

Expansion work for busiest border crossing

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An artist's rendering shows an 800-foot pedestrian bridge under construction at the U.S.-Mexico border as part of the first phase of the federal government's \$577 million project to expand the San Ysidro Port of Entry.

The federal government yesterday kicked off the first phase of a \$577 million expansion of the San Ysidro Port of Entry, the largest border project in U.S. history.

Officials with the U.S. [General Services Administration](#), which is managing the project, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection announced that construction has begun on an 800-foot, east-west pedestrian bridge that will cross Interstate 5.

GSA officials say an expanded border crossing will accommodate the growing number of travelers — more than 50,000 vehicles and 25,000 pedestrians daily — heading into the United States.

The expansion will increase the number of lanes in each direction and realign southbound lanes. The project will include larger, more sophisticated administration buildings, as well as primary and secondary inspection areas.

Noticeably missing from the yesterday's kickoff were local agencies and property and business owners who are members of a coalition fighting to improve security and border-crossing times without harming the community.

Jason Wells, a Smart Border Coalition member and executive director of the San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce, said the group decided to protest the event because the needs of the local community are being ignored. He said the coalition agreed to the bridge's current location on the condition that the GSA agree to build an additional southbound pedestrian crossing on the east side of I-5. He said the pedestrian crossing is unresolved.

Wells said the bridge creates a longer walk for pedestrians since it will replace one much closer to the border.

"Our objective is to enhance mobility, not to make it worse," he said.

Maria Ciprazo, a project executive with the GSA, said the agency is working to develop the pedestrian crossing to meet U.S. security needs and Mexico's planning requirements. She said the agency hopes to "show our progress to the community very soon, but must be clear that it is subject to available funding."

Ciprazo said the new bridge is essential to the project because the existing administration building and pedestrian crossing must be demolished before the northbound vehicle expansion can begin. The bridge is estimated to be completed in 18 months.

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