

## BILL ANALYSIS

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### AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The efficient movement and careful surveillance of commercial and noncommercial traffic through the United States' ports of entry are vital to this country's economic prosperity and security, yet serious bottlenecks are choking customs inspection lanes on the Texas-Mexico border. With its entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1986 and the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement on January 1, 1994, Mexico has become one of the United States' primary trading partners; the strength of that partnership is evident in the combined value of U.S.-Mexico export-import trade, which rose from \$81.5 billion in 1993, the year before NAFTA went into effect, to \$183.7 billion in just the first six months of 2008.

The overwhelming majority of U.S. trade with Mexico--80 percent in 2002--passes through Texas ports of entry, and over the past decade and a half these ports have seen a dramatic increase in commercial traffic; the number of commercial vehicles entering Texas from Mexico rose from 2.7 million in 1994 to more than 4.3 million in 2001, and some estimates predict that cross-border truck traffic in the Texas-Mexico border region may increase by 85 percent between 2000 and 2030. Neither the present border-crossing facilities nor the current systems for inspecting and monitoring cross-border traffic were designed to handle the volume of people, vehicles, and goods now passing through checkpoints in Texas.

Compounding the challenge posed by an inadequate infrastructure are the increasingly detailed inspections, which are designed to reduce the flow of illegal substances and to guard against terrorism; as a result of these pressures, the length of the wait time at Texas ports of entry is soaring. Delays at the border are detrimental to economic activity in the U.S., adding to a company's cost of shipping and impending production at maquiladoras, which account for the largest segment of U.S.-Mexico trade and which depend on just-in-time delivery service to achieve savings and greater efficiency. Congestion caused by these delays also poses a threat to public safety--the sheer scale of commercial traffic means that only five percent of trucks entering Texas can be physically inspected; in addition, pollution from idling vehicles has harmed air quality to a marked degree and endangers the health of border residents.

Robust foreign trade fosters domestic prosperity and generates federal revenue, and a portion of that revenue should be invested in support of customs operations, the smooth functioning of which promotes the continued expansion of exports and imports; expediting the flow of commercial traffic while ensuring appropriately rigorous inspections will require a federal commitment to fund improved infrastructure, including the construction of additional customs inspection lanes and the adoption of technology that will speed the movement of low-risk traffic, as well as an increase in customs personnel and customs operating hours.

In promoting the secure, swift movement of vehicle and pedestrian traffic at U.S. land ports of entry, the border states also have a major role to play; Section 1303 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users directs the U.S. secretary of transportation to implement a coordinated border infrastructure program and serves as a funding source for border area infrastructure improvements and regulatory enhancements. Texas legislators and business people are acutely aware of the improvements that need to be made at ports of entry on the Rio Grande, if the economic promise of NAFTA is to be fully realized by this state and nation; these ports serve as a critical gateway to foreign trade, and it is essential that they promote, rather than hinder, the flow of that vital resource.

**RESOLVED**

That the 81st Legislature of the State of Texas hereby respectfully urge the Congress of the United States to provide emergency funding and resources to begin immediately addressing increasing delays at U.S. ports of entry on the Texas-Mexico border.

That the congress provide funding for 24-hour customs operations and for infrastructure improvements, including more customs inspection lanes and more customs inspectors, at border crossings between Texas and Mexico.

That the Texas secretary of state forward official copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the Texas delegation to the congress with the request that this resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.