

Why We Conducted This Review

Ports are catalysts for economic development as they enable trade and support supply chains. The objective of this report was to provide information about Louisiana's public ports and how they compare to other southern coastal states. Because no centralized information on Louisiana ports exists, we obtained information by surveying all 32 active public ports, requesting information from the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD), and from individual port websites. We also researched eight other southern coastal states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia). We developed 10 Matters for Legislative Consideration to help improve Louisiana's port system and remain competitive. Louisiana has 32 active public ports and 10 developing public ports.

Types of Ports in Louisiana



Deep-water Port
Nine Active Public Ports
-Port of New Orleans



Coastal Port
11 Active Public Ports
-Port of Morgan City



Inland Port
12 Active Public Ports
-Central Louisiana Regional Port

Section 1: Louisiana Public Ports' National Rankings

Louisiana lost its number one ranking for the amount of waterborne tonnage passing through its ports to Texas in 2019. However, eight Louisiana ports were ranked in the top 100 in 2021.

Louisiana ranks second for total freight moved (land, air, water), only behind Texas.

The Port of New Orleans is currently Louisiana's only international container terminal. In 2021, the Port of New Orleans was ranked 17th among U.S. container ports by twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEU) volume.

Louisiana's Public Ports System

Comparison to Other Southern Coastal States and Recommendations for Improvement

What We Found (Cont.)

Section 2: Governance Structure of Louisiana Public Ports

Louisiana public ports' governance structure differs from the eight other southern coastal states we evaluated. Six (75.0%) of these eight states have a state port authority, while the other two (25.0%) have a dedicated state-level organization that assists with port system planning and coordination and advises other state agencies.

While Louisiana does not have a state port authority that owns and/or operates its own ports or an active port advisory commission, having some type of state coordinating entity could help infrastructure development and planning for ports in Louisiana.

Unlike all eight other southern coastal states we evaluated, Louisiana does not have a state master or strategic plan for its ports system. Having some type of state master or strategic plan could help the port system coordinate its efforts to drive economic development in the state.

Section 3: Louisiana Public Port's Funding and Infrastructure Investments

While Louisiana has an established program to help fund its ports, Louisiana could increase its investments in ports to keep up with other southern coastal states.

This could include dedicating resources to help smaller ports apply for federal funding or create dedicated loan programs for ports.

Louisiana's dedicated funding to ports is higher than in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, but less than the five other states – Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia – for fiscal years 2022 through 2024.

Section 4: Louisiana Public Ports' Challenges

Many challenges impact ports' development. These challenges include a backlog of transportation needs (such as funding for intermodal connectivity, port infrastructure, channel deepening, waterway maintenance, etc.), natural disasters, disruptions from extreme high- and low-water levels, the high cost of property insurance, and others. Louisiana has the second-largest inland navigable waterway system in the nation, but according to a study completed in 2023, waterborne transportation is currently underutilized in terms of unrealized potential and capacity.

Louisiana's Public Ports System

Comparison to Other Southern Coastal States and Recommendations for Improvement

What We Found (Cont.)

Section 5: Economic Impact of Louisiana Public Ports

No state entity in Louisiana is responsible for systematically measuring the economic impact of Louisiana's public ports. Measuring this impact would give legislators additional information on ports when making decisions on port funding.

Four states we evaluated assessed the economic impact of their ports in 2022 and 2023.

Even though the Port Priority Program evaluates projected economic feasibility and economic impacts of the proposed individual port projects, it does not track actual economic impacts of all completed projects.

Section 6: Competitors to Louisiana Public Ports

Competition varies by port type, cargo/services, and location. Generally, deep-water ports see the most competition over containerized cargo; however, according to the survey results, the majority of cargo moved through Louisiana's deep-water ports is not containerized.

The Port of New Orleans currently operates Louisiana's only international container terminal, and its greatest direct competition comes from the Ports of Mobile (Alabama), Savannah (Georgia), and Charleston (South Carolina). In terms of total tonnage, the Port of South Louisiana's greatest competition is Port Houston.

Coastal ports along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) are most competitive with other GIWW ports in Texas. Inland port competition depends primarily on the ports' specialties and geographic locations.

Section 7: Suggested Improvements for Louisiana's Ports

Improving the Louisiana public ports system requires collaboration among ports, governmental agencies, and relevant stakeholders.

By acknowledging and addressing challenges, Louisiana ports can enhance their competitiveness, improve operational efficiency, and ensure sustainable growth in the face of evolving market conditions and environmental risks.

View the full report at www.la.gov.