



Friends Of The Border Patrol

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Border fence crawls to end **Cost, design issues vex construction**

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Construction on the fence along the United States and Mexico border is wrapping up, but the work has not been warmly received by some.

More than 600 miles of the proposed 670 miles of fencing are expected to be finished by May, according to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency.

Concerns about the work include construction delays, increased costs, poor planning and a lack of all-weather roads.

"Former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff did not label this a national-security project, so as a result you had construction delays due to lack of materials, and the purchase and use of steel imported from Red China and Mexico," said Andy Ramirez, chairman of Friends of the Border Patrol.

Construction on the fence is part of the Secure Border Initiative that was launched in November 2005.

The comprehensive multi-year plan was established by the Department of Homeland Security to secure America's borders and reduce illegal cross-border activity.

As of Oct. 31, pedestrian fencing, also referred to as primary fencing, has cost on average \$3.9 million per mile, according to a report issued Jan. 29 by the Government Accountability Office.

The Congressional Budget Office said the cost should be \$3 million per mile. Duncan Lee Hunter, who formerly represented San Diego's eastside suburbs in Congress, had proposed that the fence cost \$3.2 million per mile.

"We stand behind those low costs set that were submitted to DHS before the fence construction project started," said Joe Kasper, press secretary to Rep. Duncan D. Hunter, R-El Cajon, Duncan Lee Hunter's son.

"Evidently, DHS has complicated the construction process and has decided not to use the most cost-effective recourses available."

The Secure Border Initiative program has received about \$3.6 billion in appropriated funds to complete 670 miles of vehicle and pedestrian fencing along the 2,000-mile border.

Initiative funds totaling \$393 million were allocated to SBInet, which called for the Boeing Co. - a main contractor of the entire fence project - to build a virtual \$20 million fence along the southwestern border.

Last year, the project stalled due to technical problems.

If the appropriate SBI funds from fiscal 2007-08 allocated for SBInet had instead been used to construct fencing, 73 additional miles of pedestrian fencing or about 232 additional miles of vehicle fencing would have been built, according to the GAO report.

"It was a \$20 million boondoggle," Kasper said. "Boeing was the manufacturer and tested the system and determined it wasn't worth moving forward with the project because it didn't provide results expected. Looking back, we wasted \$20 million of time and manpower that could have been put into securing the border."

The Secure Fence Act signed into law in 2006 required that all-weather roads be built along the fence, but that has yet to be completed, officials said.

"While we needed a fence, many know it's useless without an all-weather road," Ramirez said. "Otherwise, you'll have agents unable to drive more than 15 or 20 miles per hour because they'll roll their vehicles, and that is unacceptable."

Roads in the area of Otay Mountain and Tecate Peak in San Diego County are particularly dangerous, said Mark Endicott, San Diego Border Patrol spokesperson.

"In the San Diego sector, we strive to have all-weather roads parallel to the border," Endicott said. "There are some areas where terrain is rugged and treacherous."

Kasper said he sent an inquiry about the construction of all-weather roads to the Department of Homeland Security, but the agency did not respond.

"If the roads along the border are inadequate or poorly constructed, then they should be fixed, and we are definitely going to take a look at that," he said.

"At the end of the day, it only makes sense that you build the best road that's capable to meet border conditions. It doesn't make much sense to engineer a road that can't facilitate high speed vehicle traffic or deteriorates because of the climate."

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