approach should be adopted with the objective to develop mutually accepted risk-mitigating measures and health protocols**
- 2. Both governments should adopt a layered risk-based approach when reviewing entry requirements and travel restrictions**
- 3. A phased approach for easing border restrictions should be informed by science-based criteria and communicated based on easily understood requirements**
- 4. The economic impact of border closures should be carefully assessed by both governments and inform the path towards the easing of border restrictions**

The United States and Canada have one of the largest trade and travel bilateral relationships in the world and our two countries have a long history of innovation in the management and protection of borders. We believe that the creation of a Joint Task Force coupled with the implementation of a phased approach will ensure an orderly, safe, and gradual easing of restrictions along the U.S.-Canada border, thus strengthening this historical partnership and ensuring a sustainable economic recovery. This is also an opportunity for both countries to contribute to the shaping of global standards and best practices in the post-COVID-19 world.

We are attaching to this letter a more detailed discussion on the four principles.

We look forward to engaging with you in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,



Gerry Bruno
Co-Chair and Executive Director
gerry.bruno@futureborderscoalition.org



Matt Morrison
Co-Chair
matt.morrison@futureborderscoalition.org

Encl.: Future Borders Coalition, "Principles to Implement a Phased Approach for Easing U.S.-Canada Border Closures and Other Travel Restrictions" (July 2020).

Principles to Implement a Phased Approach for Easing U.S.-Canada Border Closures and Other Travel Restrictions

July 2020

We recognize the devastating impact of the COVID-19 virus on the health and economic conditions of communities on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border and the need for governmental action aimed at protecting the health and economic well-being of populations of all ages from global pandemics.

With the objective to reduce the unintended long-term and social and economic consequences of border closures on the quality of life of our communities, and with a view to finding a way to reconcile public health imperatives with the social need to speed up economic recovery, the Future Borders Coalition proposes the creation of a Joint Task Force – composed of government officials, public health experts, supported by an Advisory Committee of private sector leaders – to begin working on a set of risk-mitigating measures and health-related protocols based on the following principles:

1. A bi-national and coordinated approach should be adopted with the objective to develop mutually accepted risk-mitigating measures and health protocols

Although we recognize the sovereignty of both countries and the right of their respective levels of government to define their own criteria and standards, our view is that bi-national pilot projects such as health preclearance – based on successful models like border preclearance – should be considered by the Joint Task Force now and in the future. A bi-national approach on digital tools to augment traditional contact tracing, and an analysis of the effective reproduction rates of the virus in various geographic regions may also be considered.

In addition, whenever possible, the development of protocols and risk-mitigating measures should be compatible with internationally recognized science-based best practices and informed by global standards and approaches, as well as other industry guidelines.

2. Both governments should adopt a layered risk-based approach when reviewing entry requirements and travel restrictions

Any future re-opening of borders should be implemented according to a layered risk-based approach. Border restrictions should also be eased on an individual basis if it is as possible to demonstrate that the risks of COVID-19 transmission are low or negligible. In that respect, we support the adoption of common standards or benchmarks similar to those adopted by the European Union to assess high-risk countries. In our view, a layered approach also reduces risks and provides health security for our populations.

For example, according to a layered risk-based approach, governments could request those wishing to cross the border proof of a mutually recognized negative COVID test 72 hours before the date of travel. For those traveling by land, a second rapid test should be administered prior to crossing the border. For those traveling by air, the second layer should include a rapid test prior to departure, and if necessary, a third test upon arrival.

In our view, whenever a layered risk-based approach is implemented, priority should always be given to relying on the best science and health technology with a view to mitigating risks from any travel across the border.

3. A phased approach for easing border restrictions should be informed by science-based criteria and communicated based on easily understood requirements

The easing of restrictions on the U.S.-Canada border should be implemented in phases, informed by science and mutually agreed criteria, and communicated to different segments of the traveling public on explicit terms. For example, those with extended family on either side of the border and who can demonstrate a negative COVID test may be allowed to enter. Same for those who own property or businesses on either side of the border.

The introduction of health declaration forms may also be considered as a key component of a gradual easing of restrictions, especially in the later phases of re-opening. For example, those showing proof of a valid negative COVID test taken in advance may be allowed entry if they complete a health questionnaire.

The Joint Task Force, supported by a panel of experts and the Advisory Committee, should establish a set of objectives and scientifically-sound criteria for moving from one phase to the next, while also monitoring the application of restrictions and enabling necessary adjustments when required.

4. The economic impact of border closures should be carefully assessed by both governments and inform the path towards the easing of border restrictions.

Given the fiscal and financial strain imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the integrated nature of the cross-border economy, the governments of the United States and Canada should prioritize a study of the direct and indirect impacts to both economies resulting from the continued closure of the border for non-essential travel, by region. This data, when paired with health risk information, will help inform the urgency with which the decisions related to the easing of border restrictions are made.