

# Border wall construction has sped up amid coronavirus crisis, CBP chief

**EXCLUSIVE:** Construction of the wall at the southern border has sped up amid the coronavirus crisis, and it remains a “top priority” for the Trump administration, the head of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) told Fox News this week.

“This pandemic has not slowed the construction of the border wall system. In fact, we’re increasing the pace of construction,” Acting CBP Commissioner Mark Morgan said. “COVID-19 should be a wake-up call for all Americans that border security is national security. Preventing and slowing down the introduction of a deadly virus into the U.S. from outside our borders is exactly why border security matters, and why the wall matters.”

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Morgan said that 182 miles of the wall have been built so far, as the administration tries to meet its goal of completing 450 miles by the end of the year, after years of battling in Congress and the courts for funding. It’s a significant jump in a few months — the administration marked the 100th mile built in January and surpassed 150 miles last month.

“Border security is national security and the border wall system is a priority in protecting the American people. We’ve been consistent about our need for a wall, and we are full steam ahead on its construction,” he said, in written responses to questions from Fox News.

While much of that construction has been in places where there were already existing structures, officials have been keen to point out that there is a big difference between this wall and the old landing-mat style structures that could easily be driven or climbed over.

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“Keep in mind that a comprehensive border wall system is not just a physical structure, but it also includes more roads for Border Patrol enforcement, and ever-evolving technology like cameras and sensors — equipment that is vital for confronting the unique and diverse threats we face, including pandemics,” Morgan said.

The wall is one of the Trump administration’s most controversial policies — having served as a lightning rod for criticism ever since the campaign. Democrats and pro-immigrant activists have claimed that a wall is cruel, while simultaneously claiming it doesn’t work.

Last month, dozens of House and Senate Democrats wrote to the administration urging it to halt all border wall construction.

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“Money that should be invested in health care, small businesses and fighting the spread of COVID-19 is instead being used to build an ineffective and wasteful border wall that does not solve our immigration crisis or protect our homeland,” the lawmakers wrote, according to Politico. “We should be using all resources and funding to combat this virus and protect Americans, instead of using critical funding and resources to continue the construction of a border wall.”

It’s an argument that the administration flatly rejects — and it has pushed a number of immigration and border-related measures in response to the crisis, including allowing CBP to immediately return those who enter the country illegally, as well as limiting nonessential travel at both the southern border and the U.S. border with Canada.

The wall is part of that effort, and CBP, in particular, had taken efforts to demonstrate the progress it is making on the barriers — recently creating an interactive website to track this.

“The border wall system is and will remain a top priority. It is an integral tool [that] improves CBP’s operational capacity with every mile of steel put into the ground to effectively impede and deny who and what is coming through our borders that may cause harm to our nation’s citizens, including infectious diseases like COVID-19,” Morgan said.

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He later stressed the added health risk to agents, doctors, and the public, saying the wall is a “necessary tool in our toolbox” in fighting back against the coronavirus.

“CBP has dealt with a variety of infectious disease threats in the past and it is undeniably a health security and national security matter,” he said. “The border wall system has helped us stem the spread of COVID-19.”

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