

# More than just deep water - Port Miami gears up for post-Panamax Ships with Trifecta of projects

**Bill Johnson**, director of Port Miami, Miami, Florida, US

Ports around the US are scrambling to prepare for expected growth from one of the largest transportation projects in decades and what could be an economic game changer – the expansion of the Panama Canal. Expanding port capacity will be most critical along the US Southeast and Gulf coasts, according to a report issued recently by the US Army Corps of Engineers. As the closest port of call to the Panama Canal, Port Miami has forged ahead with three projects to handle post-Panamax cargo ships: dredging to -50 feet of water, restoring on-dock rail and building a tunnel to provide trucks direct highway access.

## The deep dredge

By 2015, the canal expansion will make way for cargo vessels of 8,000 TEUs to 13,000 TEUs. Port Miami is preparing for shifts in trade patterns, bigger ships and increased cargo traffic from Asia by dredging from its current water depth of 42 feet to 50–52 feet. Slated to be completed in tandem with the completion of the canal expansion, Port Miami will be one of only three US Atlantic ports to be at -50 feet and the only one south of Norfolk, Va.

Port Miami's trade with China and other Asian countries is expected to grow after the canal expansion is completed, and although these post-Panamax ships make up only 16 percent of the world's container fleet, they have nearly half that fleet's carrying capacity.

However, deep water and an “open” sign are not enough to distinguish a port as a viable hub and attract these larger ships. Post-Panamax shippers will be looking for ports that can facilitate fast, reliable and efficient access to major markets. The infrastructure available at the port is every bit as crucial as the water depth.

## The post-Panamax containers have arrived! Now what?

Unloading quickly and efficiently is a key consideration for shippers. Port Miami is an oceanfront port with only 2.5 miles from buoy to dock, making for reduced pilot costs and improved turn-around times. Additionally, special Super Post-Panamax cranes are required to handle the cargo coming into ports on the larger post-Panamax ships, and Port Miami has purchased four additional fully electrified Super Post-Panamax gantry cranes which will be in service by 2014. Currently, the Port has nine cranes, two of which are Super Post-Panamax cranes. Also, Port Miami is in the process of strengthening its cargo bulkhead to accommodate the deeper water and to accept the four new Super Post-Panamax cranes. It is the first US deep water port to incorporate precast fascia panels on this project to

expedite construction and provide a clean uniform appearance of Port Miami as viewed from Biscayne Bay.

## Increasing speed to market – intermodal rail

In the post-Panamax world, the “four corners strategy” shippers use to avoid too much reliance on one single port will likely see logistical shifts as tacticians map out economical delivery patterns along with altered trade routes. Steady product flow from the west and northeast coast ports, coupled with increased infrastructure investment from key southeast ports, will allow merchants to attack the American market with more efficiency from multiple distribution points.

Port Miami is partnering with the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) to re-introduce on-port rail service. The restored tracks will link the port to the FEC mainline, providing direct cargo access to the national rail system. The on-dock intermodal rail service will provide shippers 9,000 feet of working track. The convenience of port-to-ramp service with absolute lead times that match or exceed those of trucking, with service reliability and reduced carbon emissions. It will offer rail connectivity via interconnections with CSX and Norfolk Southern to 70 percent of the U.S. population, and the Port Miami-FEC connection offers the fastest access to Southeastern U.S. consumer markets.

Rising transportation costs and tight truckload capacity are creating more opportunities for intermodal rail, especially since any lost time at sea can be quickly made up with improved rail service. Recently, some shippers have elected to take a slower sea route just to elude the high price of diesel.

## Port tunnel – reducing road congestion and idle time

Scheduled for completion in spring 2014, the Miami Port Tunnel will improve access to and from Port Miami, serving as a dedicated roadway connector linking port facilities with Florida's Interstate Highway System. In addition to providing quicker access for port-bound trucks and automobiles, the Port Tunnel is designed to reduce traffic congestion on downtown Miami streets.

The tunnel is comprised of two side-by-side tubes that will carry traffic underneath Biscayne Bay. The project includes roadway work on adjacent roads and the widening of the MacArthur Causeway Bridge that links downtown Miami to Miami Beach.

The public-private partnership project includes the following participants: the Florida Department of Transportation; Miami-Dade County; the City of Miami; and the private consortium managing the project, Miami Access

### Florida investing in itself for jobs and growth

The budget crisis has made federal funding for port projects extremely tight, and while other ports are fighting for federal funding, Port Miami, with its state, federal and private-sector partners, is investing more than \$2 billion into its own projects. Besides benefiting early on from increased Asian trade, the port's projects will create numerous new permanent jobs. Florida's ports moved 100 million tons and three million TEUs of cargo last year. The 15 seaports contributed to Florida's record year for international trade - \$149 billion. With the new and improved port, rail and tunnel projects at Port Miami, cargo growth is expected to double over the next decade.

Tunnel. The French Company, Bouygues S.A., is the prime contractor for construction.

### Legislation supporting ports and infrastructure

Florida Governor Rick Scott recently signed two bills related to transportation infrastructure that include an increase of available funds for the state's seaports, railroads and associated freight mobility, with the intention of sending a message to the world that Florida is the ideal location for the transfer of goods into and out of the eastern US.

It is still unclear, even to industry analysts, major retailers and

the World Shipping Council, to what extent the expansion of the Panama Canal is going to affect US Southeast ports, but what we do know is it is going to transform the way US shippers move their goods to market, and Port Miami and FEC will be ready.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As director of Port Miami, **Bill Johnson** oversees the top container port in the State of Florida and the 11th largest in the nation. Under his stewardship, Port Miami has maintained its leadership position as the busiest cruise port in the world with more than four million passengers traveling through its terminals last year. Under Mr. Johnson's management, the Port has strengthened its financial position to its highest level in 12 years and, despite challenging economic conditions worldwide, Port Miami has seen both its cargo and cruise traffic grow over the past two years.

### ABOUT THE PORT

**Port Miami** is among America's busiest ports and is recognized across the globe with the dual distinction of being the Cruise Capital of the World and the Cargo Gateway of the Americas. The Port contributes more than \$18 billion annually to the South Florida economy and helps provide direct and indirect employment for more than 180,000.

### ENQUIRIES

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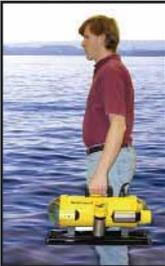


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