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Is there a Future for ArriveCAN at the Land Border?

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IS THERE A FUTURE FOR ARRIVECAN AT THE LAND BORDER?

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ARRIVECAN AT AIRPORTS

ArriveCAN is now an optional feature for arrivals at a number of Canadian international airports where travelers can provide customs and immigration declarations in advance of arrival.

Digitizing this process for pre-arrival has the potential to reduce wait times and processing times. By some estimates, use of the Advance CBSA Declaration feature of ArriveCAN can reduce primary inspection times by as much as 30% at an inspection kiosk or eGate.

As ArriveCAN shifts from a public health tool to a border management tool, it could help to alleviate ongoing staffing shortages and travel delays at airports.

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the introduction of a number of restrictions as governments around the world sought to implement border management tools that could protect public health. One such example was the ArriveCAN app, introduced by the Government of Canada in November 2020. This advanced data submission tool aimed to reduce the spread of COVID-19 by ensuring arrivals were vaccinated and by facilitating contact tracing. This Border Policy Brief provides a summary of the nearly two-year use of ArriveCAN as a border management tool during the pandemic. We consider its impact on passenger flows through the U.S – Canada land border, the termination of its mandatory use, and its potential implementation going forward.

BACKGROUND

The amendment to the Quarantine Act[2] of March 17, 2020, introduced several entry conditions to Canada, including the obligatory use of ArriveCAN by anyone seeking to enter or re-enter the country. Initially, it was enforced on air travel at Canadian international airports, and in February 2021, it became a requirement for all border crossings, with only a few exceptions and under monetary penalty for non-compliance. Canadian citizens and international travelers were obliged to provide information through ArriveCAN (mobile app or online), including proof of vaccination, travel dates, destinations and contact information within 72 hours before arrival. As of October 1, 2022, all COVID-related entry requirements have lifted, ending the mandatory use of ArriveCAN.

CONTROVERSIES

CBSA President Erin O'Gorman recently stated that "*ArriveCAN is a cautionary tale about technology.*" Since its inception, it was criticized for acting as a barrier for border communities, being outdated by health standards and for its technical glitches. The most common criticisms include:

- **Negative impact on border traffic.** The compulsory use of ArriveCAN discouraged people from undertaking foreign travel, even when border restrictions began to ease. This position was expressed, among others, in an open letter sent to the federal government in September 2022, by members of parliament and mayors of borderland communities in Canada and the U.S. They called for the withdrawal of ArriveCAN, perceived as a tool discouraging people from visiting and shopping in Canada, and thus hindering the post-pandemic recovery of border areas.

- **Scope of the required data.** The scope of the required data collected did not always accurately reflect travel realities. For example, the need to indicate the place of stay or quarantine location completely overlooked same day trips, which are very common in borderland communities. In some cases, the scope of the data collected did not follow existing realities regarding public health, such as information about a third vaccination.

- **Accessibility.** While submitting an ArriveCAN manifest was fairly simple for tech-savvy, native English speakers with good Internet access, many other travelers encountered problems related to a digital divide. This was exacerbated by the threat that those who failed to provide the required information through ArriveCAN could face monetary fines as high as CAD $5,000.[3]

- **Public skepticism of privacy protection.** ArriveCAN became the subject of public skepticism over privacy concerns. First, the application was developed by entities who are not on the Government of Canada's list of eligible suppliers to provide AI services, solutions and products.[4] Second, according to the ArriveCAN Privacy Notices, the app shares information between governmental institutions, yet there are no agreements or regulations in place that define the rules of the data-sharing process between them. Finally, ArriveCAN raised concerns about control over data protection and processing. When services are provided by private corporations, there is typically an option to withdraw consent to data processing, however there was no such option with mandatory data collected with ArriveCAN.

- **Technical glitches.** For a long time, the app was criticized for facing technical problems. Sometimes ArriveCAN sent flawed notifications that didn't reflect the situation of the travelers. For instance, in August 2022, the app sent fully vaccinated and non-symptomatic individuals faulty notifications instructing them to quarantine. In addition, legal changes in border crossing restrictions required updates to the app and the scope of data collected. Not only did technical solutions fail to keep up with the changes, but updates to the app made its use confusing.

CONCLUSIONS

ArriveCAN enabled the mass collection of advanced passenger information at the land border for the first time. Such information is advantageous from a security and clearance standpoint, as it allows screening to be done prior to the traveler's arrival at the port-of-entry. However, the fact that the data collected did not accurately reflect the actual experience of border crossers was incredibly problematic, and perhaps *reflects a broader disconnect between border policy and border realities.*

As the app continues to evolve from a tool designed for screening public health, to one aimed at facilitating cross-border travel, its functionality and usability are likely to improve. With ArriveCAN now an optional component of border management, effort should be taken to revisit its use at the land border. One possibility is to pilot the concept of the 'Ready Lane,' once a feature at the Blaine port-of-entry. The Ready Lane enabled expedited processing for travelers with any type of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) document.[5] A similar approach could be taken with ArriveCAN submissions; if traveler information is submitted in advance, screening at the booth can be reduced and border passage expedited. If CBSA hopes to continue to collect advance traveler information at the land border, and travelers experience reduced processing time (and potentially reduced wait-time with a dedicated lane), then re-designing ArriveCAN to benefit the traveler and accommodate border crossing realities could produce both a security and an efficiency benefit.

ENDNOTES

1. Dr. Andrzej Jakubowski is an assistant professor at the Institute of Social and Economic Geography at Maria Curie-SKlodowska University Lublin and the 2022-2023 BPRI-BIG Cross-Border Visiting Fellow. See https://bpri.wwu.edu/collaboration#faculty_fellows_affiliates.

2. Quarantine Act (S.C. 2005, c. 20), https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/q-1.1/index.html#hist.

3. Quenneville G., "What you need to know about Canada's divisive ArriveCAN app" (Aug 14, 2022). CBC News. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/ottawa-arrivecan-criticisms-airports-wait-times-1.6548504. (Accessed: October 10, 2022).

4. Malone M., "The ArriveCAN app needs to go" (Aug 8, 2022). The Globe and Mail. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-arrivecan-app-needs-to-go/. (Accessed: October 10, 2022).

5. Border Policy Research Institute, "A Business Case for Increasing RFID at the Canada - US Land Border" (2015). Border Policy Research Institute Publications. 101. https://cedar.wwu.edu/bpri_publications/101/.