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Easing of supply chain problems to start with backed-up seaports, White House says

Infrastructure bill includes billions for ports, waterways



The first seaport to improve its facilities following passage of the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill could be in Savannah, Ga., a senior Biden administration official said Tuesday.

President Joe Biden has yet to sign the measure, which [Congress sent to Biden's desk](#) late last week, funding improvements in highways, transit, ports, waterways, airports and other infrastructure.

But seaports facing historic backups from the pandemic are already making plans to put the money and policy changes to use.

“There’s work going on right now to actually get these projects teed up,” a senior administration official said on a background call with reporters Tuesday. Officials spoke on the condition they would not be named.

Port operators are planning to start many programs within 45 to 90 days through a variety of funding streams and policies the bill will provide, the official said.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Virginia, [was at the Port of Virginia in Portsmouth Tuesday](#) to talk up the infrastructure bill, telling leaders there it could be “transformative for port operations, for road and rail infrastructure, for transit, which is really necessary here,” WTKR reported.

It wasn’t clear what the bill might mean specifically for Virginia’s port, but, in a statement to the Mercury, port officials called it “a significant federal investment in critical infrastructure projects that, among other things, will help strengthen the nation’s supply chain and keep trade flowing” and “an important step forward.”

The Port has plowed about \$800 million into upgrades since 2016 and the new federal spending package will “enhance our efforts and help keep our port and this nation competitive by funding projects like the Norfolk Harbor deepening and widening,” the statement from spokesman Joe Harris said.

Unlike many other ports across the country, **the Port of Virginia hasn’t been plagued by major holdups, Harris added.**

“From a fluidity – overall cargo flow – standpoint, POV is probably among the best in the nation,” he said. “No vessels at anchor, no waiting for berth space and our gates and rail ramps are flowing without congestion. We have a lot of things working in our favor right now and we don’t foresee a (negative) change.”



Biden is scheduled to appear at the Port of Baltimore in Maryland on Wednesday to further promote the bill's effects on shipping infrastructure. The pandemic has caused backups at seaports around the world, leading to major supply chain delays in the United States.

The administration expects the Port of Savannah, the nation's third-busiest importer, to be the first to take advantage of a policy change allowing ports to redirect about \$8 million in funding to immediately address supply chain challenges, the official said.

The Port of Savannah will use that power to convert existing facilities to temporary container yards in Georgia and North Carolina, freeing up space closer to the port itself, according to a White House fact sheet. Those facilities could be ready in as few as 30 days, the official said.

The administration will also make available \$230 million in grants to ports and \$13 million to improve navigable waterways within 45 days. An additional \$475 million for ports and navigable waterways would be available in 90 days, the official said.

In the next three months, the administration will identify \$3.4 billion in upgrades to inspection facilities at ports of entry handling international trade. The official said outdated customs inspection infrastructure “has clearly been a bottleneck.”

In addition to the relatively short-term funding, the administration announced plans to help the long-term flow of goods from ports. The bill will provide \$110 billion for roads and bridges that the White House said could be “smartly deployed” to ease supply chain congestion.

The Transportation Department and the National Maritime Commission will request proposals to standardize data collection and sharing in the transportation supply chain. Private companies are responsible for most goods movement throughout the country, and don't have a universal system for collecting and sharing data.

The White House said standardizing data would allow different companies to work together and create “greater transparency, resiliency, fluidity, competition, and efficiency across the supply chain.”