



# Jacksonville Port Authority looking inland to gain allies

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By [David Bauerlein](#)

The possibility that cargo moving through Jacksonville's port could go up the highway — and rail lines — to neighboring counties brought officials from across the region to Jacksonville for a meeting about creating a united front in lobbying for federal dollars.

Officials from Baker, Columbia and Nassau counties attended the meeting of the Logistics Advisory Group, which is affiliated with the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce.

The group heard presentations about inland ports, which are large-scale shipping hubs connected by highway or rail lines to seaports.

"The key driver for a port isn't just location," said Carolyn Bissonnette, assistant director of the Baker County Planning and Zoning Department. "It's service. That's what we have to offer."

Proponents of the inland ports said they expect Jacksonville will gain enough shipments in the future that shippers will need more space to put cargo while it is sorted and transported over land.

The North Florida Transportation Planning Organization, which works with the state on transportation funding in Northeast Florida, will do a regional study of cargo shipments.

George Gabel, a Jacksonville lawyer who heads the Logistics Advisory Group, said the regional push will be needed to win federal support for deepening the Jacksonville port's channel. That cost is expected to be at least \$500 million.

"When the port goes to Washington and asks for money, it's just the port," Gabel said. "We need regional players. That's how you get the money."

Jacksonville faces tough competition from ports in Charleston, S.C. and Savannah, Ga., that have deeper water, said Dennis Kelly, regional vice president of TraPac, which opened a Jacksonville terminal in 2009.

TraPac's connection to the Asian shipping lines is fueling the interest of neighboring counties in inland ports because more Asian-based trade is expected to go through East Coast seaports after the Panama Canal is widened in 2014.

Kelly said when TraPac talks with companies about using Jacksonville's port for their cargo shipments, "The first thing they say is get deep water."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is conducting a study of the costs and benefits of deepening Jacksonville's harbor.

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