



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
LICENSING

Washington State Border Crossing Initiative: Enhanced Driver License

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Border crossing at Blaine, WA.

The tragic aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks required thoughtful and immediate improvements to our nation's border security. One major change affecting many in the United States is the federal Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). As it stands, this law requires a passport or other federally-approved identification or proof-of-citizenship document for all travel into the United States, including U.S. citizens. This requirement will be in place for all land and sea travelers in the summer of 2008.

This new law is important for our nation's security. However, this major change has the potential to disrupt Washington State's robust trade and travel relationships with Canada. Currently, our citizens can cross the Canadian border and return to the U.S. using a driver license or birth certificate as identification.

The State of Washington proposed developing a document sufficient to show identity and citizenship for crossing the Washington/British Columbia border. This document will be based on the standard Washington State driver license or identification card, but will be enhanced to meet the requirements of the WHTI.

This enhanced driver license will:

- Be a voluntary program.
- Be slightly more expensive than a standard license.
- Require proof of citizenship, identity, and residence.
- Be more secure than a standard license, and similar in security features to a U.S. passport.

Background

In December 2005, Premier Gordon Campbell of British Columbia and Governor Chris Gregoire of Washington State jointly wrote President George W. Bush to discuss concerns about the possible negative impacts of implementing WHTI. In 2010, Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games will take place in Vancouver, British Columbia. Because of the economic and cultural benefits related to these games, Governor Gregoire and Premier Campbell expressed concern that costly identification requirements could dissuade families and travelers from crossing the Washington/British Columbia border.

Governor Gregoire and Premier Campbell met again in June 2006. They co-signed a letter to President Bush and Prime Minister Stephen Harper restating that a passport requirement could significantly impact tourism between the two countries.

During an Executive Session of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) Conference held in Edmonton, Alberta on July 18, 2006, Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff expressed a willingness to consider passport-equivalent documents to meet the WHTI requirements. On November 13, 2006, Washington State sent Secretary Chertoff its Border Crossing pilot proposal.

Initiative

Washington State's pilot will produce an Enhanced Washington Driver License or Identification Card (EDL/ID) that will show the applicant's U.S. citizenship, identity, and state residence. Technology will be used to help validate the authenticity of foundational documents and to establish citizenship and identity as prerequisites for issuing the enhanced driver license.

The EDL/ID will be a voluntary program. To take part in the program, all applicants must be United States citizens by birth or naturalization. Participants can have a certified birth certificate (or other passport-equivalent foundational documents) scanned and the document's security features electronically authenticated. An enhanced driver license will not be issued if Washington State is unable to authenticate the participant's documents. The applicant will be referred to the State Department for a passport.

The driver license is a nationally accepted means of identification. Therefore, Washington State proposed the use of an EDL/ID card as an acceptable alternative document for border crossing along the Washington and British Columbia borders. An EDL/ID card will allow its owner to carry a single document to show citizenship and identity at a significant cost-savings to the applicant. This proposal satisfies the intent of the Secretary's remarks at the July 2006 PNWER Conference and established a viable program that can serve as a system easily mirrored by other states.

Implementation will include the following:

1. Create new standards to establish the individual's citizenship and reaffirm identity, as well as ensure the individual meets qualifications for an EDL/ID card.
2. Develop policies and procedures to implement the enhanced driver license enrollment process and use document scanners and document validation technology:
 - Electronically authenticate, scan, image, and store all foundational documents for auditing purposes.
 - Verify an applicants' Social Security Number with the Social Security Administration.
 - Only staff that has undergone the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) Advanced Fraud Document Recognition Training will process the EDL/ID.
 - For Washington-born applicants, the Washington State Department of Licensing will be able to electronically validate the birth certificate with the Washington State Department of Health. (When available, we will validate all U.S. birth certificates using the AAMVA, Electronic Verification of Vital Events Records (EVVER) System.) Until the EVVER system is available, we will use technology to scan and authenticate the security features of other documents.
 - Additional security measures will be accomplished by identifying strategic locations to issue the voluntary EDL/ID. This will allow for better concentration and development of the appropriate staff skills and oversight.
 - We will scan and authenticate proof-of-identity documents (driver licenses, military identification cards, etc.)
 - We will issue a permanent license from a central, secure location.
 - Current EDL/ID card security features include embossed seals, watermarks, ultraviolet and fluorescent light verification features, security laminations, and micro printing.

- The state will continue to capture a digital photo of all applicants.
- Washington recognizes the importance of free-flowing borders with minimal crossing times and the need for any alternative document to facilitate, and not hamper, border crossing. Washington State's driver license and identification card contains a 2-D bar code and a machine-readable zone.

Proposal Objectives, Outcomes and Benefits

- Demonstrate feasibility of establishing requirements and processes in collaboration with Washington State, British Columbia, and the federal border protection agencies.
- Demonstrate the use of a Washington State-issued driver license or ID card to maintain the level of trade and tourism to Washington citizens.
- Improve the capability of the Customs and Border Protection Agency (CBPA) to quickly verify identity and citizenship at Washington State and British Columbia borders.
- Increase the overall level of security by requiring consistent foundational documents.
- Significantly improve the identity verification process.
- Strengthen the current driver licensing process via legislative changes by establishing citizenship requirements supported by authentication of foundational documents.
- Establish a level of confidence and security in the EDL/ID card equal to the Passport, or P.A.S.S. Card (passport card).

More Information

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