



September 2012

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Legislative Committee Services  
State Capitol Building  
Salem, Oregon 97301  
(503) 986-1813

Background Brief on ...

# Oregon Ports

## Background

Oregon's system of 23 public ports plays an important role in the state's economy. Ports are the gateways through which Oregon products, as well as those of much of the western United States, begin or continue their journey through worldwide markets. The state's agricultural, timber, and manufacturing industries rely on ports, in coordination with all modes of transportation, to move their goods. Goods from throughout the world also arrive at Oregon ports to be distributed throughout Oregon and the United States.

Oregon's nine ports on the Columbia River make up one-quarter of the 36-port Columbia-Snake system, along with one in Idaho and 26 in Washington. The three ports on the lower Columbia, Astoria, St. Helens, and Portland, are deep-water ports. Over 13 million tons of goods moved through the Port of Portland's marine terminals in 2011. Oregon also has 14 coastal ports, including the deep-water ports of Newport and the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay.

Ports are a critical part of the state's multimodal freight transportation system. Multimodal refers to the fact that goods may be transferred between ships, barges, trains, trucks, pipelines and aircraft on their way from production facilities to markets. Goods are generally transported in one of five forms:

- Dry bulk: examples include grain, potash, or wood chips;
- Liquid bulk: items such as crude oil, petroleum products and liquefied natural gas;
- Break bulk: carried in bags, crates, boxes, or on pallets;
- Containers: large metal boxes that can be customized for a variety of goods and can be mechanically moved between modes of transportation; or
- Roll-on/roll-off: cars and other wheeled equipment.

Port districts also play an active role in economic development. According to the Statewide Ports Strategic Plan adopted in October 2010, “one out of six Oregon jobs is directly or indirectly tied to cargo, recreation, industrial, commercial or other activities at Oregon’s ports, including privately owned and operated docks which import and export goods.” Ports create and maintain industrial and commercial infrastructure in surrounding areas. They own and develop industrial and commercial parks for lease to private companies and help to maintain transportation infrastructure. Their role in attracting jobs and private investment is especially beneficial to rural areas where industrial infrastructure might not otherwise be developed. Several Oregon ports also operate air terminals and railroads in addition to marine facilities.

Oregon’s public ports are also important to state tourism and the commercial and recreational fishing industries. Ports develop and own marine and land-side infrastructure necessary to support thousands of commercial fishing and sport boats. The ports are a primary link in moving Oregon seafood products to domestic and international markets.

According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Oregon Commercial Fishing Industry Economic Contributions in 2011 and Outlook for 2012, 285.1 million pounds of fish were delivered to Oregon Ports in 2011. The estimated total personal income generated by the Oregon commercial fishing industry was at least \$518 million and the commercial fishing industry represents about one-half percent of all Oregon net earnings.

Oregon’s ports are incorporated special local districts, regulated under Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) chapter 777 and 778 (Port of Portland only). Ports are run by locally elected boards of commissioners (except for the Port of Portland and the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay, whose boards are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Oregon Senate), and are authorized to generate income through bonding, user fees, taxation, and other sources.

Because of differences in waterway conditions, surrounding transportation infrastructure, and goods shipped, each port faces different issues. For example, forest products and wood fiber make up 95 percent of the tonnage shipped through the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay while accounting for less than 10 percent of commodities on the Columbia River, where the single largest commodity is wheat. The Lower Columbia is first in the nation in wheat exports and third in the nation as a grain export center.

### **Statewide Ports Strategic Plan**

The Oregon Business Development Commission formally adopted “Ports 2010: A New Strategic Business Plan for Oregon’s Statewide Port System” in October 2010. Statutory changes enacted by the Legislative Assembly in 2007 provided the impetus for development of the Statewide Plan. Both those statutory changes and the statewide plan require that ports incorporated under ORS 777 develop and maintain strategic business plans based on an Oregon Business Development Department (OBDD) approved template as a condition for maintaining access to department funding.

The Statewide Ports Plan requires that the individual port strategic business plans be approved by OBDD. The plan also calls for elected port commissioners and officials to receive training on ethics and best practices. Under the Statewide Plan, once a port’s business plan is approved by OBDD, the Department and the Port are to develop an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) based on the approved plan, with the agreement incorporating the training requirements, best practices and other recommendations of the Statewide Plan. The IGA lays out how the Department and port will work together to implement the port’s adopted business plan.

Multiple ports have completed the strategic plan and IGA process and others are actively working to do so. Under current administrative rule, ports have until the end of October 2013 to develop their plans and receive approval by the Department.

## Infrastructure Improvements

Port managers continually seek ways to upgrade their infrastructure. Since ports are but one part of a multimodal system, it is vital that rail and highway connections be maintained, and where possible, enhanced. Achieving seamless movement of goods across transportation modes and geographical regions minimizes transportation costs, thereby making Oregon's ports and Oregon's products more competitive. Port needs include rail improvements, road access expansion, and terminal expansion and improvement.

The navigation channel and ocean bar crossings of most coastal river mouths and bays must be dredged periodically to maintain their depths due to natural buildup of silt deposits. Coastal jetties also require periodic maintenance in order to protect navigational access to smaller ports and harbors. Federal funding for maintenance dredging of many of Oregon's shallow-draft fishing ports is threatened annually with reduction or elimination. The Legislative Assembly expanded the Marine Navigation Improvement Fund in 2003 to help provide local matching funds needed to obtain federal dollars for navigation projects.

In 1999, the Legislative Assembly authorized \$45 million in lottery bonds for local commercial and industrial infrastructure projects, including port facilities (House Bill 2153). House Bill 3364 (2001) created the Oregon Freight Advisory Committee to advise the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) on freight transportation policies and programs. House Bill 3446 (2003) provided \$3.5 million in lottery bond capacity for small port dredging purposes.

During the 2005 legislative session, *ConnectOregon* was created as a \$100 million lottery-bond-based initiative to invest in air, rail, marine, and transit infrastructure to ensure that Oregon's transportation system is strong, diverse and efficient. Ensuing projects focused on connections between the highway system and other modes of transportation. The projects were distributed statewide and selected by the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) with the use

of criteria specified in statute along with stakeholder and regional transportation advisory committee consultation. An additional requirement was that 15 percent of the proceeds were to be spent in each of ODOT's five regions. Following the sale of the \$100 million bonds approved in 2005, 41 projects were funded. Nine ports received funding for projects ranging from barge slip redevelopment, intermodal rail project, mooring dolphins and a post-panamax crane.

The 2007 Legislative Assembly enacted *ConnectOregon II* through House Bill 2278 that provided for an additional \$100 million in lottery-backed bonds for intermodal infrastructure improvements. The Commission selected projects using the following revised criteria:

- Reduction of transportation costs for Oregon businesses or improved access to jobs and labor sources;
- Economic benefit to the state;
- Ability to provide a critical link between transportation elements to measurably improve utilization and efficiency;
- Amount of cost that can be borne by the applicant from any source other than the Multimodal Transportation Fund; and
- Readiness for construction.

Two marine projects, at the Port of Portland (\$4.5 million) and Port of Astoria (\$973,000), received funding through *ConnectOregon II*.

House Bill 2001 (2009) included an additional \$100 million in funding for multimodal projects in *ConnectOregon III*. After being reviewed by modal and regional committees, 41 projects were awarded funding by the Oregon Transportation Commission, using similar criteria from the 2007 selection process. Seven port projects were funded, including dredge equipment upgrades, deicing system upgrades, wharf repairs, crane modernization and rail-to-barge facilities.

In 2011, the Legislative Assembly approved \$40 million in lottery-backed bonds for the *ConnectOregon IV* program as part of [House](#)

[Bill 5036](#). Building on the success of the first three authorizations, *ConnectOregon IV* will continue to improve the connections between the highway system and other modes of transportation. A total of 65 applications that met eligibility criteria; in late spring 2012, a Final Review Committee will prioritize its recommendations for funding and forward them to the Oregon Transportation Commission, which will select projects to receive funding.

## **Deepening the Columbia River Channel**

After nearly 20 years of effort, the Columbia River channel improvement project is complete. The final portion of the 110-mile, lower Columbia River navigation channel was deepened from 40 to 43 feet in November 2010. The region has since seen \$930 million in new investment, including nearly \$125 million in improvements at the Port of Portland's Terminal 5 and 6, and new and upgraded facilities at other lower Columbia River ports. In addition to the dredging, 257 acres of habitat were restored and 11 tide gates were retrofitted to allow for fish passage as part of the project.

Dredging the 103-mile, 600-foot-wide navigation channel between the mouth and Portland to deepen it from 40 feet to 43 feet was originally estimated to require removal of 19 million cubic yards of sand at a cost of \$134 million. Environmental challenges and increased costs ultimately increased the total project cost to roughly \$200 million. On May 20, 2002, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service jointly announced findings that the channel deepening project presented negligible risk to threatened and endangered species. With the deepening portion of the project completed, additional work restoring fish habitat and areas where dredged materials were deposited will continue into the future.

The navigation channel is managed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. It was originally dredged in 1878 to a depth of 20 feet, and has been progressively deepened, usually in five-foot increments, to its current depth of 43

feet. House Bill 2275, enacted in 2001, authorized issuance of \$28.7 million in lottery bonds through the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department to pay Oregon's share of the dredging project's total cost. The bonding authority was extended by House Bill 3446 (2003).

## **Staff and Agency Contacts**

Patrick Brennan

[Legislative Committee Services](#)

503-986-1674

Gary Neal

General Manager of the Port of Morrow

President of the

Oregon Public Ports Association

[Port of Morrow](#)

541-481-7678

Mark Landauer

Executive Director

[Oregon Public Ports Association](#)

503- 896-2338

Dave Harlan

[Oregon Business Development Department](#)

503-986-0065

Sheryl Carrubba

US Army Corps of Engineers

503-808-4340

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