

July 24, 2025

## Borders 101

### Overview

Since its founding, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) has recognized the importance of its geographic location and consistently pursued collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions. This approach has developed along three key dimensions: binational (Mexico), interregional (Orange, Riverside, and Imperial Counties), and government-to-government (17 sovereign tribal governments in San Diego County). This report provides an overview of SANDAG's efforts with these partners.

SANDAG's structure has incorporated this borders-focused vision. Mexico has been part of the Board of Directors since the 1970s, now represented by the Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego. Following the first North American free trade agreement, SANDAG formed a task force that led to the Committee on Binational Regional Opportunities (COBRO), still active today and unique in U.S. local government.

In 2001, SANDAG adopted a new policy advisory committee model, creating the Borders Committee. Today, the Borders Committee advises the Board on major interregional planning activities that impact the borders of the San Diego region. This includes Orange, Riverside, and Imperial Counties; the Republic of Mexico; and neighboring tribal nations. The preparation and implementation of SANDAG Binational, Interregional, and Tribal Liaison Planning programs are included under this purview. Recommendations of the Borders Committee are forwarded to the Board for action. The committee meets monthly, on the fourth Friday at 1:30 p.m.

In 2003, SANDAG received a legislative mandate via Senate Bill 1703 (Peace, 2003) reaffirming its structure and adding Imperial County as a Borders Committee member, later complemented with Orange and Riverside Counties as advisory members. In 2006, the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association (SCTCA) joined as an advisory member and later became part of the Board and other committees.

Since 2020, SANDAG's regional relationships have evolved in response to the pandemic, social equity issues, policy changes, and a new border security context.

**Binational:** San Diego shares the largest transborder community in the Western Hemisphere, with over 100,000 daily crossers. As California's primary international trade gateway with Mexico, collaboration with Baja California includes mobility projects like transit, bike lanes, and the future Otay Mesa East Port of Entry. Challenges include long commutes, air quality, and crossborder wastewater pollution.

**Interregional:** Collaboration with neighboring counties involves shared infrastructure and regional mobility. With Orange County, priorities include the LOSSAN rail corridor and environmental concerns. With Riverside, focus areas include I-15 corridor, transportation, employment, and housing. With Imperial, collaboration includes the shared international border, water, energy, and infrastructure issues.

**Tribal Governments:** San Diego was originally tribal land, now home to 18 tribal nations and 17 sovereign governments represented by the SCTCA. SANDAG maintains strong ties with SCTCA through the Borders Committee, the Tribal Transportation Technical Working Group, and regular Tribal Summits and Symposiums.

### Action: Information

This report provides a brief overview of San Diego Association of Governments' longstanding efforts to work with our binational and interregional partners.

### Fiscal Impact:

None.

### Schedule/Scope Impact:

None.

**Hannah Stern, Director of Public Relations**