

**Local, state and federal officials celebrate new Peace Arch border crossing**  
**PETER JENSEN / THE BELLINGHAM HERALD / Mar, 24, 2011**

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BLAINE - Construction of the new Peace Arch border crossing spanned a decade, accommodated the millions of travelers who used the crossing during the work and continued unabated throughout the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, B.C. And with the \$107 million project finally completed, the local, state and federal government officials who gathered outside the new station for a ceremony Wednesday morning, March 23, could be forgiven if they were a little self-congratulatory. The project expanded the number of primary inspection booths from eight to 10, almost doubled the number of secondary inspection booths and replaced a station that was more than three decades old. The expansion of the crossing - the third most-traveled on the northern border of the U.S. - also resulted in the construction of a new overpass on Interstate 5 near the crossing and other major highway work.

"Today marks the final step in a process that has taken nearly 10 years," said George Northcroft, the regional administrator of the U.S. General Services Administration in the Pacific Northwest. The GSA worked with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which operates the crossing, the Federal Highway Administration, the Washington State Department of Transportation, the city of Blaine and agencies in Canada to complete the project.

While the project was initially budgeted to cost about \$70 million, it incurred additional expenses because excavation work cost more than expected and because crews had to build an overpass for I-5. The facility's site is restricted on three sides by the city of Blaine, Semiahmoo Bay and Peace Arch State Park. Thus, the only way the expansion could occur would be to excavate a hillside, and the dirt was a lot more difficult to remove than initially expected. Crews had to build the new overpass to accommodate Customs' need to expand the number of lanes from eight to 10. The project received \$26.9 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which Congress passed in 2009 to stimulate the economy.

Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Alan Bersin spoke at the ceremony and expressed his wish that the new facility will enhance his agency's ability to keep America secure while fostering greater commercial relationships with Canada. "The 21st century offers greater challenges to our countries," Bersin said. "We have to grow closer. This is a special celebration. It represents a new collaboration."

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