2.2 Private Sector

Regular and detailed input from the private sector was also vital to the Plan's success. Consisting of businesses with a keen interest in freight and logistics, their participation took the form of serving on the Plan's Private Sector Committee. Businesses represented included many Georgia-based industries such as Georgia Pacific, UPS, CSX, Norfolk Southern, Delta Airlines, The Home Depot and many others including logistics businesses and the Georgia Motor Trucking Association. In addition, key State agencies, the Port of Savannah, and Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport were examples of active participants in the committee meetings. The Private Sector Committee provided invaluable oversight and direction to the Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan, meeting at four key milestones during the Plan's development. At each meeting, key legislators (House and Senate Transportation Committee chairmen) were also invited to share in the discussion. The Committee's charge, first from Governor Perdue and later from Governor Deal, was to ensure that the Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan outcomes are both industry-driven and actionable.

In addition to the Private Sector Committee, the Freight and Logistics Plan was presented at first three Freight Summits held in Atlanta. Sponsored by the Center for Innovation and Logistics, the attendance at these annual Summits has grown to include over 1,000 attendees in 2012. The audience is primarily comprised of private sector freight and logistics businesses in addition to various government agencies. Prior to the inaugural 2010 Summit, the Planning team conducted a survey of needs, which was completed by over 100 businesses that were registered to attend. The survey identified problem corridors and transportation issues, such as congestion, reliability, and capacity. A presentation of the survey's findings was included in the agenda of the 2010 Logistics Summit held on April 29, 2010, and responses overwhelmingly indicated that congestion in Atlanta had a major impact on freight operations.

Input from private sector businesses was also obtained by mapping out supply chains for Purdue Chicken, Home Depot and Weyerhaueser. This work was done as part of the Plan's investigation of Georgia-specific case studies for goods movement. For Purdue Chicken and Home Depot, logistics personnel were interviewed. For Weyerhaeuser, information on supply chains was obtained from their website. Findings were included in the Plan final documentation.

2.3 General Public

While it is sometimes a challenge to garner public interest in a long-range planning discussion, that does not the public isn't interested in being informed and having an opportunity for input. Given the statewide geography of the Freight and Logistics Plan, the Plan Development Advisory Committee opted to provide current information via a robust project website and offer any citizen an opportunity to contact GDOT staff to discuss the plan and offer comments. The project website served as the central depository for information and documentation of the Georgia Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan throughout the development of the plan. Powerpoints that were presented to MPOs and others, as previously noted, were always posted on the website for review and outreach purposes.

Also available via the website are a series of project newsletters. Four newsletters were prepared at key information milestones in the project and were posted on the project website. Additional distribution of newsletters were made possible by the Center for Innovation and Logistics, who shared newsletters via “e-blasts” to their contact list of interested parties, government agencies, economic development entities, and other freight and logistics companies. The web site was an important venue for sharing status updates and posting study deliverables as they were completed.

In addition, many newspaper stories were written about the Freight and Logistics Plan which referenced the study website and informed additional citizens about the Plan’s objectives, findings and recommendations. These articles are included in the appendix of the Plan documents.

Georgia Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan

Compendium of Representative Media Articles Reporting on the Georgia Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan

prepared for

Georgia Department of Transportation

prepared by

Cambridge Systematics, Inc.

March 07, 2012

www.camsys.com

Media relations were on-going throughout the development of the Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan, and consisted of interviews, media packets, and fact sheets. Media coverage increased as the plan was nearing completion and the Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan was presented in publications throughout Georgia and nationally.

Media publications that covered the Georgia Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan included, but were not limited to:

- AASHTO Daily Report (national)
- Atlanta Business Chronicle
- Atlanta Journal Constitution
- Augusta Chronicle
- Macon Telegraph
- Savannah Herald

This list is not comprehensive, but is a representation of media articles presented in publications. A sample of media articles appears below.

Williams, Dave (February 15, 2012). GDOT: Easing flow of freight won't be cheap. *Atlanta Business Chronicle.* Retrieved from http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta.

ATLANTA BUSINESS CHRONICLE

From the Atlanta Business Chronicle:
http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/news/2012/02/15/gdot-easing-flow-of-freight-wont-be.html

GDOT: Easing flow of freight won't be cheap

Atlanta Business Chronicle by Dave Williams, Staff Writer
Date: Wednesday, February 15, 2012, 3:03pm EST

Related: Logistics & Transportation

Dave Williams
Staff Writer - *Atlanta Business Chronicle*

Georgia needs $18 billion to $20 billion in highway, rail, port and air cargo improvements to fully take advantage of its status as a freight hub, the Georgia Department of Transportation recommended Wednesday.

The DOT's Office of Planning presented a statewide study more than two years in the making to the agency's board calling for a series of projects to unclog highway and rail bottlenecks across Georgia.

Georgia needs $18 billion to $20 billion in highway, rail, port and air cargo improvements to fully take advantage of its status as a freight hub, the Georgia Department of Transportation recommended Wednesday.

The study also endorsed deepening Savannah Harbor, building a new port across the Savannah River in Jasper, S.C., in conjunction with the state of South Carolina and adding air cargo capacity at **Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport**.

The study is based in part on a s urvey of some of the biggest Georgia-based companies, including **The Home Depot Inc.** (NYSE: HD), **Delta Air Lines Inc.** (NYSE: DAL) and **United Parcel Service Inc.** (NYSE: UPS), which provided input on the best ways to ease the flow of freight.

Among the study's suggestions were:

- Widening interstates 85 on both sides of Atlanta, Interstate 75 between Atlanta and Macon and Interstate 20 between Atlanta and the Alabama line.
- Improving Interstate 285 interchanges with interstates 75 and 85 north of Atlanta and the I-285/I-20 interchanges east and west of the city.
- Building an I-75 bypass around the Chattanooga, Tenn., region and a bypass connecting Macon, Ga., to LaGrange, Ga.
- Expanding freight-rail capacity by increasing double tracking and sidings.
- Adding warehouse capacity in the Atlanta area for air cargo.
- The highway projects would take up the largest share of the costs at about $9.5 billion. The recommended rail improvements would cost $4 billion to $6 billion.

Of course, the biggest challenge would be finding the money to pay for such large-scale projects.

However, the study suggests it would be worth the investment. The DOT predicts that building the various projects would generate $65.7 billion to $72.3 billion in benefits, including additional tax revenue, increased gross state product and savings in transportation costs.

Jones, Walter C. (February 16, 2012). Expanding the Port of Savannah is Georgia's number one cargo priority. *Savannah Morning News*. Retrieved from http://savannahnow.com.

savannahnow.com
Savannah Morning News

Thursday, Feb. 16, 2012

Expanding the Port of Savannah is Georgia's number one cargo priority

By **Walter C. Jones**
Morris News Service walter.jones@morris.com

ATLANTA — Expanding the port of Savannah is Georgia's No. 1 cargo priority, according to the State Logistics Plan released Wednesday.

Years of study by multiple state agencies and outside consultants resulted in the long-term plan that Gov. Nathan Deal says will make Georgia a global crossroads.

The plan calls for beefing up interstate highways, ports, rail lines and airports while placing priorities on critical corridors for moving freight. While relieving traffic congestion for cars was a major goal of the study, its primary purpose is to exploit the state's logistical assets as a job generator.

Last week, Deal told attendees at the state's annual logistics summit in Atlanta that the long-term plan will help move Georgia from a regional freight hub to a true global crossroads.

"This plan will guide us to invest where we get the biggest bang for our buck," he said.

Topping the priorities is deepening the shipping channel in the Savannah River from 42 to 48 feet so the Port of Savannah can accommodate the larger freighters that will begin transiting the expanded Panama Canal in 2014.

Georgia is already making a $180 million ante, and the federal government has kicked in $600,000 with President Barack Obama recommending another $2.8 million.

The ports in Savannah and Brunswick are major generators of freight traffic. The study showed the majority of freight moving in Georgia travels by interstate highway and is destined for markets in the state, with only one-third or less moving through to other states.

Such information changes some of the approach to transportation strategies and shoots down older proposals for elaborate bypass highways to steer trucks around major cities, said state transportation planning director Todd Long.

Transportation experts had speculated that much of Georgia's truck traffic was merely passing through.

"I learned a lot just reading through the material," Long said.

Improving interchanges where interstates meet became another priority in the plan, especially in Atlanta, Macon and Savannah. Nevertheless, the plan does recommend new bypasses around Chattanooga to mesh with one Tennessee has on the drawing board and a new one between Macon and LaGrange.

Although less freight moves on highways other than interstates, the plan calls for widening U.S. 84, Ga. 133 from Albany to Valdosta and U.S. 441 from Interstate 85 to I-16.

It calls for extending the runway at the Albany airport and construction of additional warehouses at the Atlanta airport.

The authors also found choke points on the state's rail network where lines should be extended and bridges reconstructed to carry greater weights or raised to allow double stacking of containers on railcars. Additional side tracks are needed along many major routes to allow trains to pass each other without creating delays, according to the study.

More terminals are needed where containerized cargo can be transferred to trucks.

Included in the plan is a timetable for when the various projects should be completed to handle the anticipated volume that runs from this year all the way to 2050.

Montoya, Orlando (February 16, 2012). Report Ranks Georgia Freight Projects. *Georgia Public Broadcasting News*. Retrieved from http://www.gpb.org.

Thu., February 16, 2012 4:04pm (EST)

A new report details how freight moves through the state. It prioritizes projects according to cost-to-benefit ratios. (photo Christopher Charles)

Report Ranks Georgia Freight Projects

By Orlando Montoya
Updated: 3 weeks ago

SAVANNAH, Ga. — A new report upends some long-held assumptions about how freight traffic moves through Georgia.

But a state-backed analysis released this week also reaffirms the state's push toward deepening the Savannah harbor.

Transportation experts previously thought most freight moving in the state merely was passing through.

But a report prepared by the state Departments of Transportation and Economic Development says, up to three quarters of cargo traffic either is going to or from someplace in Georgia.

Page Siplon of Georgia's Center of Innovation for Logistics says, that means, road, rail and port projects have to work together.

"Ports are hubs," Siplon says. "And they're called hubs for a reason because they have to get that cargo out. And the ports that can do that more effectively are more competitive." The analysis is described as the first comprehensive freight and logistics plan for Georgia. "Eighty percent of the cargo that goes out of our ports in general, and here in Georgia as well, goes out on our roads," Siplon says. "And so access to the road system is critical." The report's top priority is the Savannah harbor expansion. But a Macon-to-LaGrange highway, Metro Atlanta interstate exchanges and statewide rail improvements also rank high. Middle Georgia's Fall Line Freeway ranks low. Here are other selected projects: High Cost Benefit Projects (Cost Benefit Ratio)

METRO ATLANTA: I-285 Exchange at I-85 North (6.11)

MACON TO LAGRANGE: U.S. 27 4-laning (5.29)

METRO ATLANTA: I-285 Exchange at I-75 North (4.41)

METRO ATLANTA: I-285 Exchange at I-20 East (3.85)

STATEWIDE: Freight Rail Improvements (3.30)

METRO CHATTANOOGA: I-75 Bypass (2.94)

ATLANTA TO SOUTH CAROLINA: I-85 Improvements (1.81)

ATLANTA TO ALABAMA: I-20 Improvements (1.52)

ATLANTA TO ALABAMA: I-85 Improvements (1.32)

ATLANTA TO MACON: I-75 Improvements (1.24)

METRO ATLANTA: I-285 Exchange at I-20 West (1.59)

SOUTH GEORGIA: US 84 Improvements (.63)

SOUTH GEORGIA: State Road 133 Improvements (.63)

NORTH, MIDDLE, SOUTH: US 441 Improvements (.62) Low Cost Benefit Projects (Cost Benefit Ratio)

MIDDLE GEORGIA: Fall Line Freeway (-0.85)

SOUTH GEORGIA: US 280 Improvements (.01)

METRO ATLANTA: I-285 Exchange at I-85 South (.04)

METRO ATLANTA: I-285 Exchange at I-75 South (.33)

MACON TO SAVANNAH: I-16 Improvements (.28)

ATLANTA TO TENNESSEE: I-75 Improvements (.43)

MACON TO FLORIDA: I-75 Improvements (.64)

METRO ATLANTA: Western Bypass (.69)

COASTAL GEORGIA: I-95 Improvements (.83)

ATLANTA TO SOUTH CAROLINA: I-20 Improvements (.91)

METRO ATLANTA: Northern Bypass (.93) See how other projects across the state rank by going to Section 4.1 of this PDF document.

February 16, 2012. Interstate widening recommendation part of DOT study. ***Georgia News Network*****. Retrieved from http://accessnorthga.com.**

Posted: Thursday, February 16th 2012 at 11:45am

Interstate widening recommendation part of DOT study

By Georgia News Network

ATLANTA - An Interstate widening project in Franklin County is among billions of dollars in improvements recommended in a new study.

The Georgia Department of Transportation commissioned study includes widening Interstate 85 from two lanes in each direction to three near the South Carolina border.

"They identified a lot of freight and passenger vehicles in there, but when you add the freight in with it and it's only two lanes in each direction it does hamper the mobility," DOT spokeswoman Jill Goldberg said.

"That was definitely a key area that they identified as needing to see those improvements sooner rather than later," Goldberg said.

DOT's Office of Planning Wednesday presented the statewide study that took over two years. It found the state needs $18 billion to $20 billion in highway, rail, port and air cargo improvements to fully take advantage of its status as a freight hub.

Among other recommendations: expanding freight rail capacity, widening I-75 in northwest Georgia, and improving freeway interchanges in metro Atlanta. The study also endorsed deepening Savannah Harbor.

February 16, 2012. Midstate transportation gets boost under Ga. freight plan. *The Macon Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://www.macon.com.

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Thursday, Feb. 16, 2012

Midstate transportation gets boost under Ga. freight plan

By MIKE STUCKA - mstucka@macon.com

The state's top transportation planner is recommending significant investments in Middle Georgia to handle waves of rail and
truck traffic carrying freight.

According to a presentation presented to the state transportation board Wednesday by planner Todd Long, the state's freight and logistics report will recommend a highway route from Macon to LaGrange that bypasses current choke points, upgrades to Interstate 75 between Macon and Atlanta, and an improved Interstate 75-Interstate 16 interchange.

The report says investments recommended statewide could cost $18 billion to $20.1 billion, but would bring at least $65.68 billion improvements to the gross state product by the year 2050, said Jill Goldberg, a Department of Transportation spokeswoman. Those calculations do not include growth in the gross state product due to the deepening of Savannah Harbor, developing a Jasper port or improving air cargo facilities in Atlanta and Albany.

Pat Topping, senior vice president of the Macon Economic Development Commission, said the state plan seems to match many of Middle Georgia's needs. Topping thinks the region is poised to build on its transportation network, which includes interstate highways, an airport, a major rail yard and international freetrade zones.

Topping said more freight could be flowing through an improved Savannah port, making it easier for trucks to get to Atlanta, south of Macon or west to car factories in Alabama and west Georgia.

Topping has been seeking logistics businesses, such as transportation and warehousing companies. "I think logistics is a great opportunity for Middle Georgia," he said.

Topping cited Sara Lee's warehouse along Interstate 75 near Hartley Bridge Road, where products from several locations are taken. That inventory is then mixed and loaded into individual trucks for further distribution.

Those kinds of warehousing jobs require skills and offer reasonable pay, Topping said.
As described in Wednesday's presentation materials, the state's freight and logistics plan supports some of the projects in Middle Georgia's upcoming transportation special purpose local option sales tax referendum, such as rebuilding the Interstate 75-Interstate 16 interchange and improving rail service.

But the plan goes further, such as the Macon to LaGrange connection. It also identifies a Norfolk Southern rail line between Macon and Savannah as a current bottleneck, with significant growth expected.

Goldberg said she didn't know when the final state freight and logistics report is expected, but she said the materials released Wednesday contain much of what will be in the final report.

To contact writer Mike Stucka, call 744-4251.

Jones, Walter C. (February 19, 2012). Politics is the link between roads and jobs. *Savannah Morning News*. Retrieved from http://savannahnow.com.

savannahnow.com
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Politics is the link between roads and jobs

Posted: February 19, 2012 -12:42am

By Walter C. Jones

ATLANTA — Talk of a new port, a new Caterpillar factory and a new logistics study in one short week will all shape the political battle over transportation dollars for months and years ahead.

Georgia's newest job-creation announcement Friday from Caterpillar came with a couple of statements that illustrate the linkage between transportation and economic development.

The linchpin in that linkage is politics, of course.

At the Caterpillar announcement, Vice President Mary Bell stressed that Athens' four hours from the port of Savannah had been a major factor in her decision of where to locate the $200 million factory that will eventually bring 1,400 jobs and another 2,800 supplier jobs.

"Logistics is a primary success factor for our business, and the proximity of Athens to the Savannah port will be a major, major plus for us," she said.

For any Georgian who had not already embraced the gospel of deepening the Savannah River to accommodate larger freighters, Bell's words may be convincing testimony. It was also more evidence of how interconnected the state's economy is when a four-hour drive is close enough to sway the location of a multinational's plant.

As Georgia officials continue to lobby Washington for federal funds for the harbor expansion, it's certain her comments will be repeated often.

It also illustrates why earlier last week the executive director of the Camden County Economic Development Authority made a pitch to lawmakers for the state to establish a new ocean port on the St. Marys River. The sight of a former paper mill that had a barge dock is on the market for $12 million, just 3 miles up river from a channel already as deep as Savannah's.

If a site four hours away can attract jobs, think how many the vacant land in the same county could draw.

The county has seen its dreams of lush retirement resorts vanish in the smoke of the recent recession along with the jobs from the paper mill that went bankrupt. So, there's plenty of

incentive to use political influence to compete for scarce state-taxpayer dollars to develop a new port.

At the same news conference, Caterpillar CEO Doug Oberhelman injected fuel into another political battle involving transportation.

He said the state's pending referendum on a sales tax for transportation projects was a factor in his own thinking about where to put the plant.

"That was a consideration in coming to Georgia. We need infrastructure badly in this country. I know. I sell infrastructure products, full disclosure, no problem," he admitted. "That Transportation Investment Act is critical in making Georgia competitive. We'll work for it, from all of our employees' perspective here in Georgia to help get that passed here this summer."

No doubt, Oberhelman's comments, like Bell's, will be repeated often in the political campaign waged by business interests in support of the tax. Indeed, Tea Party activists opposed to the tax recognized its potency in an email just hours after he uttered it.

"I just heard on the radio a snippet from the announcement about Caterpillar," wrote Patti Pratt to fellow activist Dr. Bill Hudson. "... This will make our job of killing it much harder."

Earlier in the week, the state issued a report that is also likely to become fodder for future political debates over transportation spending. It is the recommendations of a multi-year, multi-agency analysis of the statewide logistics network. The point was to identify the weaknesses now and over the next 40 years as cargo traffic grows.

The governor sanctioned the study, and the engineering consultants dove into it with the unstated expectation that its data would offer an inoculation against political influence. Since the state began, government decisions about which infrastructure projects to pursue have usually been based largely or entirely on political power.

For decades, rural legislators have gone to Atlanta to push for better highways to their homes in hopes they would lure industry. The newly released logistics study shows that the state depends more on Interstate highways rather than four-lane freeways connecting country crossroads.

The logistics study has already had an impact. Before it was launched, nearly every conversation about transportation dealt with how to relieve commuter congestion. Even chamber of commerce officials were warning that the traffic woes of passenger automobiles were an economic-development issue if they scared away companies considering Georgia locations.

Since commuters drive into and out of individual metro areas, the discussions then were about distinct transportation problems in the various cities.

Now, everyone is singing from the freight hymnal about how important the statewide network is. A network that is only as strong as its weakest link, shifting the focus from local to statewide.

In the coming months and years, the political debates over transportation will only become more sharply focused thanks in part to the events of a single week.

Walter Jones is the bureau chief for the Morris News Service and has been covering state politics since 1998. He can be reached at walter.jones@morris.com, (404) 589-8424 or on Twitter @MorrisNews.

Pendered, David (February 20, 2012). GDOT report: Transportation sales tax won't begin to fix state's freight systems. *Saporta Report*. Retrieved from http://saportareport.com.

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GDOT report: Transportation sales tax won't begin to fix state's freight systems

Posted in David Pendered
Date: February 20th, 2012, 5:37 pm

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By David Pendered

It turns out that more than $18 billion really doesn't go as far as it used to.

That's the amount to be raised within the next decade if voters in July approve the 1 percent sales tax for transportation in each of Georgia's 12 special tax districts. Even that amount didn't provide for the majority of road, transit and airport projects initially proposed.

Nor does the sum begin to make a dent in the $18 billion to $20 billion list of upgrades that must be made to the state's freight handling systems – its highways, railroads, Savannah seaport and airports in Atlanta and Albany, according to a new report from the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Just $500 million of the projects to be paid for by the proposed transportation sales tax will address the separate needs of the state's freight handling systems, according to the GDOT report. That amounts to 2.5 percent of the needs in the freight system.

Georgia Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan

The report is sobering. It links Georgia lingering economic malaise to a failure to invest in freight handling systems:

"Georgia has a world-class freight infrastructure that is critical to the State's economic competitiveness.

"This infrastructure was developed through several decades of outsized investment by both the public and private sectors.

"Over the last 20 years, this investment has decreased, and this has in part been a contributor to the economic stagnation of Georgia relative to the rest of the U.S. since 2000."

The report, "Georgia Statewide Freight and Logistics Plan, 2010-2050," was prepared by the Atlanta office of Massachusetts-based Cambridge Systematics, Inc.

Click here to read the report on proposals to upgrade the freight system.

This economic stagnation is so entrenched that Georgia won't recover the jobs it lost during the recession until 2020, according to Robert Sumichrast, dean of UGA's Terry College of Business. That's four years longer than forecast for the rest of the nation.

Click here to read about Sumichrast's comments in a previous story in SaportaReport.com.

These freight-handling systems would appear to be as important as the mobility of the traveling public, given the full-court press to deepen the Savannah Harbor.

One central issue that's not received much attention in public is how the Savannah port – and its feeder network of highways and railroads – is supposed to handle the additional cargo that's to flow through it once bigger vessels start arriving at the port.

The port is slated to reach capacity by about 2026, according to a Georgia Ports Authority section of the report. That projection appears to be based on current growth trends. The report does not mention if it accounts for the bigger cargos expected to arrive once the harbor is deepened and able to accommodate bigger vessels that are expected along the East Coast once the Panama Canal is expanded.

The report states that there's no easy source of money in sight to pay for upgrades to the freight systems.

"Funding the 'Freight & Logistics Action Plan' will be a challenge," according to the report, which goes on to acknowledge potential help from the transportation sales tax. "However, the vast majority of recommended freight improvement projects will require alternative funding sources."

According to the report, those sources include general funds at the state and federal levels for the harbor deepening; private funds for the railroads; federal, state and local funds for airports; and federal and state funding for highways, with some money from the local governments and the proposed transportation sales tax.

Georgia's ability to handle freight would seem to be uppermost on the minds of policymakers as they lobby the federal government to deepen the Savannah Harbor.

It clearly is on the governor's radar.

Gov. Nathan Deal said at the State of the Ports luncheon in October that upgrades to the state's freight systems would be delayed if voters reject the T-SPLOST referendums, as in "transportation special purpose local option sales tax."

"There are portions of the overall (cargo distribution) plan embedded in the T-SPLOSTs, so we hope they pass," Deal said. "Without revenue from the T-SPLOST, we'll have to ask local governments and the state to come up with the money.

"It will just take more time and won't be as easy."

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About David Pendered

David Pendered, Managing Editor, is an Atlanta journalist with nearly 30 years experience reporting on the region's urban affairs, from Atlanta City Hall to the state Capitol. Since 2008, he has written for print and digital publications, and advised on media and governmental affairs. Previously, he spent more than 26 years with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and won awards for his coverage of schools and urban development. David graduated from North Carolina State University and was a Western Knight Center Fellow. David was born in

Pendered, David (March 4, 2012). North Carolina's new study on port expansion bears attention. *Saporta Report*. Retrieved from http://saportareport.com.

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North Carolina's new study on port expansion bears attention

Posted in David Pendered

Date: March 4th, 2012, 7:53 pm

By David Pendered

For some odd reason, the folks in North Carolina think they are able to build a deep water port that could rival Charleston or Savannah for the massive vessels expected to sail through the expanded Panama Canal.

The Old North State even issued last week a draft copy of its governor-sponsored study into the possible project: "North Carolina Maritime Strategy." Public comment sessions continue this week.

This possible port development is barely mentioned in Georgia, where the public discourse is of competition between Charleston and Savannah. Sometimes there's a nod to a potential ocean port in Jasper County, S.C., which could complement the Savannah port along the shared river.

Yet North Carolina bears watching – the state is a fierce contender that already is a regional leader in areas including scientific research and development, banking and finance, transit and tourism.

Represented in green, the Piedmont Atlantic megaregion stretches from Raleigh to Bimingham. Credit: North Caroline Maritime Strategy

In addition, Raleigh is to anchor the northern end of the megaregion dubbed the Piedmont Atlantic. This sprawling population center is expected to form over the coming decades, with Birmingham at its southern tip. Atlanta and Charlotte will be major urban areas in the center of the region.

The North Carolina ports now do not have the connectivity to transport a major portion of goods to the population centers of this megaregion, according to the study. Indeed, much of the North Carolina market now is served by the ports near Norfolk, Va., the study showed. Better networks of road and rail would have to be established to deliver goods to and from an expanded North Carolina port.

Georgia faces a similar problem, according to the Georgia Department of Transportation's recently released freight study. The system of roads and rail that delivers goods to and from Savannah's port need to be expanded, the study showed.

Click here to read North Carolina's draft maritime study.

Click here to read Georgia's freight study.

North Carolina could expand rail capacity to link its seaports with existing rail junctions in Fayetteville and Raleigh. Credit: North Carolina Maritime Strategy

Nonetheless, North Carolina's state government and business leaders have both the tools and wherewithal to establish the capacity of rails and highways to get product to and from the state's seaports.

For instance, the North Carolina draft study determined that Wilmington's potential port development could be enhanced by related projects including expanding the airport to handle jumbo planes; adding rail track to connect to existing rail junctions in Fayetteville and Raleigh; and increasing the number of cruise ships that use the port.

The North Carolina draft study looked into six potential ports and determined that four are viable candidates for development.

Three sites are near Wilmington, along the Cape Fear River. The fourth is near Morehead City. Two sites along the Neuse River were dismissed as economically unfeasible.

Wilmington now is a major seaport that developed as the steamship era replaced sail, making it feasible to transport ladened vessels up river.

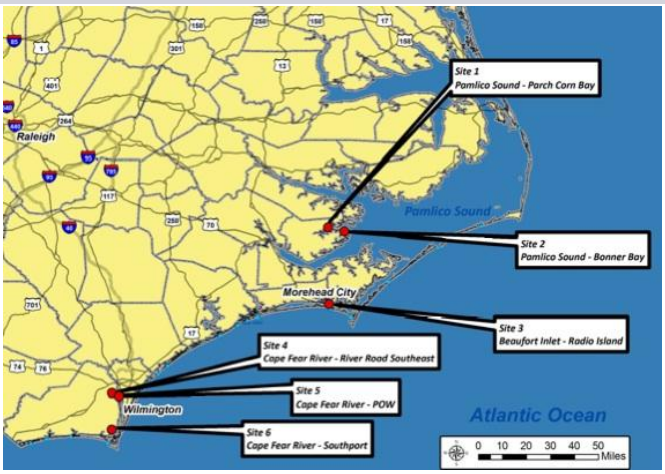
Wilmington's port handles less cargo than Savannah, but it is of a similar type – container cargo, break bulk, and bulk. Container cargo is that which is transported in the types of trailers that can be towed by a truck on a road. Break bulk is transported on pallets, boxes or bails. Bulk is loose material that can be shoveled, scooped or conveyed by a belt into a cargo hold.

Savannah, in addition to these types of cargo, handles refrigerated cargo and containers that can be rolled on and rolled off a vessel.

Morehead City is not a likely candidate for expansion to handle the larger vessels expected through the enlarged Panama Canal, according to the draft study. The port is almost deep enough even today, but trucks and trains have difficulties reaching the port, the study found.

The Morehead City port is served by roads that handle a tremendous amount of beach-bound tourism traffic, in addition to all the traffic heading to the ferry that connects the mainland with the Ocracoke, the southernmost village on the Outer Banks. The train track that serves the port runs down the middle of this divided road.

The two sites that were discarded are along the Neuse River. The Neuse helps form the Pamlico Sound, which is the body of water that's separated from the Atlantic Ocean by the Outer Banks. These two sites were found to be too costly to build because of the massive dredging required to connect them to the ocean.



North Carolina's port development study identified six sites that could be developed as harbors deep enough to accommodate large vessels. Sites 1 and 2, on the Neuse River near the center of this map, have been dismissed as unfeasible because of the cost of dredging. Credit: North Carolina Maritime Strategy.