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## Long border wait gets even longer

**By Ignacio Ibarra**  
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NOGALES, Sonora - Even on the best days, the line of cars waiting to cross the border into Arizona can stretch for 20 vehicles.

So when thousands of *paisanos* - Mexicans living in the United States - start heading back home this weekend after spending the holidays south of the border, the wait can get excruciatingly long.

"I read the newspaper, listen to music or to news on the radio. If I had a way, I'd watch a movie, too," says Roberto Balcazar, a 26-year-old Nogales, Sonora, resident and frequent cross-border traveler.

The usual wait to cross is 40 minutes to an hour.

"You always wait. But this time of year the waits are always long, so you have to plan for it and bring along something to occupy yourself."

The cross-border traffic jam this year is being worsened by a major construction project that is diverting most of the northbound travelers from downtown's Dennis DeConcini Port of Entry to the Mariposa Port of Entry on the western edge of Nogales, Ariz. Because there are fewer inspection lanes at Mariposa to handle the crush of post-holiday traffic, the wait time to drive across the border last weekend was up to five hours.

The wait this weekend could be just as long, though some officials are optimistic some motorists could get across the border in as little as two hours.

Omar Bolivar, 23, and his friend Gloria Felix, 18, decided to spend their border wait Thursday watching the latest "Charlie's Angels" movie on a portable DVD player that was perched on the dashboard of his vehicle.

Bolivar, of Rio Rico, said he makes the trip across the border several times a week on both personal and family business. The waits, he said, can be inconvenient and aggravating.

Watching a movie helps kill the time and lets him keep an eye on traffic inching up to the port of entry. He said the wait can last longer than most movies.

Trinidad Tello, 45, of Nogales, Sonora, crosses the border every week to shop and visit friends. She passes the time in line by reading, gossiping with friends or shopping, her favorite choice for making the wait bearable.

The short lines at the border Thursday - the wait was about 30 minutes - let Tello leave her daughter behind the wheel while she dashed to a tortilla shop and to a pharmacy near the waiting line of cars.

"You never know how long it's going to take. It all depends on the people doing the inspections," Tello said. "There's nothing to do but pass the time as well as you can."

The constant stop-and-go can be frustrating, causing cars - and sometimes the people driving them - to overheat.

But Hortensia Ramirez, 46, of Rio Rico, who makes the cross-border trip daily to drop her daughter off at day care, has found a way to keep her cool.

While motorists around her impatiently rev their engines or race to cut in line to gain a place or two, Ramirez sits calmly in her car praying the rosary and reading from Scripture.

"It usually takes about an hour, and while I wait I pray," Ramirez said. "It makes the wait easier, I feel better, and I don't get impatient or desperate."

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