Growing Heartlandia

By Livio Di Matteo
About the Author

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Introduction

Despite the current period of global uncertainty and economic up-heaval, the time may be ripe to consider innovations in trade and cross-border relations. There is growing interest in the Great Plains and western Great Lakes regions of the United States and Canada for the concept of Heartlandia, an economic region straddling the middle of the North American continent – a North American central economic region spanning Northwestern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North and South Dakota and Minnesota.

There is growing recognition that a more formal approach to cross-border cooperation could bring about real improvements in the economy of this region and ultimately the quality of life. The concept of a formal cross-border regional framework is already well established on the west coast of North America with the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER).

Canada is best described as a set of politically linked regions united by a common trading partner – that once was Great Britain, but now is the United States, which takes 80 percent of Canada’s exports. The United States has a large population distributed in nodes throughout its territory interconnected via a dense network of transport corridors much like interlocking wheels and spokes thus facilitating internal commerce. At the same time, Canada is the United States’ largest trade partner and not China, Japan or Mexico. Canada, on the other hand is sparsely populated with its population strung out along the border in a line of isolated clusters making it easier to interact with Americans across the border than with each other across provincial boundaries.

Regions and their cities are critical components of economic activity. An economic region is a spatial agglomeration of economic production and consumption activity defined by its locational advantages, transaction costs and market size. As Anderson (1990: 2) writes:

“The concentration and specialization of economic activity in different locations and variations in returns to factors of production imply that different regions will possess different economic characteristics.” While the organization of activity may define an economic region, sometimes one can also delimit the boundaries of a region because of the availability of statistical information or because a collection of political units may share common economic problems and opportunities. However, regions, “however delimited, are always interdependent parts of the larger spatial economy in which they are embedded.”

As well, the traditional notion of clusters of development focused on firms, resources and government sharing support and infrastructure in a region is being accompanied by the new concept of the “networked region”. While basing substantial parts of their operations in one location, firms are also relocating separate operations such as research, development and production.
to different locales based on their cost and resource advantages but linked via high tech and communications technology to function as a single entity. Therefore, regions that are sufficiently networked into global opportunities will have the ability to reap the benefits of employment and output activity. Research, development and commercialization can be spread across the world via a network of hubs and nodes of activity that do not need to be linked by geographic proximity. In bio-tech, for example, local firms, local researchers and the local medical sector can develop partnerships with international pharmaceutical companies and international research agencies to locate some product development and testing facilities in places like North Dakota or Northwestern Ontario. As Yali and Seline (2005) wrote:

“The concept that a region must have all the elements to support life sciences research, development and commercialization no longer reflects industry dynamics. This changing paradigm leads us to suggest that regions must decide if their local assets and critical mass compose a hub (the core location providing momentum for development) or a node (a significant contributor to a national or international hub).”

Within North America, there are also opportunities for networked cross-border economic regions that share infrastructure and production facilities.

Heartlandia, which spans Northwestern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North and South Dakota and Minnesota, with a history of cross-border trade, travel and interaction originally rooted in the days of the fur-trade and agricultural settlement, can be a source of such opportunities. Yet, despite this critical interdependence, governments with fixed territorial boundaries do not always effectively address the need for cross-border regional economic partnerships and co-operation. Some cross-border regional issues can be dealt with using models of functional governance that link collaborative partners on specific issues or interests rather than more rigid and hierarchical territorial governance structures.

The remainder of this paper explores the impact of borders in a regional economy, establishes the economic dimensions of Heartlandia and examines the institutional possibilities for creating a more formal structure for the region.

“Regions that are sufficiently networked into global opportunities will have the ability to reap the benefits of employment and output activity.”

– F. J. Anderson (1990)
Borders are places where different cultures, institutions and arrangements come into contact and are therefore zones of opportunity...

Regions, Borders and the Canada-U.S. Border

International borders are “invisible, vertical planes that transect the airspace, the soil and the subsoil between adjoining states, and they mark the limit of territory in which a state can exercise its sovereign authority” (Timothy 1995: 525). A border is an institution and institutions are the arrangements that people have for dealing with one another. Nobel laureate Douglass North (1981: 201) asserts that “Institutions provide the framework within which human beings interact” and that they are “sets of rules, compliance procedures and moral and ethical behavioural norms designed to constrain the behaviour of individuals.” Political-economic systems are institutional arrangements and borders separate such systems and provide zones of formal contact and interaction. Borders are institutional devices that assert and enforce property rights by a nation-state over a set geographic space. Given that borders separate differing institutional spaces, it is to be expected that economic behaviour as well as other types of behaviour will differ across borders. At the same time, borders are places where different cultures, institutions and arrangements come into contact and are therefore zones of opportunity.

An extensive literature has developed on borders and it has influenced economics, geography and tourism research. This literature has grown given the global institutional changes that have been occurring with respect to international trade agreements as well as national integration and disintegration. As Leimgruber (1988: 53) wrote:

“The study of boundaries has become very popular with human geographers in the past few years, and this popularity seems to be increasing as the date of the final abolishment of boundaries within the EC approaches (1992).”

The establishment of free trade zones and agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Canada-U.S. Free Trade agreement also creates an interest in borders and their impact. Some economists have argued that the establishment of regional trading blocs makes the impact of borders less important for international trade. However, John McCallum (1995) estimates a model of trade between Canada and the United States and finds that even “the relatively innocuous Canada-U.S. border continues to have a decisive effect on continental trade patterns” and that this suggests that “national borders in general continue to matter.” In another study, Engel and Rogers (1996) examine the importance of borders and distance on price volatility using Canada and the United States and again find that distance and the presence of the border are significant in explaining price dispersion across different locations. Engel and Rogers (1995: 1123) conclude that their results also confirm McCallum’s that “despite the relative openness of the U.S.-Canadian border, the markets are still segmented.”
Canada is relatively sparsely populated with most of its population strung out along the border in a series of isolated population islands...

With respect to tourism, boundaries are often seen as a barrier to interaction given the formalities that often need to be observed when crossing but at the same time they may be regarded as lines of contact (Timothy 1995: 531). A border creates a destination by creating a demarcation line to new opportunities. Borders can create different economic and social spaces which spawn the diversity that fuels travel and ultimately trade. Moreover, crossing the border itself can be regarded as a tourist attraction as travellers sometimes cross borders “for the sole reason of being able to claim, for reasons of prestige, that they have been in a foreign country” (Timothy 1995: 527). In the case of tourism, boundaries between different countries can have different functions, which can be listed as a barrier to tourism, as a destination area, as modifiers of the tourist landscape and as transit zones (Timothy 1995b).

Boundaries are elements of the cultural landscape and the boundary between Canada and the United States lies at one extreme of the spectrum of demarcated boundaries being a particularly well-travelled and, until the post 9/11 era, a relatively easy-to-cross border where fairly similar societies meet. The Canada-U.S. border is approximately 4,000 kilometers long with 116 official border-crossing points. As Prescott (1965: 93) wrote:

“Here the boundary vistas are carefully cut and the boundary monuments kept in good repair even on the more remote western borders. This is largely for reasons of administrative convenience, and not to restrict circulation. Structures to allow the application of state functions are located at the important recognized crossing points. Along such boundaries there is often an absence of permanent fortifications. At the opposite end of the scale there are those boundaries between unfriendly states where the boundary demarcation is maintained in order to prevent circulation and to simplify defence.”

The border between Canada and the United States also marks off two different geographic distributions of population, which also influences interaction between the two countries. The U.S. population is distributed in large dense nodes throughout its territory each interconnected to the other via a dense network of roads and transport corridors much like interlocking wheels and spokes. Canada, on the other hand is relatively sparsely populated with most of its population strung out along the border in a series of isolated population islands. As one famous Canadian author put it:

“On the map Canada looks square; in reality we are another Chile, with nine-tenths of our people living within..."
two hundred miles of your border, an archipelago of population islands walled off from each other by the terrifying obstacles of Precambrian rock, muskeg, mountain barriers, storm-tossed waters.”

This distribution of population suggests that Canadians will often find it easier to interact with Americans across the border than with each other across interprovincial boundaries as opposed to Americans who have a much denser internal market for trade and travel. Indeed, using Canada-U.S. cross-border travel as an example, there are variations both east-west as well as north-south. Canadians are generally more likely to cross the border into the United States than Americans are into Canada.

The concept of cross-border regions in North America is not new. Garreau’s Nine Nations of North America describes cross-border regions that share similar economic, social and cultural characteristics. As well, there are concepts for other cross-border economic regions such as Cascadia on the west coast and Atlantica on the east coast. Atlantica is more formally known as the Atlantic International Northeast Economic Region (AINER) and is currently the focus of advocacy and research on the part of the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies based in Halifax and the Eastern Maine Advocacy Corporation. The AINER concept comprises the Canadian Atlantic provinces as well as Maine, Vermont and the northern part of New York State bordering Lake Ontario.

Cascadia is being operationalized by a government funded cross-border advocacy group initiative known as the Pacific Northwest Economic Region or PNWER. PNWER defines a region of the Pacific northwest that includes British Columbia, Alberta, the Yukon, Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and most recently Saskatchewan, with a total population of about 20 million people. The PNWER provides a forum to address important cross-border issues in trade, transportation, the environment and energy before they progress to formal international processes. The 18th annual summit of the PNWER was held in Vancouver in July 2008 and discussions focused on marketing the Pacific northwest in advance of the Vancouver Olympics, trade and travel across the Canada-U.S. border and opportunities surrounding the Mackenzie Valley and Alaska Natural Gas pipelines. It should be noted that PNWER has a charter that proposed a Border Solutions Coordination Council that would meet semi-annually as well as a Border Policy Research Institute and has established a variety of working groups.

Meanwhile, Ontario and its adjacent U.S. counterparts also constitute an economic region resulting in substantial cross-border economic and environmental co-operation given the sharing of the Great Lakes basin. There are frequent meetings of the Great Lakes premiers, governors and mayors though a formal regional framework has yet to be established. Recent research has also explored alternate institutional arrangements and border configurations between Ontario and Manitoba focusing on the natural linkages between Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario.
Heartlandia’s Dimensions and Economic Potential

This proposal for a North American central economic region termed Heartlandia sets the regional components as Northwestern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan North and South Dakota and Minnesota – a region that is at the cross-roads of the North American continent. It essentially comprises primarily the north-central portion of Garreau’s “Breadbasket Nation”\(^\text{14}\) thus excluding, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas portions. (See Appendix 1, Pg. 16). While Heartlandia could be expanded to include these areas, as a starting point, the analysis of the concept at this stage can minimize transaction costs by keeping the number of partners manageable. Indeed, the most tractable starting point would likely be simply considering Manitoba and North Dakota though realization of greater regional potential requires a broader range of geographic partners.

Heartlandia covers 2.4 million square kilometers with a population of nearly 9 million people and a GDP (US$) of about 405 billion dollars (See Table 1). This economic region contains agricultural production activities, food processing, forestry, petroleum, potash, uranium, coal, mineral and hydroelectric resources as well as substantial manufacturing and service capacity. In terms of employment composition, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario are more resource intensive compared to their American counterparts while Minnesota, Manitoba and North Dakota are relatively manufacturing intensive compared to the rest of Heartlandia (See Table 2, next page).

The recent rise in commodity, food and energy prices is an indication of the strategic importance of Heartlandia in the long run. As well, the major metropolitan

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<th>Table 1. Basic Dimensions of Heartlandia</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW Ontario</td>
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<td>Heartlandia</td>
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* In US dollars. 1 Cdn$ = 0.80 US. ** Estimate based on Di Matteo (2004).
Winnipeg, Manitoba is particularly strategically located at the hub of an array of transportation corridors and routes...

centres of Minneapolis-St. Paul and Winnipeg are already locations for numerous corporate head offices, health, educational, research and government services. In addition, Heartlandia contains vital road, rail and airport hubs that would be complemented by three ocean-going ports: Churchill, Duluth, and Thunder Bay as well as the Mississipi route down to the Gulf of Mexico (See Appendix 2, Pg. 16). Indeed, Winnipeg, Manitoba is particularly strategically located at the hub of an array of transportation corridors and routes that includes the Asia-Pacific Gateway, the North American Super Corridor Coalition and the Great-Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway. Recognition of this has sparked developments regarding the intermodal inland container port transportation concept known as Centreport.

The similarities and geographic proximity of the provincial and state economies of this region create a conjunction of common interests and possibilities for economic trade and growth. For example, Manitoba has abundant hydroelectric resources and would benefit from increased exports through additional power contracts south to meet growing American power needs. Despite the current recession, given long-term trends in energy prices, Heartlandia has the potential to be a 21st century energy export giant rooted in agricultural and forest bio-fuels and hydro-electricity. In particular, the potential of Northwestern Ontario as a forest bio-refining energy center and hydroelectric producer would be enhanced with the sharing of expertise with Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Minnesota. Another specific example of economic interests coinciding is the aerospace program at the University of North Dakota and the fact that Winnipeg is a center of aerospace manufacturing. As well, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Minnesota both provide large adjacent markets for goods and services for firms in North and South Dakota.

Indeed, Heartlandia is already linked by substantial cross-border trade relationships. Canada is the most important destination for exports from Minnesota, North and South Dakota. In 2008, Canada took 29% of Minnesota’s exports, 51% of North Dakota’s and 34% of South Dakota’s exports.

<table>
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<th>Table 2. Employment Composition (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>N Dakota</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources, Mining &amp; Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, Trade, Transport &amp; Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (eg Health, Education, Government, Other Services)</td>
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Northwestern Ontario is dependent on the United States with over 90% of its exports destined for that market...

Table 3. Recent Employment Statistics

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<th>Employment (000s)</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>517.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>605.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>359.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>430.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>2,764.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW Ontario</td>
<td>101.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartlandia</td>
<td>4,160.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
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Dakota’s. Meanwhile, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Northwestern Ontario are even more dependent on the American market. In 2006, about 77% of Manitoba’s exports were to the United States while two-thirds of Saskatchewan’s exports were to the United States. Northwestern Ontario is even more dependent on the United States with over 90% of its exports destined for that market.

As a further example of common economic interests, Minnesota, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have had robust growth and relatively tight labour markets and some of their firms might benefit from setting up operations in nearby Northwestern Ontario where there is currently highly skilled surplus labour and capacity due to the forest crisis and its effects on the unemployment rate (See Table 3). Moreover, recent economic development initiatives announced for northeastern Minnesota could also provide opportunities for Northwestern Ontario firms. As well, improvements to the highway, road and border-crossing network in Heartlandia could also generate benefits for increased regional partnerships.
The PNWER Example

The Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) provides an excellent template on which to begin organizing Heartlandia’s activities as an economic region. The organization has been performing activities for 18 years, the highlight of which is their annual meeting. In the words of PNWER:

“The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) is a region-al U.S.-Canadian forum dedicated to encouraging global economic competitiveness and preserving our world-class natural environment. PNWER is recognized by both the United States and Canada as the “model” for regional and bi-national cooperation because of its proven success. PNWER is a respected voice and resource for our region, and provides the public and private sectors a cross-border forum for unfiltered dialogue that capitalizes upon the synergies between business leaders and elected officials who work to advance the region’s global competitiveness.”

At their July 2008 meeting, PNWER welcomed Saskatchewan into the group making PNWER a region with 20 million people with a combined output of $700 billion U.S.

PNWER is governed by a bi-national executive committee consisting of a core of President, four Vice-Presidents, and an immediate past-president that is supplemented by a set of past presidents, politicians and several private sector members for a total of 19 executive members. This large executive maintains representation from all of the constituent provinces, territories and states, which now total nine. There are two councils that provide a representative membership for the organization. There is a Delegate Council of representatives from provincial, territorial and state governments that includes premiers, governors and designated alternates. There is a Private Sector Council of representatives from the business community, which again are spread across the nine constituent members with Canadian and U.S. Chairs/Co-Chairs.

There is an Executive Director that maintains the administrative operations of the organization dealing with records, statistics and statutes, and supervises a staff of eight that provides the manpower to drive initiatives and activities. The responsibilities of the staff are instructive and provide a quick overview of the activities that PNWER is engaged in. Along with Chief Executive and Operating Officers, there is an Energy Project Director, A Tourism Program Manager, a Homeland Security Coordinator, an Innovation Network and Workforce Development Program Coordinator, and the Director of A Centre for Regional Disaster Resilience. These staff help organize and maintain a number of working groups dealing with specific regional issues: tourism, agriculture, border issues, energy, environment, forestry, healthcare, high tech, homeland security, invasive species, sustainable development, telecommunications, trade and economic development, transportation, water policy and workforce
Developing a regional vision and set of common statistics that could be used to lobby both federal governments could also have long-term benefits...

devlopment. PNWER also maintains regional news feeds, trade and economic statistics and is about to begin putting together a Border Policy Institute to mobilize research on border issues. Most recently, PNWER has endorsed a Border Charter that provides a document listing action items and designed to start work on a cross-border animal health conference, working on steps to ensure a welcoming border experience in anticipation of the 2010 Winter Olympics, creating a Pacific Coast utility alliance, starting discussion of student exchange and transfer of academic credit amongst the region’s universities and creating a Border Health alliance to deal with public health care preparedness.

Organizing Heartlandia

This economic region requires a sense of common vision in order to grow and prosper during the 21st century. Leaders in this region need to facilitate cross-border commerce and activity in the areas of cross-border employment and business opportunities, better relationships between producers and suppliers, improving cross-border transportation infrastructure, cross-border environmental and nature conservation, and tourism promotion.

Institutionalizing a regular set of meetings as has been done in the Pacific Northwest would be a good beginning. Furthermore, developing a regional vision and set of common statistics that could be used to lobby both federal governments could also have long-term benefits particularly when it comes to border issues that threaten the role of the border as a zone of interaction. How do we ensure that the border remains a zone of contact, interaction and opportunity that facilitates commerce and travel? How do we study border issues in a focused and objective fashion and then use the research to set priorities and pursue action?

A possible formal framework for the implementation of Heartlandia requires the participation of government, business and the community in an organization that could provide some direction – for example, a Council or a Directorate. The functions of such a Directorate would be to provide a consultative forum via regular meetings and sketch out general directions. The broad functions of the Directorate would be issue identification, goal setting and prioritization and resource mobilization for issue resolution. At the government level, the logical members and participants are representatives of municipal, state, provincial and national governments as well as First Nations. At the business level, the logical participants are individual businesses and trade associations such as Chambers of Commerce. At the community level, interested parties and participants could include community and cultural organizations, post-secondary institutions and public interest groups. The region’s post-secondary institutions may wish to pool their strengths in creating research networks with applied industrial spin-offs.

The role of the Heartlandia Directorate will be two-fold: first, it will serve as the general steward and advocate of
visions for the economic development of Heartlandia and second, it will research, implement and manage projects and activities beneficial to the regional economy. The general organizational structure of Heartlandia could consist of a consultative forum for the representation of economic interests, a board and executive selected from the consultative forum and a secretariat that provides the administrative support data collection for the activities of the Directorate. Think of the Directorate as a “tree” (See Figure 1) with the membership as the base, a board, executive and secretariat as the trunk, and the various activities and task forces as the branches and leaves. Funding for the activities of this Directorate would come in the form of membership dues from participants as well as contributions from provincial, state and federal governments. Among some of the possible activities would be thematic tourism marketing of the region – perhaps a “Breadbasket Theme”, cross-border taxation and regulatory issues, the facilitation of cross-border travel and commerce, natural resource and agricultural research, transportation infrastructure.

**Figure 1**
A cross-border institutional framework for Heartlandia would identify issues, set goals and priorities...

Conclusion

The time is ripe to consider an economic region straddling the middle of the North American continent – a North American central economic region spanning Northwestern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North and South Dakota and Minnesota termed Heartlandia. This cross-border region shares common economic interests, is a cluster of human, natural and capital resources, and is strategically positioned at the heart of the North American continent at a nexus of trade and transportation corridors. Key immediate priorities for this region involve research and industrial partnerships, common tourism marketing and steps to reduce congestion and streamline border flows of legitimate trade and travel.

The next step is for interested parties and stakeholders to come together to establish a formal framework. The precedent for such a framework of cross-border functional governance already exists with the Pacific-Northwest Economic Region which has been developing over almost twenty years. A cross-border institutional framework for Heartlandia would identify issues, set goals and priorities, and proceed to mobilize resources for addressing opportunities. The first steps towards a regional vision are already occurring. Indeed, the city of Winnipeg’s recent decision to change its city slogan from “One Great City” to “Heart of the Continent” may be a harbinger of things to come”.25
Appendix I: Joel Garreau’s Nine Nations of North America

Source: http://www.harpercollege.edu/~mhealy/g101ilec/namer/nac/nacnine/na9intro/nacninfr.htm

Appendix 2: Heartlandia as a Transportation Cross-Roads

Source: http://winnipeg inlandport.ca/centre_port_canada.htm
SOURCES


ENDNOTES


ENDNOTES Cont’d.

6. For additional references on borders and frontiers, see Prescott (1965, 1987) and Boggs (1966).
9. Regional differences in cross-border travel behavior by Canadians going into the United States are examined in Di Matteo and Di Matteo (1996).
10. See www.atlantica.org.
16. See the Mayor’s Trade Council Report, Winnipeg-Canada’s Global Center for Trade; Centreport Canada Inc, presentation by the Honourable Ron Lemieux, Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, January 27, 2009 and Centreport Canada.
20. Under the Minnesota Job Opportunity Building Zones (JOBZ) program, 34 communities, 58 sub-zones on 3,271 acres across northeastern Minnesota have been given this special designation which provides tax free business opportunities. Tax exemptions include state income tax for operators or investors, property tax on commercial and industrial improvements, state and local sales tax on goods and services purchased, state corporate franchise taxes, wind energy production tax and employment tax credits for high paying jobs. See http://www.irrrb.org/business/ssf/jobz
23. The 2008 Border Charter established a framework for private sector representation. One representative shall be selected from each PNWER jurisdiction to represent the private sector on the PNWER Executive Committee:
   · Appointments shall be for a two-year renewable term;
   · Appointees shall be expected to have broad general knowledge of and represent the interests of the overall private sector and shall not represent any particular interest group, constituency or position;
   · Representatives shall be expected to be available for bi-weekly teleconference of the Executive Committee; for periodic teleconferences or meetings of the Private Sector Council; and to attend the Annual Summit and Winter Meeting of PNWER;
   · Representatives should have the ability to mobilize other private sector participants and generally foster enhanced involvement in and support for PNWER activities;
   · Representatives will be expected to enjoy the support, both morally and financially, of their employer/organization for their involvement in PNWER at this level.
24. Smooth transitions for border commerce is a constant and growing issue. See Alan Gotleib, "We need borders without boundaries," The Globe and Mail, April 2, 2009.
25. For the CBC news story on Winnipeg’s change see:
   http://www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2008/09/05/wpg-sign.html