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Update On Santa Teresa-san Jeronimo Border Crossing

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Category/Department: General
Published: Wednesday, April 21, 1993

Murphy-Aguilar On April 13, Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM) met with President Carlos Salinas de Gortari in Mexico City. Domenici says President Salinas promised to pave the Mexican side of the Santa Teresa, New Mexico-San Jeronimo, Chihuahua border crossing within the next three months. However, Domenici cautioned that several Mexican agencies must now comply with the pledge made by Salinas. In an interview, Agnes Oczon assistant press secretary for Senator Domenici in Washington DC told the Latin America Data Base (LADB) that the purpose of Domenici's visit was to discuss a series of issues related to US-Mexico trade and economic development, but he met for one hour with President Salinas to specifically discuss the border crossing. LADB's research assistant Moria Ann Murphy-Aguilar recently travelled to Dona Ana county where she interviewed local officials and residents. Following is a brief history and overview of recent developments related to Santa Teresa/Dona Ana county.

Border crossing anonymity
Little fanfare marked the official opening of the Santa Teresa border crossing in Dona Ana county, New Mexico, with San Jeronimo, Chihuahua. According to El Financiero International, at the January 12, 1993 inauguration, officials from the US and Mexico lacked enthusiasm and "the Mexicans closed up shop shortly after a ceremony." The fanfare has hardly picked up since then. Look at any map of the major highways between Canada, the US, and Mexico. You will find El Paso (Texas), Nogales (Arizona), and Los Angeles (California). But where is Santa Teresa, or even Las Cruces, the largest city in Dona Ana county? The "anonymity" of Santa Teresa underscores the obstacles which New Mexico officials have had in getting the crossing noticed and operational. While El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, are in their own right bustling industrial and trade centers, the New Mexico crossing is located in Santa Teresa, a small "bedroom" community for El Paso comprised mainly of housing divisions. The crossing is generally perceived as an extension of Las Cruces, 40 miles north of Santa Teresa, rather than part of the town of Santa Teresa itself. Las Cruces seems to be counting on receiving many of the potential benefits from the crossing. Las Cruces Mayor Ruben Smith commented in the March 1993 Twin Plant News that "El Paso has things Las Cruces doesn't have. They're on the border, they've got all their transportation infrastructure set up. But if traffic veers off to Santa Teresa and Anapra, we're in a great position." The idea of having a border crossing in New Mexico dates back to the early 1930s. In 1974 David King, nephew of New Mexico Governor Bruce King, even dedicated a crossing in the village of Anapra, New Mexico. However, in reality, a functional New Mexico border crossing never materialized. Charlie Crowder, a southern New Mexico developer, entered the Santa Teresa saga in the mid 1980s and brought the issue of a New Mexico crossing back into the limelight. Crowder acquired 30,000 acres along the New Mexico-Chihuahua border in an exchange with the federal government for some Arizona ranches which were embroiled in the Navajo-Hopi dispute. He also acquired extensive water rights. Crowder envisioned an industrial hub on the border at Santa Teresa, complete with an efficient border crossing. His concept seemed clear: promote the Santa Teresa area as an alternative to the congested, saturated El Paso-Ciudad Juarez area. The state of New Mexico harbored similar ideas, hoping to prepare itself for increased trade with Mexico. The US federal government, through Congress, appropriated US$6 million for the crossing. Mexico promised to pave the road on the San Jeronimo side to link it to the Chihuahua highway network. Crowder himself claimed to have
invested US$5 million in the project. The plan, however, turned sour. Crowder ran into financial difficulties. Mexico decided not to pave the road on the San Jeronimo side, claiming that since the industrial hub had not materialized, no reason existed to commence the paving. Originally, the Santa Teresa crossing was scheduled to open upon completion of the temporary facilities in 1991. However, various factors, including the lack of pavement on both sides of the border accessing the crossing, forced the opening date to be moved back to 1992. In early 1992, the US paved five miles of road leading up to the crossing on the Santa Teresa side. But Mexico has not yet paved the road leading to the crossing in San Jeronimo. An environmental assessment of the temporary facilities undertaken by the US General Services Administration (GSA) resulted in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), paving the way for the project to move forward. Despite preparations on the US side, however, the future of the Santa Teresa crossing remains unclear. The Albuquerque Journal, one of the main New Mexico daily newspapers, opened 1993 with a number of stories on the crossing. "Mexico Won't Pave Santa Teresa Crossing" heralded the January 1, 1993 edition. Two weeks later, however, a piece by Larry Calloway called "Heading for the Border" ended with a prediction by Ray Sadler, border historian at New Mexico State University, that "the road is going to be built." Economic issues surrounding the border crossing The two principal economic issues surrounding the border crossing at Santa Teresa are intertwined but separate. Robert Queen, the trade specialist from the New Mexico International Trade Division stationed in Las Cruces, describes them as "industrial development and international trade." According to Queen, the reason why Santa Teresa holds importance for the state of New Mexico is its potential for creating industrial development along the New Mexico-Chihuahua border. Industrial development in turn would generate increased tax revenues for the state. However, Queen points out that although the crossing would facilitate international trade, it is not imperative. "New Mexicans don't have to wait for the crossing to open to conduct international trade," he declared. New Mexico's exports to Mexico registered a 62% increase from 1991 to 1992, with a dollar value increase from US $16.8 million to US$28.6 million. Mexico's ranking rose from the seventh most important export destination for New Mexico products in 1991 to its fourth largest export destination in 1992. "That occurred," Queen added, "without Santa Teresa and without a free trade agreement." Queen attributed the growth in importance of Mexico as a destination for exports from New Mexico to factors such as continued population growth in Mexico and the huge demand for US products there. In addition, the New Mexico Division for International Trade, headed by Roberto Castillo, holds frequent seminars for New Mexicans on opportunities for trade with Mexico, and provides advice on how to initiate or improve trade with Mexico. The area surrounding the crossing Santa Teresa is located 40 miles south of Las Cruces, in Dona Ana county, near the New Mexico-Texas-Chihuahua border. In 1990, Dona Ana county had a population of 135,510 people, 62,125 of whom resided in the city of Las Cruces. Population projections estimate that by the year 2000, the county will have a population of 184,179 people, with 85,955 living in Las Cruces. El Paso, located twelve miles east of Santa Teresa, is the closest US industrial hub to the crossing. Ciudad Juarez is the closest Mexican industrial hub, just over the border from El Paso. Over the past five to ten years, according to Queen, five industrial plants have located in Santa Teresa, among them two Ford suppliers to Hermosillo, Sonora, and a medical instrument sterilizing plant which distributes its products throughout the US and Mexico. The largest developer in the area is Charlie Crowder, who owns thousands of heavily mortgaged acres in Santa Teresa. According to Queen, two other developers, John O'Donnell and Ryan O'Hare, own smaller parcels but do not have the financial difficulties which have besieged Crowder. The Santa Teresa crossing currently operates between the hours of 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. According to Roger Maier, Public Affairs Specialist for US Customs in El Paso, the crossing averages
approximately 100 northbound vehicles per day, most of which are passenger vehicles. (US Customs keep statistics only on northbound traffic which enters the US.) Since the crossing's inauguration in January, few commercial vehicles have used the facility. According to Maier, those vehicles carried loads with low-value goods, such as household mops. The facilities on the US side remain temporary, although plans are underway to construct permanent buildings at the site. According to a February 1993 General Services Administration document, 100 acres have been set aside for the crossing facilities. It has still not been determined how many buildings will be constructed, nor how long construction of permanent facilities will take, although the GSA insists that the US plans to coordinate its construction schedule with that of Mexico. The owner of the crossing will be GSA. The permanent facilities will consist of four primary vehicle inspection points, expandable to 12, plus 12 secondary inspection stations, expandable to 36. The facilities will also include a 50-foot wide import lot and dock, with 50 truck docks. According to Brad Godfrey of Sandia National Labs in Albuquerque, Santa Teresa is an excellent location for a border crossing. Unlike nearby El Paso, separated from Ciudad Juarez by the Rio Grande, Santa Teresa is a land-based crossing with no bridges to navigate. Therefore, expanding and improving the crossing will be much easier since it is "not as painful as expanding a bridge." The future of the Santa Teresa crossing According to Agnes Oczon, Mexico has finally begun paving the turning lanes from the Casas Grande road a major artery into the Ciudad Juarez maquila center to the unpaved 12-mile stretch of road which leads through San Jeronimo to Santa Teresa. This unpaved stretch constitutes a major obstacle for traffic wishing to use the San Jeronimo-Santa Teresa crossing. The process of getting the Santa Teresa crossing operational continues to inch forward. Without the crossing, New Mexican firms can still conduct trade with Mexico. However, with a crossing, New Mexico will be in a better position to attract and keep industry in the state, thus increasing employment and the local tax base. At present, however, Robert Queen says the prolonged anticipation of future benefits is "taxing" Dona Ana county. He says that politicians, planners, economic development specialists and others have spent many hours planning for the crossing, but to date their toil has resulted in "no return from Santa Teresa."

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