

AMERICAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Prepping for Bigger Boats

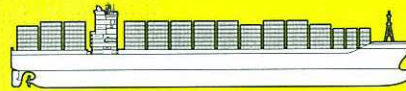
➔ The operators of the Panama Canal are widening and deepening the waterway to allow larger ships to access the Atlantic and Pacific oceans starting in 2014. Even as port operators prepare for the vessels (see below), work on other vital trade connections is lagging. Experts such as Paul Bingham, an economist with the transportation consulting firm Wilbur Smith Associates, say U.S. road and rail networks are unprepared for the increase in commerce. "The most critical problems are in urban areas near the ports," Bingham says. "These are dense regions without a lot of room to expand." Ships will unload twice as much cargo, causing logistical gridlock, says Johanna Mendelson Forman, senior associate with the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "Railroads are at capacity in the U.S., and we have not invested what we need to be competitive." Bingham says the clock is ticking: "Three years is a blink of an eye. It's almost too late." — AMIR KHAN



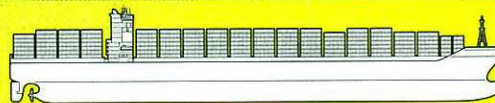
GROWING CARGO SHIPS

Panamax

New Panamax



965 ft


Draft:
39.5 ft


1200 ft


Draft:
50 ft

Bayonne, N.J. ➔

The Bayonne Bridge at the mouth of Newark Bay has a clearance of just 151 feet—even current ships have a hard time fitting beneath it. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey recently approved a \$1 billion plan to raise the bridge to 215 feet. Construction is expected to begin within two years and to be completed by 2016. Officials say the bridge will remain open to traffic during construction.

Baltimore, Md. ➔

Engineers have been increasing the depth of this shipping channel from 45 feet to 50 feet to accommodate New Panamax ships at the docks. The \$105 million project will be finished in 2012, two years ahead of the 2014 opening of the expanded canal. Officials credit the quick work to the establishment of a public-private partnership that spared the project from budget cuts at the state level.

Charleston, S.C. ➔

The port currently supports larger Panamax ships only at high tide. This year, local officials and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approved a study to investigate the environmental and economic impact of dredging the channel. But a lack of funding could delay the analysis for eight years, long after the new canal opens to ship traffic. Dredging, if it happens, could cost \$310 million.

Savannah, Ga. ➔

Big ships destined for Savannah are filled to half-capacity and enter the port during high tide in order to avoid scraping the river bottom. The state has partially funded an impending dredging project, but local environmentalists express concern that deepening the channel could decrease the already depleted dissolved oxygen levels in the river and introduce salt into freshwater wetlands.