



June 15, 2022

Submission to the Standing Committee on the Potential Impacts of the ArriveCan Application on Certain Canadian Sectors

By Ron Rienas, General Manager of the Buffalo & Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority (Peace Bridge)

The Peace Bridge is a critical international border crossing between Buffalo New York and Fort Erie Ontario, governed by a ten-member bi-national Board with five members appointed by Privy Council.

The Covid-19 pandemic and governmental border restrictions have decimated cross border traffic. While essential commercial traffic was allowed to continue to cross, discretionary travel was eliminated for most of the past two plus years. Even after the mandatory COVID testing requirements were lifted on April 1, auto traffic has been down 43% compared to the same pre-pandemic time frame in 2019. This has had a devastating impact on our toll revenues, the tourism industry and other border dependent businesses like Duty Free stores.

The mandatory ArriveCan app to enter Canada is a major contributing factor to depressing discretionary travel. This is due to a number of factors:

- For travelers by air, airlines require and assist passengers in completing ArriveCan and in airports people are much easier to direct and move than cars. While there may also be ArriveCan issue at airports, the mechanics of ArriveCan are able to work better at an airport than at a land port of entry.
- ArriveCan is not known in the U.S. The result is drivers arriving at the border without ArriveCan and then completing it at the inspection booth or having technical difficulties (especially prevalent at borders with competing U.S. and Canadian cell towers, roaming and different data plans) resulting in inordinately long processing times, sometime exceeding ten minutes. Meanwhile, compliant drivers behind such a vehicle have no place to go and are also delayed leading to lengthy border wait times. CBSA processing times have increased compared to pre-pandemic processing due to the additional health informational requirements not previously needed.

- When car delays result in queues onto the Peace Bridge, they impede trucks from getting to their inspection booths resulting in truck wait times that impact the logistics and supply chains. Combined, the border delays result in border avoidance.
- The technology discriminates against a large population of senior travelers. A January 2022 PEW Research survey found *“that 96% of those ages 18 to 29 own a smartphone compared with 61% of those 65 and older, a 35 percentage point difference.”* 50% of Niagara tourism revenue comes from Americans and with 39% of Americans over 65 not having a smartphone it will undoubtedly have a negative impact on their ability to enter Canada and therefore Niagara tourism revenue. 40,000 people in the Niagara Region rely on tourism to provide for their families.
- Even for people aware of ArriveCan, the requirement to use the app for **every** border crossing is a disincentive to discretionary travel. Unlike air travel, the nature of this bi-national community is being able to cross frequently to visit friends or family, for dinner, a show, a winery tour, a baseball game, shopping, beach, etc without going through the process and inconvenience of having to file with ArriveCan each and every time. People just won't bother to cross the border for discretionary travel as they have enjoyed for decades.

At some point the CBSA/Government of Canada will declare success and say that a high percentage of travelers are using ArriveCan. That will **not** account for the half of the population that has decided it is no longer worth the inconvenience and delays to cross the border. That will be devastating to the Niagara tourism industry and other border dependent businesses.

Based on a January 22, 2022 CBC news piece [Canada planning technological fixes to make crossing the border faster | CBC News](#) , ArriveCan was a solution looking for a problem and the Covid pandemic was that problem. As stated in the article; *“the agency had been considering technological changes to the border — but the pandemic has allowed it to break through “glass ceilings” that were in the way.”* Denis Vinette, vice-president of the CBSA's travellers branch went on to say *“Prior to the pandemic, the CBSA had brought the average time spent speaking with a customs officer at the land border down to an average of 55 seconds. With the new technologies, Vinette said, the agency hopes to bring that average time down to 15 seconds”.*

The Peace Bridge supports technology that expedites the flow of cross border traffic and understands that CBSA having pre-arrival information and declarations can achieve that. However, our data suggests that currently, even those that enter with ArriveCan, have border processing times that are approximately 50% longer than pre-pandemic processing times without ArriveCan. Therefore, we would recommend a phased in approach with ArriveCan being voluntary with designated inspection booths. If ArriveCan can achieve much quicker processing times as CBSA asserts, then travelers will voluntarily complete ArriveCan to avoid border delays.

