

Border Wall Costs to Date:

The Costs of Physical Barriers along the U.S.-Mexico Border

Updated March 2019

President Donald Trump has made constructing a border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border one of his highest priorities. But the Trump Administration is not the first to promote the construction of physical barriers along the Southwest border. The U.S. government has already spent billions of dollars building hundreds of miles of barriers in efforts to halt the flow of illegal goods and people across the Southwest border. Even if President Trump’s wall is not implemented, there will be continuing investments in border security through existing programs.

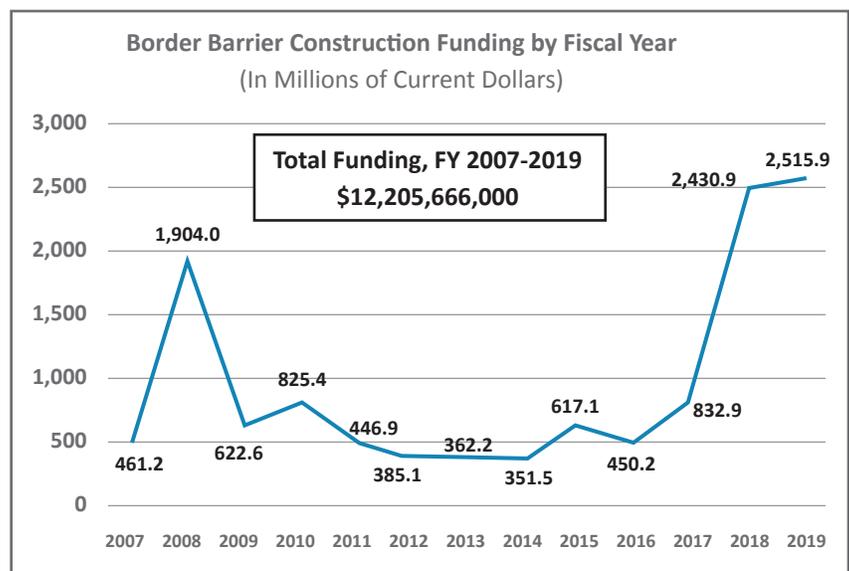
Findings In Brief

- The U.S. government **has spent \$12.2 billion** on border barrier construction since 2007, almost entirely along the Southwest border.
- The U.S. Customs and Border Protection Service (CBP) oversaw construction of several hundred miles of barriers along the Southwest border between 2005 and 2011. In subsequent years, however, Department of Homeland Security largely stopped deploying additional fencing and shifted its enforcement strategy to one that places less emphasis on physical barriers.
- In his first two budget proposals to Congress, President Trump requested over \$3 billion for “Border Wall Construction” along the Southwest border.
- Congress has been unwilling to fully support the president’s border wall plan. Instead, they have opted to split the difference – allocating significantly higher funding for physical barriers along the Southwest border but refusing to specifically fund the president’s proposal for a wall.
- Estimates of the total cost of President Trump’s plan vary widely, ranging from the president’s estimate of \$8 billion to over \$40 billion.

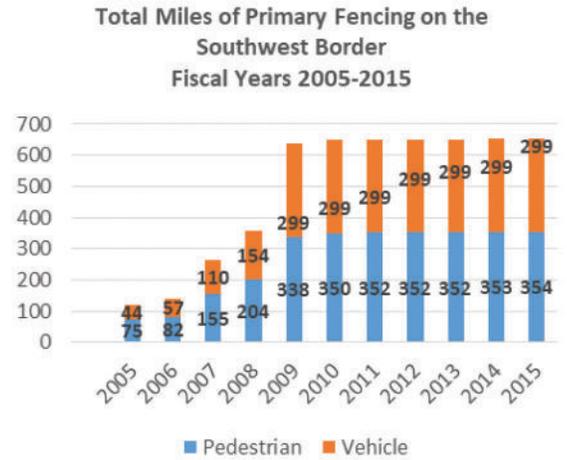
Background

The Southwest Border: Basic Facts

— The border between the United States and Mexico extends 1,900 miles from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, and bounds four U.S. states – California, New Mexico, Arizona and Texas. The Rio Grande river is the border between Mexico and Texas, covering over 1,200 miles of the total length of the border. Roughly five percent of the total border runs through populated areas.



Previous Border Initiatives — The federal agency with primary responsibility for barrier construction along the nation’s borders is CBP, part of the Department of Homeland Security. CBP first began erecting physical barriers along the Southwest Border in 1990 with an initial 14-mile-long “primary fence” constructed in the San Diego area. The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) is the primary statute authorizing barrier construction along U.S. international borders. It explicitly gave the Attorney General (since transferred to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security) broad authority to construct border barriers. Section 102 of IIRIRA authorizes the DHS Secretary to waive “all legal requirements,” including environmental considerations, that might impede construction. DHS constructed several hundred miles of new barriers along the Southern border between 2005 and 2011. In subsequent years, however, DHS adopted an enforcement strategy that relies more on patrols and interdiction by Border Patrol personnel.



President Trump’s Border Wall Initiative — On January 25, 2017 President Trump issued [Executive Order 13767](#), which instructed the Secretary of Homeland Security to “take all appropriate steps to immediately plan, design, and construct a physical wall along the southern border...” The order defines a “wall” to mean “a contiguous, physical wall or other similarly secure, contiguous, and impassable physical barrier.”

Funding the Border Wall — While President Trump originally stated that the proposed border wall would be paid for by the Government of Mexico, he has already requested over \$3 billion for “Border Wall Construction” in his first two budget submissions to Congress. Congress, as part of its FY2019 Consolidated Appropriations Act, included more than \$2.5 billion for border construction in the CBP budget, including \$1.375 billion for physical barriers along the Southwest border, but it specifically did not fund the President’s plan. Instead, the omnibus spending package specifies which areas of the Southwest border would receive new construction. Also, [Section 230](#) of the Act stipulates that construction funding “shall only be available for operationally effective designs [already] deployed,” blocking DHS from funding the administration’s proposed new border wall.

TCS has been unable to independently determine how much of the Southwest border is currently protected by border barriers, and of what type. In February 2017 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a [report](#) detailing the total miles of primary fencing on the Southwest border for Fiscal Years 2005-2015, showing a total of 654 miles of fencing in FY 2015. Department of Homeland Security budget documents for Fiscal Years 2018 and 2019 also identify 654 miles of existing fencing along the Southwest border. TCS has been able to identify funding in congressional budget documents for 25 miles of fencing in FY 2018 and 55 miles of fencing in FY 2019. **IF** the 80 miles of barriers funded in the last two fiscal years are constructed on sections of the border where no barriers already exist (there are currently multiple layers of barriers along many parts of the border), then that would account for roughly 734 miles of barriers along the almost 2,000-mile border.

Total Cost of the President’s Plan — This is just the tip of the wall’s funding iceberg, which Mr. Trump first put at [\\$8 billion](#). The [White House Framework on Immigration Reform & Border Security](#) now estimates \$25 billion for the border wall system. Investment industry analysts [have placed](#) the wall’s total cost at between \$15 and \$25 billion. Other estimates are considerably higher, including a [Massachusetts Institute for Technology study](#) estimating the cost at around \$40 billion.

Border Wall Costs by State

To see your state’s [share](#) of the government’s \$12.2 billion spending on border wall construction, visit the TCS website [here](#).