

StrongPorts FAQs Page

What is StrongPorts?

StrongPorts is a collection of the Maritime Administration's programs and efforts aimed at improving ports' efficiency, capacity, and capabilities, as well as at further integrating the marine transportation system into the larger U.S. surface transportation system. The Program efforts are sorted into three broad categories: 1) port planning and stakeholder engagement, 2) financing and 3) project management.

Why is the United States government supporting port planning?

The U.S. marine transportation system is critical to our national economy and way of life. The system includes up to 500 ports, of which 179 are medium to large sized ports (each handling at least 250,000 tons of freight annually) and about 52 ports handling containers.¹ In 2012, these seaports handled over 99 percent of the volume of U.S. overseas trade,² which was valued at nearly \$1.781 trillion.³

The demands placed on our nations ports are also growing. Overseas trade volume handled by U.S. seaports grew by over 230 percent between 1972 and 2011;⁴ trade volumes are projected to double by 2021 and grow by a similar magnitude between 2021 and 2030.⁵ For our ports to meet this growth challenge, they must be able to fund new capacity and efficiency enhancing projects, as well as to maintain existing infrastructure.

Is this program mandatory?

No, this Program is voluntary and all ports are eligible for participation.

What can the StrongPorts Program do for ports in my area?

The StrongPorts program provides support to ports and port authorities, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, State Departments of Transportation, and private transportation companies that are seeking to enhance the capacity or efficiency of their local marine transportation system. The Program is designed to support ports in completing long-term infrastructure projects through three categories of assistance: planning and engagement, financing, and project management.

Who can I talk with about my port's needs for the future?

¹ American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. Waterborne Freight Transportation Bottom Line Report. June 2013. P. iv.

² U.S. Census Bureau Foreign Trade Division, February 2013. <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/Press-Release/2012pr/12/ft920/ft920.pdf> and Maritime Administration analysis. Includes imports and exports from all countries other than Canada and Mexico.

³ Census Bureau's Foreign Trade Division. U.S. Waterborne Trade by Customs District. http://www.marad.dot.gov/documents/U.S._Waterborne_Foreign_Trade_by_Custom_District.XLS .

⁴ U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. Waterborne Commerce of the United State, Calendar Year 2011. Part 5—National Summaries. <http://www.navigationdatacenter.us/wcsc/pdf/wcusnat11.pdf>. P.1-2, 1-3

⁵ American Society of Civil Engineers. Failure to Act: The Economic Impact of Current Investment Trends in Airports, Inland Waterways, and Marine Ports. 2012. P. 5.

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The Maritime Administration works with ports to develop public/private coalitions to plan, fund, and implement their needed infrastructure improvements projects. We have found that productive planning processes includes participation by the Metropolitan Planning Organizations, State Departments of Transportation, local environmental groups, terminal and vessel operators, and private investors.

The Maritime Administration has ten regional “[Gateway Offices](#)” that can explain the opportunities for engaging the StrongPorts Program. [Click here](#) to find the office nearest you or you can contact us at StrongPorts@dot.gov.

Why does the StrongPorts program emphasize port infrastructure development plans?

A port’s infrastructure development plan serves as a guide for its financial investment and can be a catalyst for regional growth. Because ports generate both jobs and traffic for their surrounding communities, the plans are also of significant interest to regional and state transportation planners, economic development organizations, as well as for the people living near the port.

Although port infrastructure development plans are not mandatory at this time, demonstrating that proposed projects fit into the port’s long-term infrastructure plans is often required by federal and state government financial assistance programs. Additionally, involving state and local planners in the port infrastructure development planning process can build support for transportation infrastructure projects that ensure regional and national connectivity for the movement of freight and passengers.

How does the StrongPorts Program fit into the larger U.S. Department of Transportation and Maritime Administration programs?

The StrongPorts Program is where the Maritime Administration’s infrastructure improvement and development efforts intersect with the U.S. Department of Transportation’s larger multi-modal infrastructure planning programs. The goal of StrongPorts is to grow the capacity and efficiency of the United States’ ports and to ensure that they are fully integrated into the national freight and passenger transportation networks. Thus, StrongPorts overlaps with other U.S. Department of Transportation Programs that fund multi-modal infrastructure improvements (such as the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery or TIGER Grant Program), and it also provides assistance to ports as they take advantage of programs that have traditionally excluded maritime transportation (such as the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act or TIFIA loan guarantee program).