

Special Report

Checkpoint 300



Key Findings Based on Statistical Data from 2008

EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel)

World Council of Churches (WCC)

Jan. 2009

Contact to the author:

urs.rybi@bluewin.ch

Contact to the current EAPPI Team in Bethlehem:

Tel: + 972 2 274 7558

eappi.bethlehem@gmail.com

Contact to the Coordination Office in Jerusalem:

Tel: + 972 2 628 9402

Fax: + 972 2 627 4499

Website: www.eappi.org

P. O. Box 741, Jerusalem 91000

Further publishing is welcome, but please first contact the EAPPI communications officer and managing editor Matilda Svensson (eappi-co@jrol.com).

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1. Introduction

1.1. Focus

This report focuses on key findings we draw out of our statistical data from December 2007 until January 2009. So we focus here on general aspects and not individual cases of harassment (even though we witness them regularly).

Our goal is to reduce the harsh situation for the persons who have to cross this checkpoint, many of them on a daily basis. Therefore we adopt here a rather technical and pragmatic perspective to evaluate opportunities to smoothen the given procedure.

The question of the legality or legitimacy of this checkpoint is not discussed here.

1.2. Short background

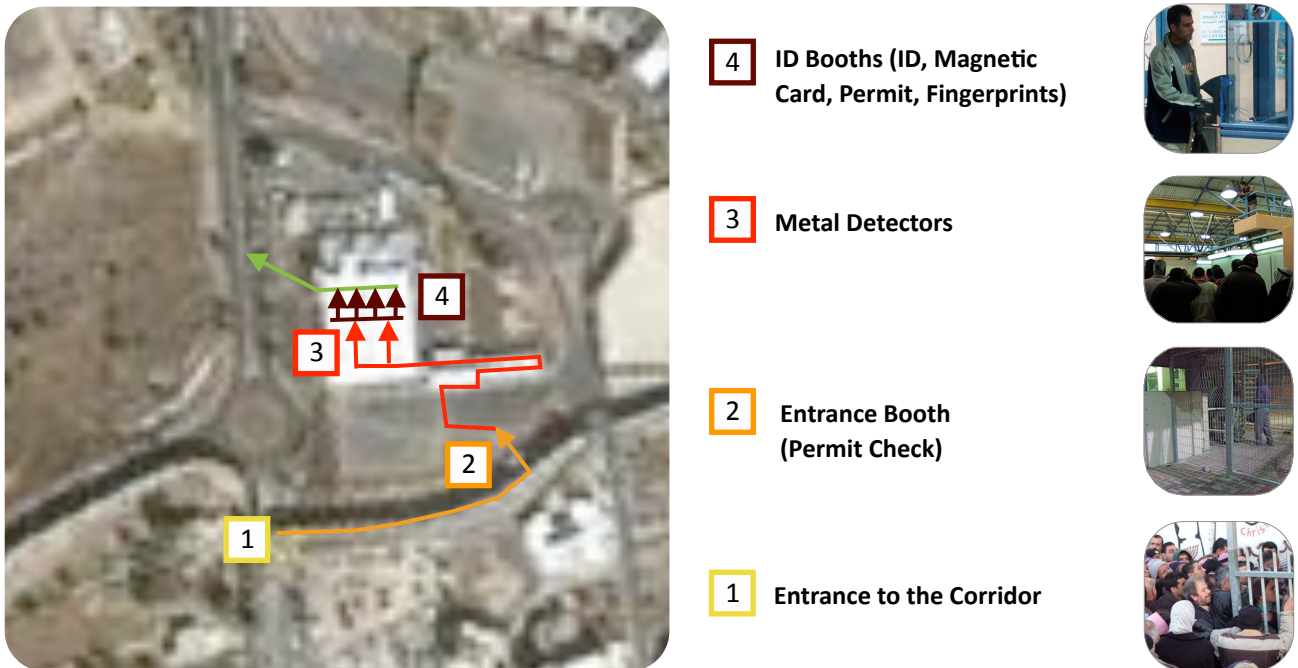


Fig. 1 Overview Checkpoint 300 (source: google earth)

Checkpoint 300 in Bethlehem is one of the main checkpoints to go from the West Bank into Jerusalem. Only a low percentage of the population has a permit to cross, mostly to go to work, some to go to hospital. Most often permits are only valid at a specific checkpoint and only for a specific purpose. So during the working days around 2500 people cross in the morning hours. All people have to pass a three point security check. Because this procedure is slow, long queues occur every morning. In average 2240 people have to queue during the morning hours in front of the first Entrance Booth in a narrow cross-barred corridor. On a normal day it takes about 1.5 hours to pass if one queues at 4:30. As the checkpoint only is supposed to open at 5 am it is very difficult to be at 6 or even 7 am at work. Additionally this time can vary heavily from day to day. Consequently the first



The first in line, queuing since hours, 5.1.09 4:53 am

people start to queue as early as 2 am to be sure to pass in the first wave. The further back somebody is in the queue, the more unpredictable is the passing time. The danger to miss the company bus or not to arrive punctually at the work place is always present. *If the checkpoint is slow hundreds of persons can lose their job*, often the only income for an extended family. Especially as many are only employed as day labourer. People are under enormous pressure.

1.3. The typical setting

On a typical day¹ at 4.45 am 600 people are waiting in the corridor and on the parking lot in front of it. At this time only about 10 women are present in front of the first turnstile. With eight minutes delay, the Entrance Booth opens at 5.08 am. Depending on the day, the people have to show their permit one by one at the booth or showing it while passing by. During the first opening wave of 10 minutes the first 300 waiting people can pass. These people go on to the terminal to pass the Metal Detectors (No. 2 of 3 open) and finally the ID Booths (No. 1, 3, 5, 7 open). As soon as this group is almost completely through the Metal Detectors, the Supervisor orders the soldier in the Entrance Booth to open the first turnstile again. Then people are let through the first turnstile the whole morning in waves of about 5 minutes open - 10 minutes closed - 5 minutes open and so on. The average speed (measured at the Entrance Booth) is 17 persons/ minute. This means roughly 500 persons are let in every half an hour. But this can vary very strongly.



Normal queue in front of the corridor, 21.12.08 4:36 am

1.4. Quality of data

We measure the speed at the Entrance Booth (with our own watches, a manual counter, and a standardized data form). This means our data is only valid under the assumption that people do not get stuck in the terminal and about the same amount of people who can enter, can also leave the terminal. In general, and over the whole morning, this seems an acceptable limitation to make valid statements.

Before November 2008 our monthly sample contains about 5 working days (so about 25%). Afterwards the method of data collection got further unified and now around 10 days are in one monthly sample. Special days like Ramadan, days with closures or Fridays and Saturdays are excluded.

¹ Average of 1.11.08 until 31.1.09

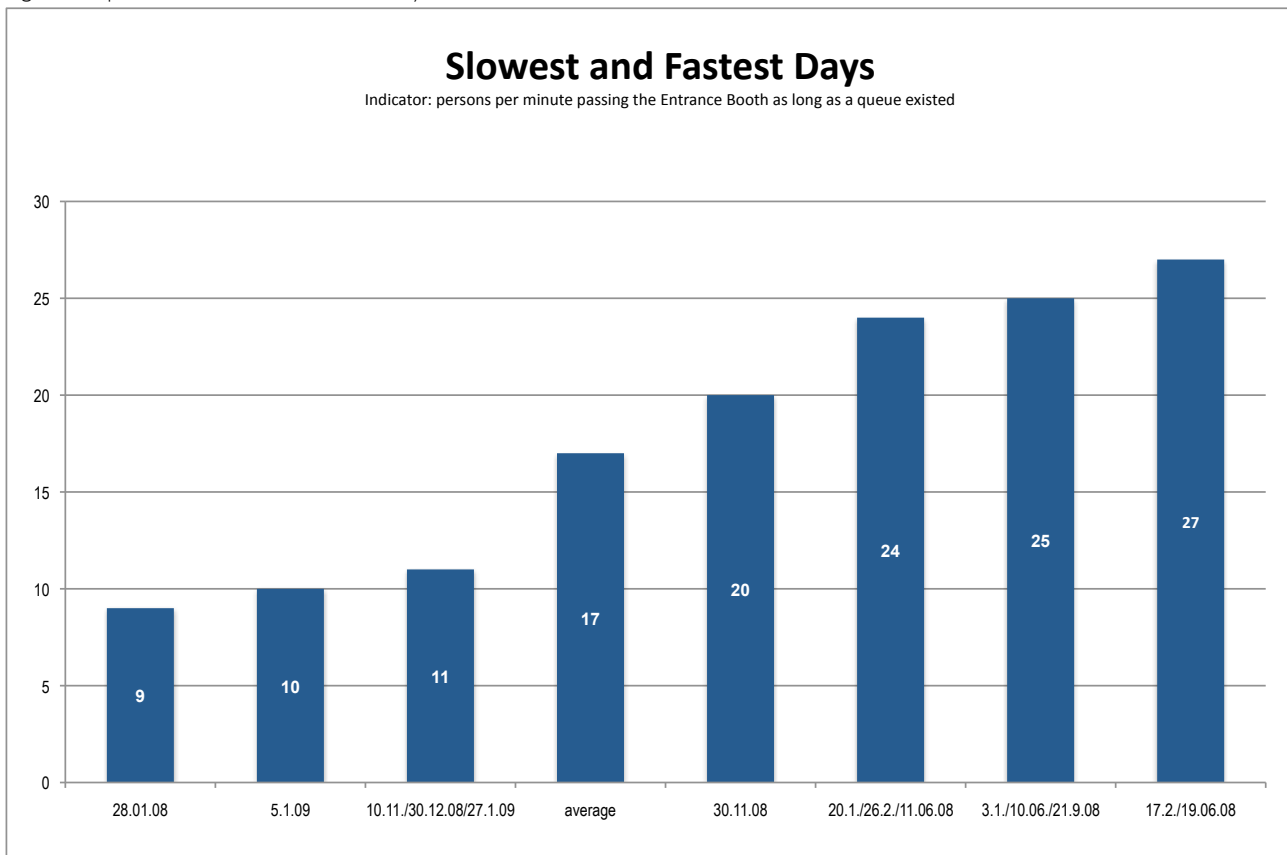
2. Key Findings

2.1. The speed varies strongly from day to day

At 6.00 am already 1645 or only 574 people can have passed². By 7:30 it can differ between 2678 and 1033³. And this notably with almost identical infrastructure used.

We measure the speed by dividing the total of persons passed at the Entrance Booth by the time span a queue existed⁴. So we receive our key indicator *persons per minute*. Fig. 2 compares the slowest and fastest days.

Fig. 2 Comparison of slowest and fastest days



The slowest days can be up to 3 times slower than the fastest. Thereby the management has a huge impact. With identical infrastructure used (2 Metal Detectors, 5 ID Booths) there are days with 11 persons per minute as well as with 27.

² 19.6.08 (2 Metal Detectors, 5 ID Booths) and 22.1.09 (2 MD, 4 ID).

³ 23.9.08 (2 MD a 3rd one for a few minutes, 4 ID) and 28.10.08 (number of MD/ID unknown)

⁴ As soon as the queue ends at the Entrance Booth we finish our counting. So the speed does not get falsified by a lack of people to let through.

2.2. The checkpoint opens rarely punctually

Only a minority (36%) of the days are punctual. In average the checkpoint opens with 8 minutes delay every day. This does not seem to be much. But considering that hundreds of people are waiting this is not negligible. With an average speed of 17 pers./min. such a delay means that 136 people more are at risk to lose their job.

Fig. 3 Overview Punctuality from Dec. 2008 - Jan. 2009

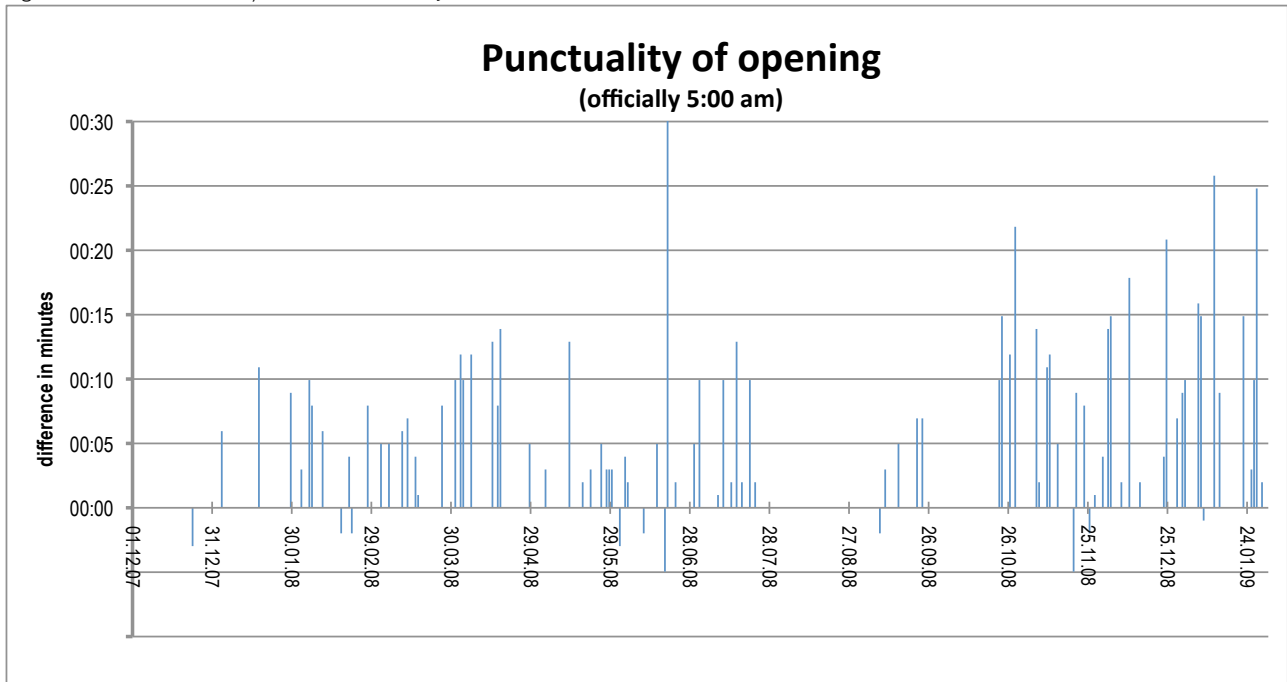
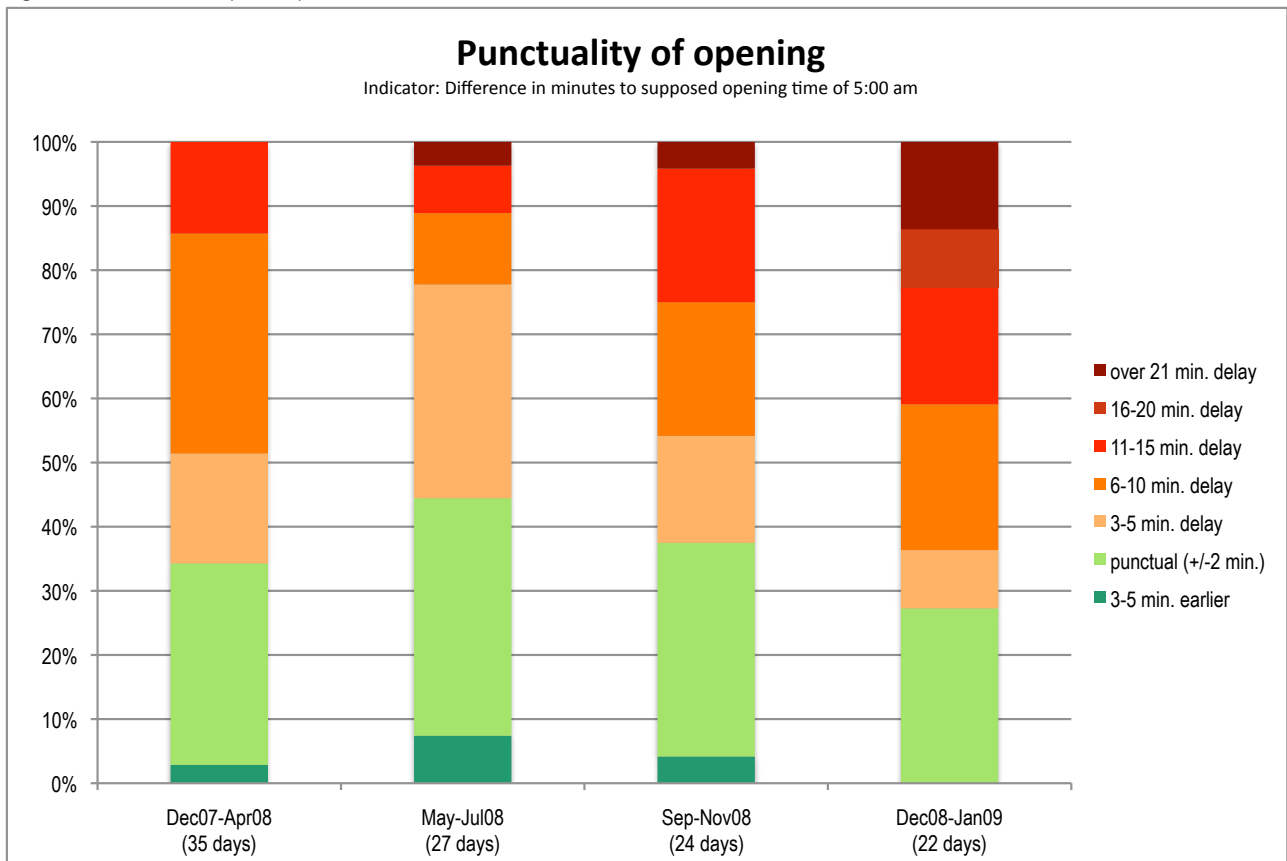


Fig. 4 Punctual and Delayed Days over the Year



2.3. The checkpoint got even slower during the last year

Despite the Gaza war, during the last three months only a slight decrease was observed (fig. 4). But in the long-term perspective a clear deterioration has to be noticed (fig. 5). While typical days in winter 2007/08 had a speed around 20 pers./min. this decreased to around 13 at present (fig. 6).

Fig. 4 Checkpoint Speed in the Last Three Month

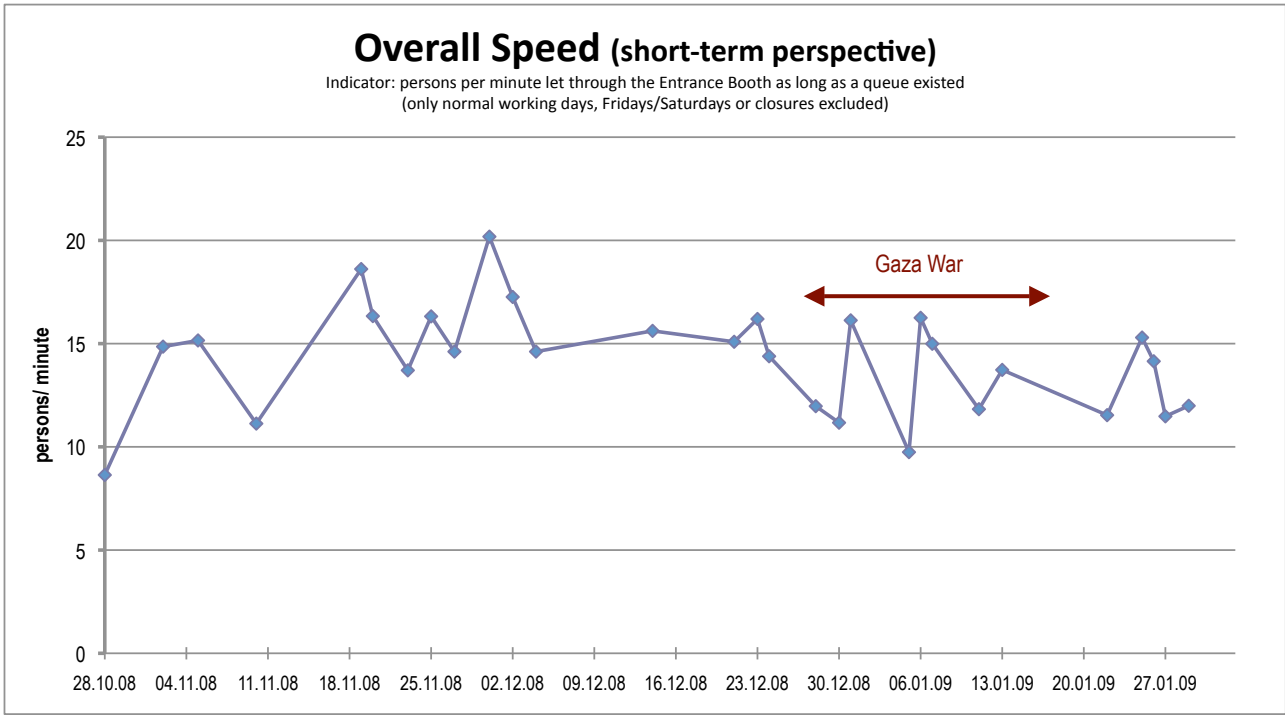


Fig. 5 Checkpoint Speed from Dec.07 until Jan.09

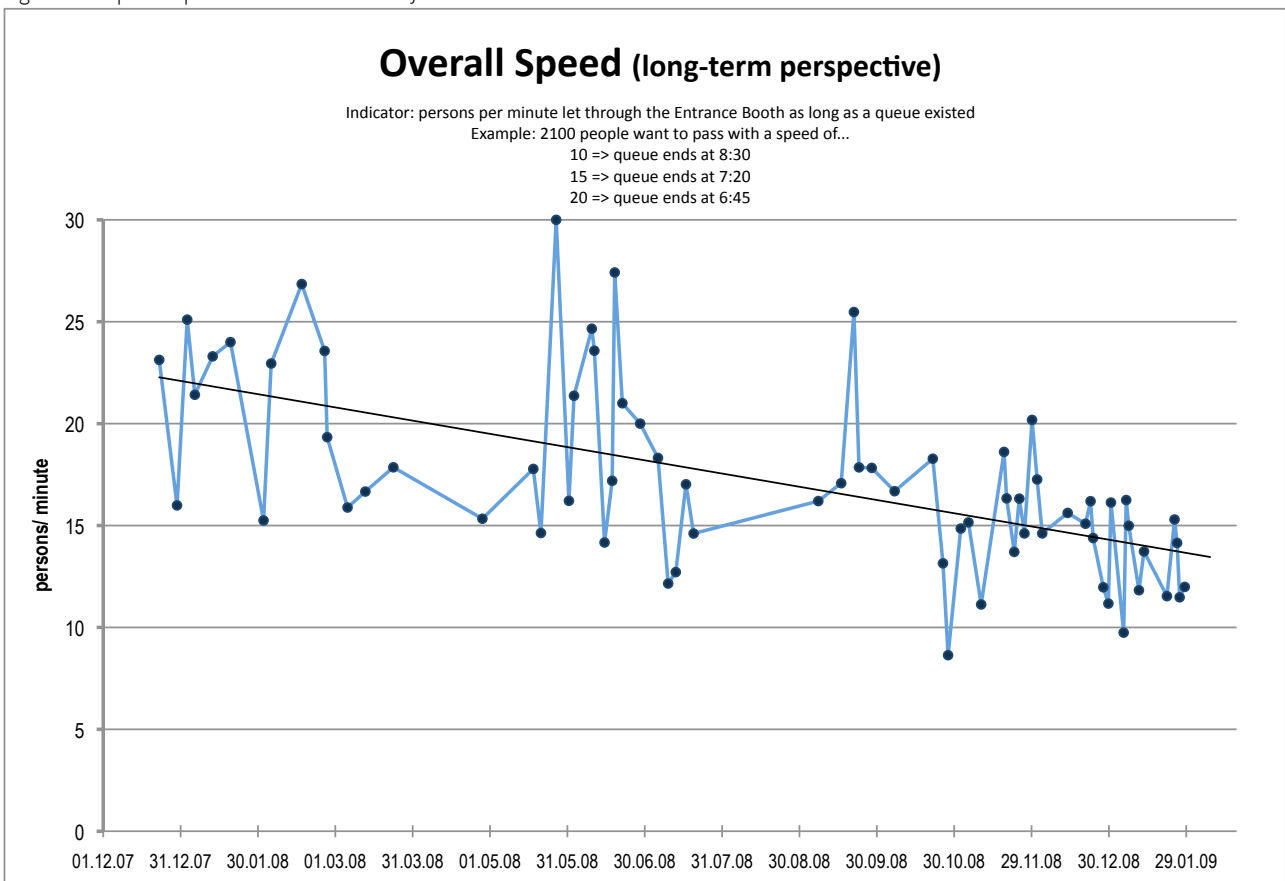
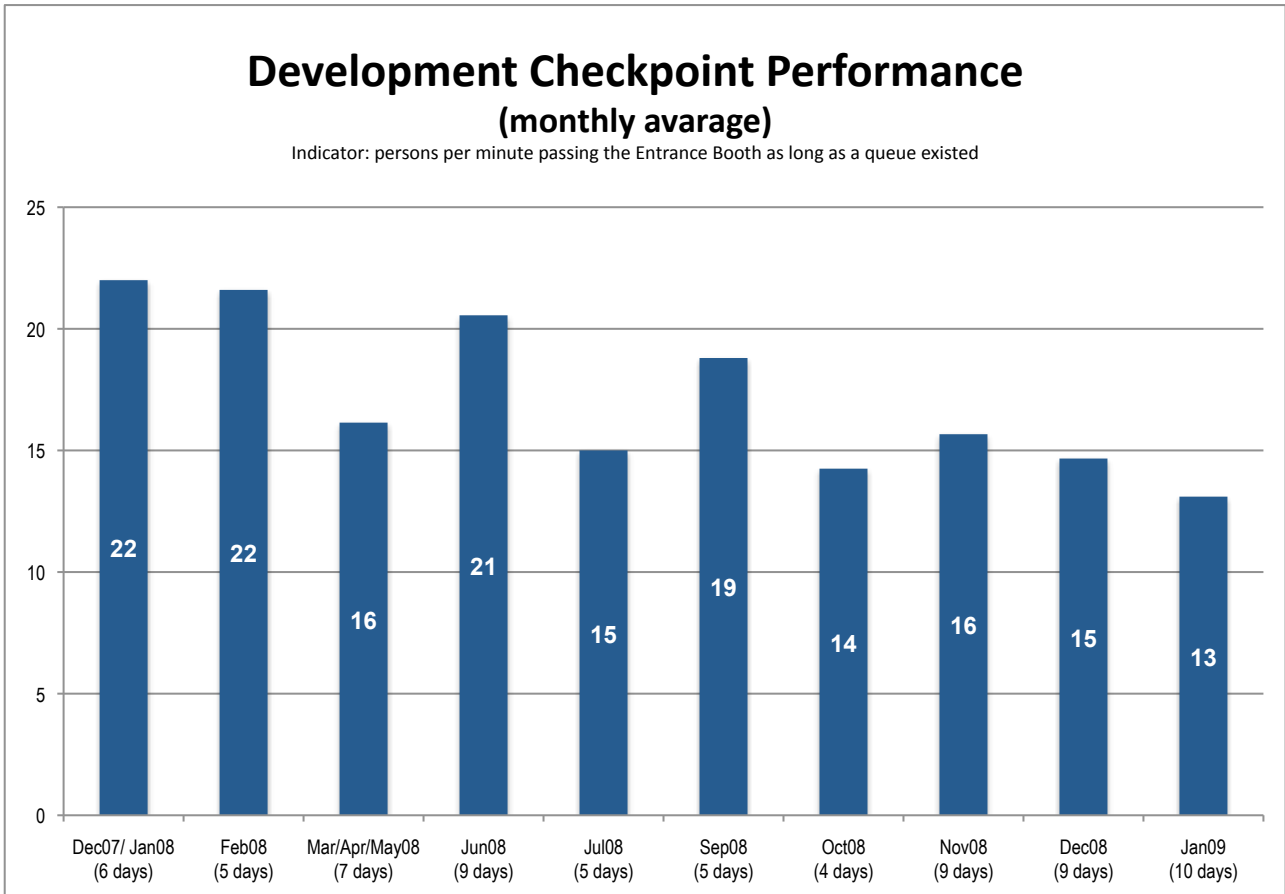


Fig. 6 Average of Speed per Month



While there days with around 20 pers./min. were the usual case last winter, they nowadays rarely ever happen (fig. 7). Figure 8 shows the same information in groups of 2-5 month.

Fig. 7 Slower and Faster Days per Month

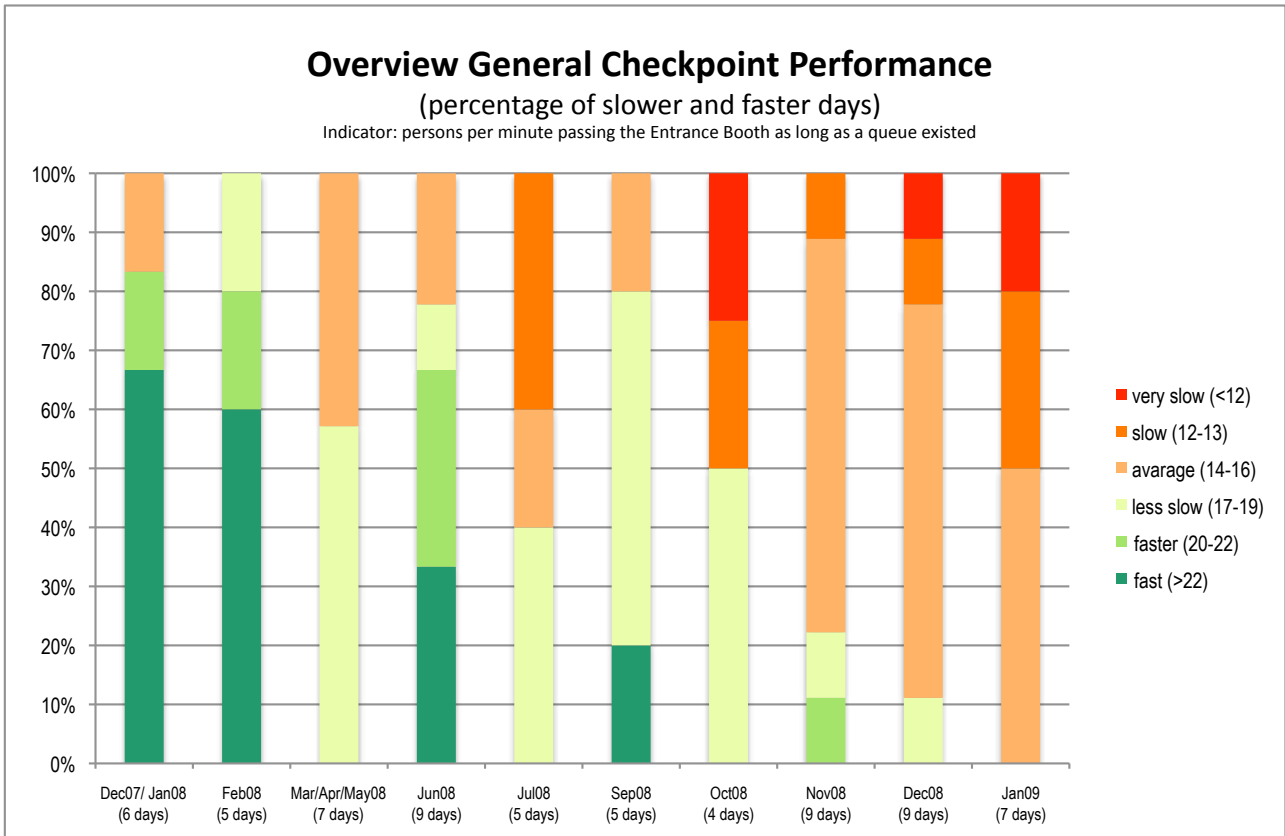
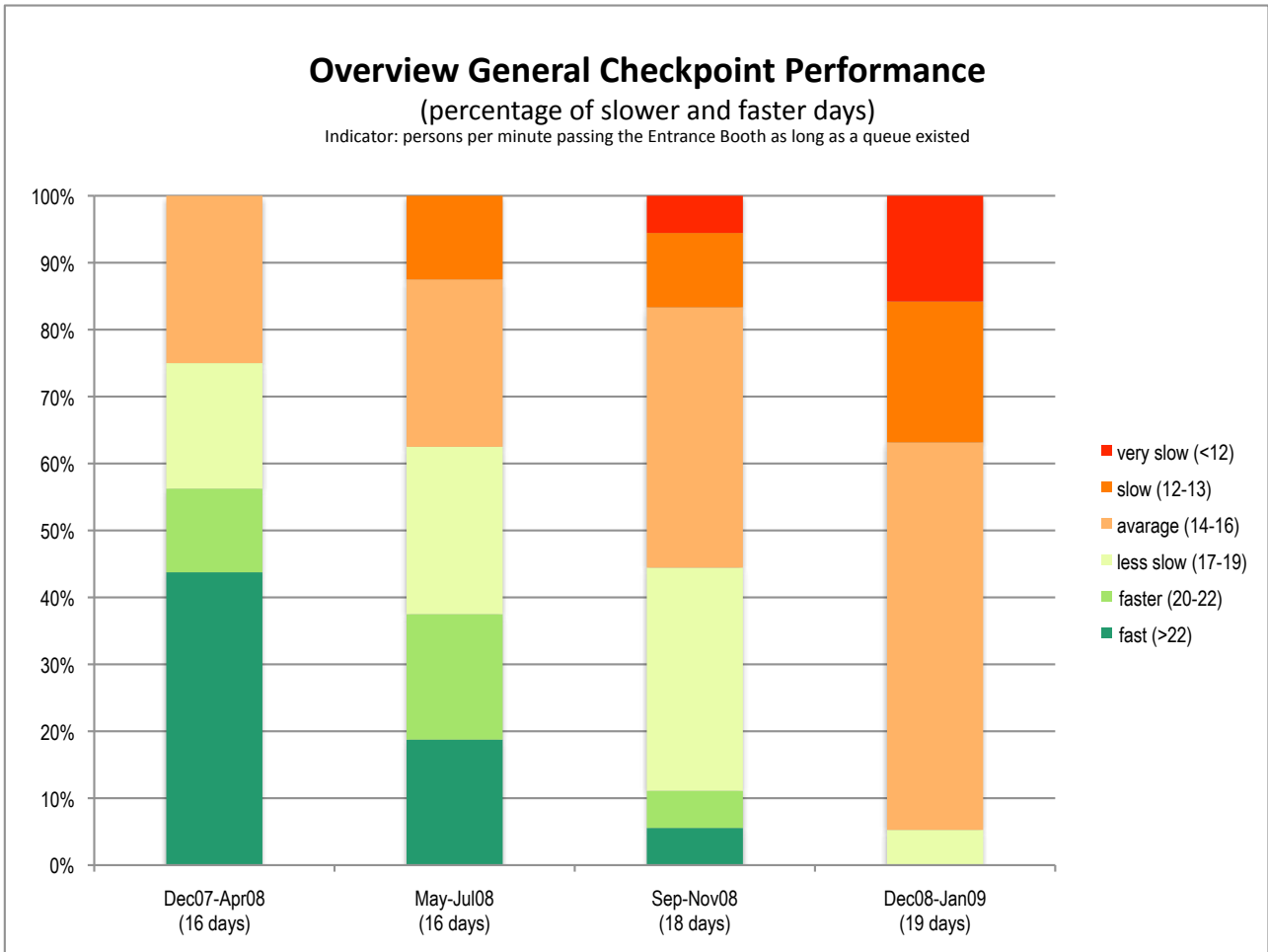


Fig. 8 Slower and Faster Days per Monthly Groups (of 16-19 days)



The number of people waiting at 4:45⁵ and the time the queue ends⁶ support this finding.

Fig. 9 People queuing before opening

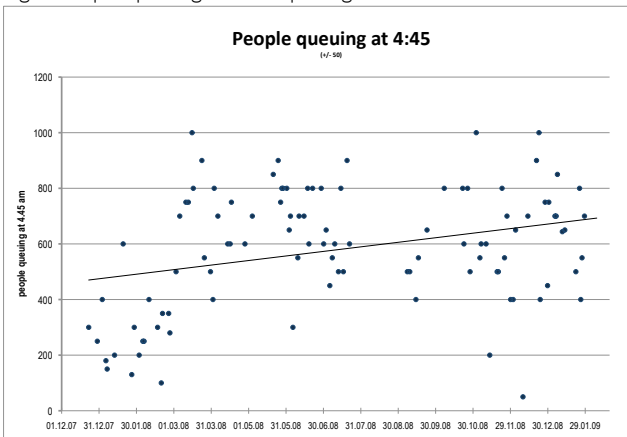
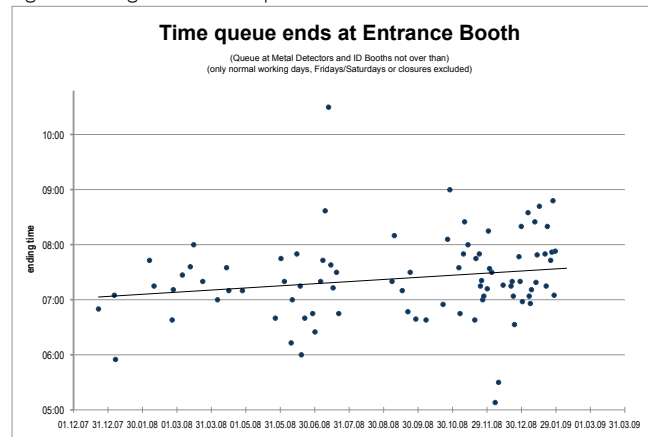


Fig. 10 Ending time of the queue



⁵ a good indicator to measure as how difficult the checkpoint is actually perceived.

⁶ This indicator has the disadvantage that the amount of people who would like to cross is not constant. Here we have data from 87 days instead of only 69 for the speed.

2.4. Only a part of the existing infrastructure is actually used

Entrance Rows

There is one Entrance Row with one Entrance Booth to enter the checkpoint. Since July 2008 a second line is built, which according to our information should serve as a Humanitarian Line for women, children and injured people (and elderly men?). But with the exception of Ramadan Fridays in September it was never used. On the 26.1.09 construction work was going on and the DCL officer at the checkpoint announced that it should be open in the next days, what was not the case until the 29.1.09.

Metal Detectors

Almost always two Metal Detectors (MD) are open. But their speed can vary strongly. In our assessment this section is mostly the bottleneck. Nevertheless practically at no time a third MD is opened (with the exception of Ramadan Fridays and a phase in April 08). As the three MD's are used in different combination, it is clear that all three are principally working. Requests to open a third MD are usually refused with the argument of technical problems or shortage of staff (1 person needed).

ID Booths

Five ID Booths are equipped with both PC and fingerprint scanner. One Booth only has a PC but can be used by entering the information manually into the system. Six Booths are unequipped. The number of open Booths varies from day to day and during the morning, mostly between 3 and 5. This shows some flexibility in the number of staff. Queuing may occur in this section, but generally the MD's are slowing down the process enough to let it pretty empty.

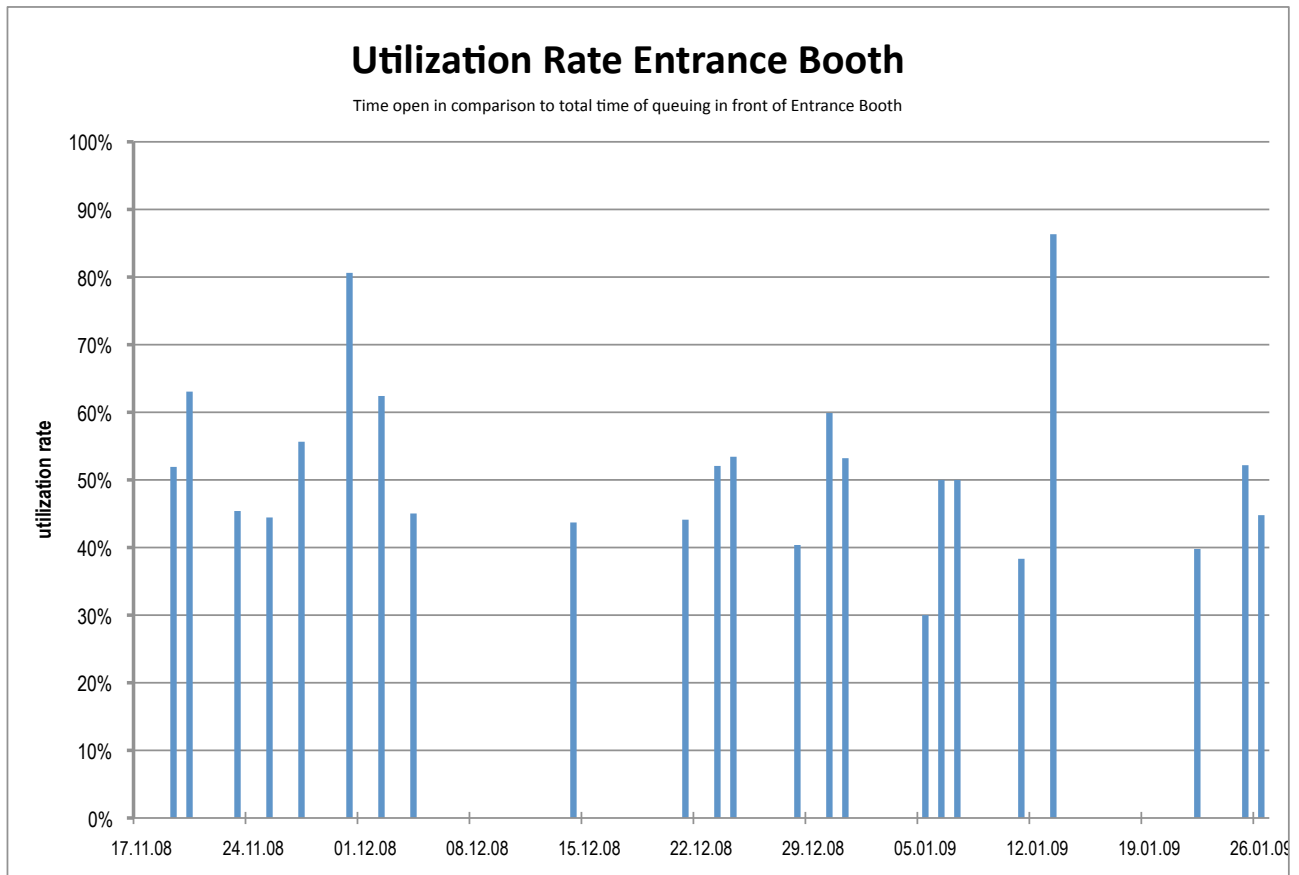
Tab. 1 Overview Infrastructure

	Total	used ✓	unused ✗
Entrance Rows	1 (+ Humanitarian Line)	1	Humanitarian Line
Metal Detectors	3	2	1
ID Booths	12 (6 without PC)	3 - 5	7 - 9

2.5. The Entrance Booth has the highest capacity

At the moment, the Entrance Booth is by far not the bottleneck as it is usually double as fast as the terminal (30 vs. 17 pers./min.). Depending on the intensity of the permit check this can also vary between 14 and 37 pers./min. over the whole morning. But anyhow, in the observed time span since 19.11.08 the Entrance Booth was never slower than the terminal and so it has to close in short distances to not overflow the terminal with waiting people. *In average the Entrance Booth is half of the time closed*⁷. Figure 11 shows the utilization rate of the Entrance Booth in the morning or the percentage the turnstile is actually open.

Fig. 11 Utilization Rate Entrance Booth



⁷ 19.11.-29.1.08: In average the Entrance Booth is only open 53% of the time a queue is existing there.

3. Conclusions

3.1. Assessment - the three major problems

We see the **unpredictability** as the major difficulty for the passing people. As they never know how slow the process will be, they have to queue even earlier.

The **entrance to the corridor** is the most dangerous section of the checkpoint, especially when the waiting people get stressed due to slow procedures. Several injuries during 2008 are witnessed and reported. For women and children it is especially important to change the situation immediately.

On most days several people get refused because of the **unreliable technique of the fingerprint scanner**. Most of these people are recognized successfully by the scanner if they are allowed to try several times and on different Booths (but sometimes soldiers just return them). This shows that the technique is not reliable. And if the palm of a person has changed (e.g. due to manual labour), the person is sent to the DCL in Gush Etzion and misses work *at least* for this day.



An everyday situation: The stress of getting punctually to work combined with slow progress is a dangerous mix at the entrance, especially for women and children, 11.1.09 6:44 am



Private security guard watching the waiting people from above in the terminal

3.2. Recommendation

Based on this analyses and our own experience since November, we strongly recommend:

1. to use the potential of efficient management of the checkpoint

As our data shows, alone with efficient management the checkpoint can be **2.5 times as fast** as the slowest days. Even with different daily security levels, there remains a big potential, if there is good will.

2. to open the third Metal Detector to improve the speed of the main bottleneck

The use of the third Metal Detector combined with a sixth ID booth might increase the speed at least 20-50%. Even if one ID Booth would be closed in exchange (no additional staff needed) this would probably follow to a clear improvement.

3. to use the already built Humanitarian Line

Every day the Humanitarian Line is not open causes very difficult and even dangerous situations for women and children. Since over 6 months the Line is ready or almost ready to use (as the usage on Ramadan showed). The efforts at the end of January should result in the opening in the nearest future.

4. to revise the unreliable technique of the fingerprint scanner

or at least to allow multiple attempts and renewing of the fingerprint right on the spot

If this technology can not be changed or improved immediately, the people should at least be allowed to try it as often as they want.

The renewing of the fingerprints at the DCL imposes the cost for technical problems on the passing people. At least this should be possible to solve right at the checkpoint.

3.3. Key conclusion

With good will (efficient management and use of existing infrastructure) the average waiting time at the checkpoint could at least be reduced to the half⁸.

The costs would vary between zero and minor expenses for 1-2 more staff.

⁸ Best effort: 27 pers. / min., average Nov08-Jan09: 14 pers./min. $27/17 = 1.9$, plus 20% due to use of 3rd MD = 2.3, $1/2.3 = 0.4$