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Port Master Plan

In any industry, location matters. Where you set up shop, what you can do on the property, whether you have room to grow, and who's doing business next door – all are key considerations.

The elements are even more crucial to an industry that runs on long-term leases and invests heavily in equipment and labor, said Michele Grubbs, Vice President of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, which represents marine terminal operators and ocean carriers that move cargo through the West Coast ports.

"That's why the Port of Los Angeles' updated Port Master Plan is so important," Grubbs said. "It tells everyone the landlord's long-term land and water use plans and gives the industry something it can count on."

The updated [Port Master Plan](#) is a comprehensive overhaul of its predecessor, the Port's original Plan adopted in 1980. Much has changed over the last 33 years, and the Port has done its best to keep up with trends such as bigger ships and higher container volume through project-specific amendments, said David Mathewson, Director of Planning and Economic Development for the Port of Los Angeles.

"There have been 20 amendments to accommodate major projects such as the Pier 400 container terminal," Mathewson said. "We reached a point where the Plan was a three-ring binder bulging at the seams that was not user-friendly. We needed to hit the reset button."

The New Port Master Plan

Hitting the reset button has produced a concise 85-page Port Master Plan that streamlines the Port's policies and guidelines for current land uses and future development. Improvements include reducing the number of planning areas from nine to five (San Pedro, West Basin/Wilmington, Terminal Island, Fish Harbor and Waterways) and establishing single-use zones for cargo handling, commercial fishing and recreational activity. The single-use designations cover more than 95 percent of nearly 7,000 acres of Port property located within the coastal zone and subject to the Master Plan.

Under the broader cargo-handling category, the Plan designates specific areas for container, break bulk, dry bulk and liquid bulk trade. "The new Plan makes sense of the current uses and establishes a logical planning framework for the future," Grubbs said.

The Plan also provides for the growth of non-containerized cargo, said Jeff Burgin, Senior Vice President of Pasha Stevedoring & Terminals L.P., which operates a break bulk terminal and specializes in steel.

"Diversification of cargo is important, especially when it comes to high-value commodities," Burgin said. "Building materials like steel drive our nation's economy. They translate into a wide range of jobs associated with shipping, transportation and construction, and they are a fundamental measure of the economic health of our state and our nation, especially during the current recovery."

Rethinking the best and highest uses of Port property included grouping compatible uses together. It also meant establishing guidelines that enhance terminal efficiency such as allowing for new technology and relocating uses that are not water-dependent to free up space for those that are, Mathewson said.

"We wanted to segregate uses that could cause conflicts, both in terms of navigational safety and land uses," Mathewson said. "We certainly didn't want to put a recreational activity next to a bulk use. That's not good planning."

In a handful of cases, the Plan allows for multiple land uses, Mathewson said. One such example is Berths 210-211 where both container and dry bulk uses are permitted. The site is currently occupied by SA Recycling, which handles iron and other scrap metals.

Future Growth

Data was a key part of the process, and projections show that the Port's containerized cargo volumes will continue to grow. By 2030, container traffic at the Port is likely to more than double, reaching 17.3 million TEUs (20-foot equivalent units).

Dry, liquid, break and general cargoes are expected to grow 1 to 4 percent by 2030. The Port already provides sufficient facilities for commercial fishing and recreational boating, and projections show no additional demand is anticipated.

Procedural improvements include updating the guidelines for assessing potential risks related to the storage and transfer of liquid bulk cargo, namely crude oil and petroleum products. The new document also incorporates formal procedures for identifying and pursuing the protection of historic, cultural and architectural sites and structures by linking the Plan to the Port's preservation and reuse policies adopted earlier this year.

Changing a designated use will still require a permit, but the new Plan simplifies the process. Instead of three types of permits, there are only two: Level I for minimal changes with no significant adverse environmental impacts, and Level II for more substantial land and/or water use changes. Also, the updated Plan delegates the authority to approve Level I permits to the Port's executive director. Level II permits would continue to require a public hearing and formal consideration by Board of the Harbor Commissioners.

The new Plan was developed with input from industry, tenants, labor, governmental agencies, the community and other stakeholders over an 18-month period. The last step is certification by the California Coastal Commission.

Grubbs, who participated in the update, praised Mathewson and his team for their methodical and collaborative approach. "It was a very open process. The Port did a great job of working with everyone."

The new Plan's appeal extends beyond its boundaries, said Burgin, also a participant in its development. "My customers and business partners around the globe see that they now have the ability to grow."