

Leading indicator of cross-border traveller volume, May 2020

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Highlights

Just as in April, the number of US and Canadian residents crossing the border from the United States by automobile stayed at a virtual standstill in May, as the travel restrictions on non-essential travel remained in effect throughout the month.

The number of US travellers entering Canada by automobile through Integrated Primary Inspection Lines (IPIL) land ports was down 96% compared with May 2019.

A comparably large decline occurred in the number of Canadians returning from the United States by automobile through these ports, dropping 95% in May compared with the same month a year earlier.

The Canada-US border closure, in effect since March 21, was set to expire on May 20, 2020, but was extended until June 21 of the same year to contain the further spread of COVID-19.

Border restrictions bring crossings to a near standstill

Restrictions on non-essential travel across the Canada-US border that initially took effect in March 2020, brought cross-border travel by automobile between the two countries to a near standstill in April and throughout May.

As of March 21, 2020, a 30-day restriction was placed on all non-essential travel across the Canada-US border.

On April 18, 2020, the Government of Canada announced that the Canada-US border would remain closed to non-essential travel for another 30 days to contain the further spread of COVID-19.

On May 19, 2020, Canada and the United States agreed to extend the border closure until June 21 of the same year.

Arrivals from the United States by car almost stop

The number of US residents entering Canada by automobile declined sharply following the March 21 announcement, and remained at a halt through to the end of April.

At 111 land ports equipped with the automated IPIL system, the number of US residents entering Canada in US-licensed automobiles in May remained 96% below the level recorded in May 2019.

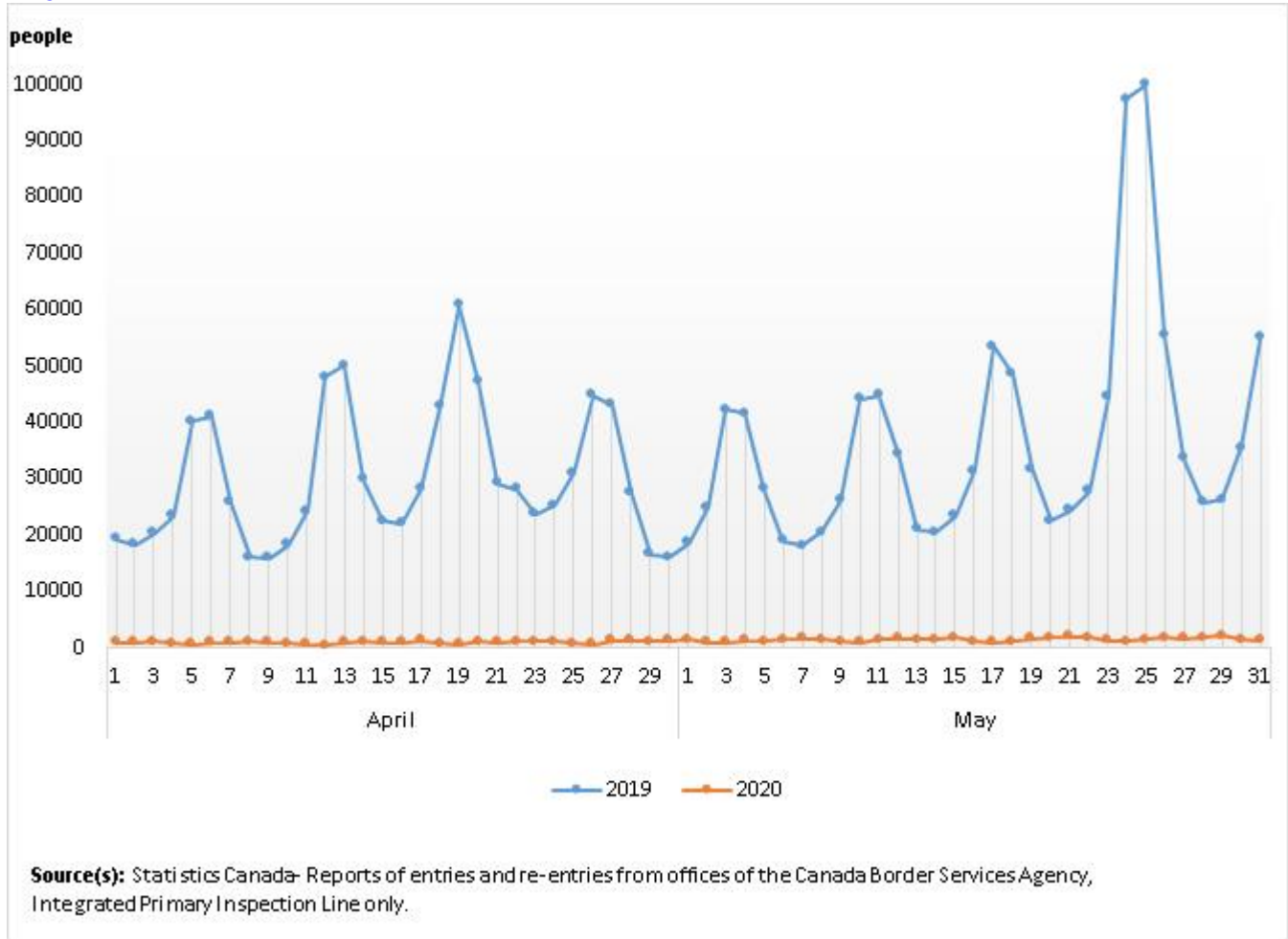
The usual spike of American residents entering Canada by automobile during the US Memorial Day weekend did not occur at all in 2020.

The largest year-over-year declines in US arrivals by car were recorded in Ontario (from 694,400 to 19,900) and British Columbia (from 219,100 to 15,100).

The largest percentage decline was recorded in Quebec (-98%), where the number of US residents entering by car fell from 119,300 to 2,500.



Infographic 1 – United States residents entering Canada in US-licensed automobiles, April and May 2019 and 2020



The number of returning Canadians remains low

The number of Canadian residents returning from trips to the United States began a steep decline after the March 21 border closure and remained at a near standstill in April and May.

In May, there were almost 95% fewer Canadian residents returning from the United States in Canadian-licensed automobiles via 111 IPIL ports compared with May 2019.

Similarly, the normal spike of Canadian residents returning from trips to the United States by automobile over the Victoria Day holiday did not occur in 2020.

The largest absolute year-over-year decline was recorded at the IPIL ports in Ontario, where the number of Canadian residents returning from the United States by automobile fell from 1.1 million to 75,000.

Infographic 2 – Canadian residents returning from the United States in Canadian-licensed automobiles, April and May 2019 and 2020

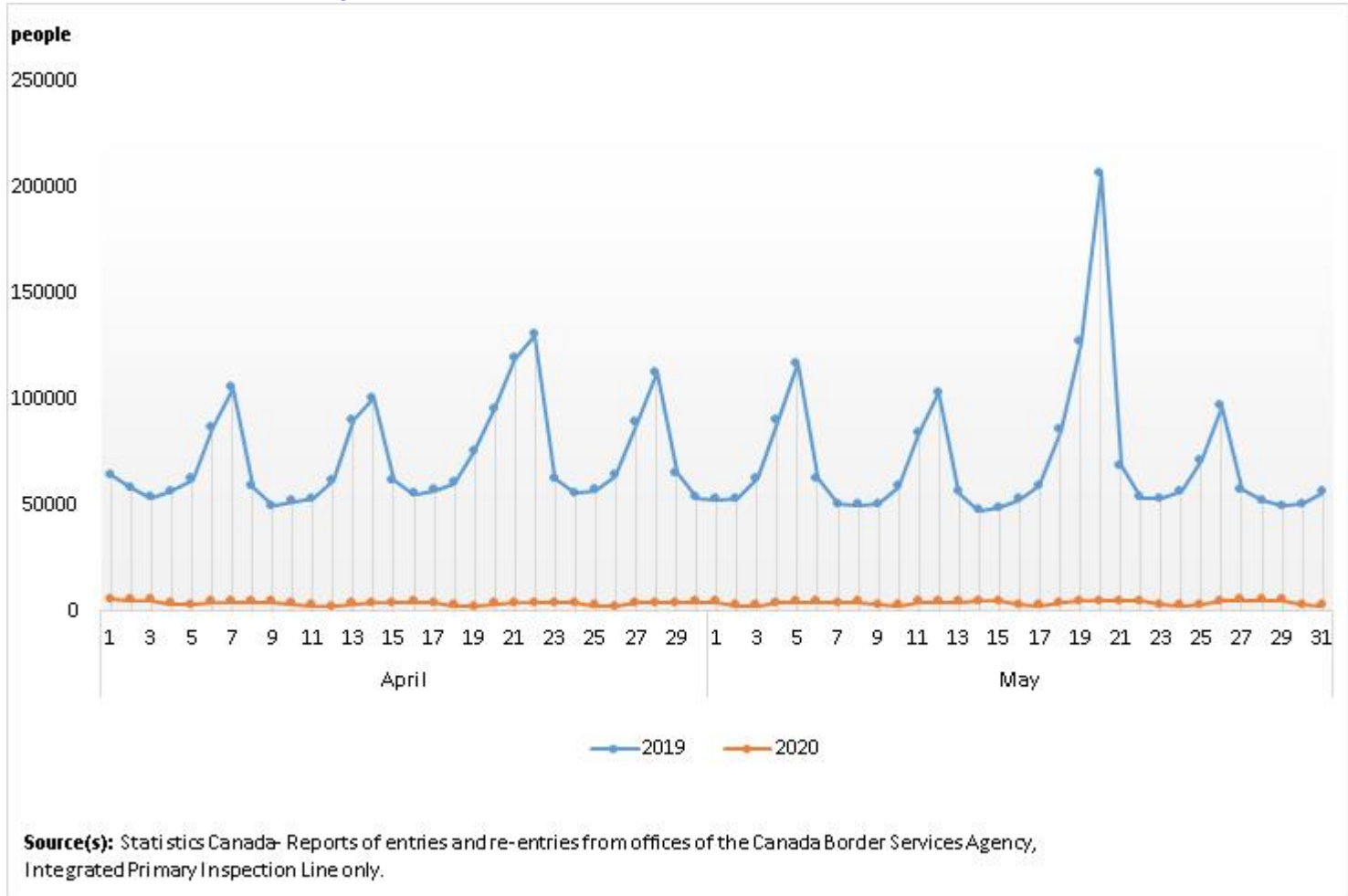


Table 1
US residents entering Canada in US-licensed automobiles

	May 2019	May 2020	May 2019 to May 2020
	thousands		% change
Canada	1,141.3	44.2	-96.1
Newfoundland and Labrador	...	...	...
Prince Edward Island	...	...	...
Nova Scotia	...	...	...
New Brunswick	54.8	2.1	-96.2
Quebec	119.3	2.5	-97.9
Ontario	694.4	19.9	-97.1
Manitoba	24.7	1.6	-93.7
Saskatchewan	7.9	1.0	-87.7
Alberta	14.0	1.8	-87.3
British Columbia	219.1	15.1	-93.1
Yukon	7.0	0.2	-97.1
Northwest Territories	...	...	...
Nunavut	...	...	...

... not applicable

Note(s): Indicators include only Canada-US border crossings by automobile at land and ferry ports recorded by the Canada Border Services Agency's Integrated Primary Inspection Line system.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Reports of entries and re-entries from offices of the Canada Border Services Agency.

Table 2
Canadian residents returning from the United States in Canadian-licensed automobiles

	May 2019	May 2020	May 2019 to May 2020
	thousands		% change
Canada	2,175.0	113.5	-94.8
Newfoundland and Labrador	...	...	...
Prince Edward Island	...	...	...
Nova Scotia	...	...	...
New Brunswick	192.6	13.5	-93.0
Quebec	235.3	7.7	-96.7
Ontario	1,081.6	75.0	-93.1
Manitoba	78.4	3.3	-95.8
Saskatchewan	19.4	1.0	-95.0
Alberta	36.8	2.4	-93.4
British Columbia	523.7	10.5	-98.0
Yukon	7.2	0.0	-99.5
Northwest Territories	...	...	...
Nunavut	...	...	...

... not applicable

Note(s): Indicators include only Canada-US border crossings by automobile at land and ferry ports recorded by the Canada Border Services Agency's Integrated Primary Inspection Line system.

Source(s): Statistics Canada: Reports of entries and re-entries from offices of the Canada Border Services Agency.

Note to readers

Data indicating cross-border travel by automobile through 111 land ports equipped with the automated Integrated Primary Inspection Line (IPIL) system are now available by the traveller's state or province of residence and by the province of entry into Canada. A traveller's state or province of residence is estimated from the licence plate of the automobile used to enter Canada.

The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) uses various data sources to collect information on travellers entering the country. One of the CBSA's sources, the IPIL system, yields data in an electronic format that requires less processing. These data account for the largest share of travellers entering Canada by automobile.

The IPIL data exclude automobile travellers who cross the Canada-US border using a NEXUS card and at ports that are not equipped with the IPIL system. These counts also exclude US travellers entering Canada in automobiles with Canadian licence plates and Canadian travellers returning to the country in automobiles with US licence plates.

As such, the IPIL data only represent a subset of Canadian and US residents entering Canada by automobile. In 2019 for example, the 111 IPIL ports covered by this indicator captured approximately 80% of cross-border automobile traffic between Canada and the United States.

Starting with the October 2016 release, data are available in formats that provide more detail on the entries of persons from each US state. Monthly data in these new formats for the period starting in January 2015 are available upon request. Data on the number of Canadian residents returning from the United States were introduced in January 2018.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5005](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).