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NY-NJ probes impact on warehouses of extended terminal hours

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The port, like others across the United States, is preparing for a rise in the number of mega-ships calling at the port that is expected to increase cargo volumes. (Above: Looking west toward the port from New York Harbor.) Photo credit: Shutterstock.com.

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The [Port of New York and New Jersey \(https://www.joc.com/port-news/us-ports/port-new-york-and-new-jersey\)](https://www.joc.com/port-news/us-ports/port-new-york-and-new-jersey) is surveying the readiness of area warehouse and distribution center owners and operators to handle cargo in off-peak hours, in an effort to tackle the long-contentious issue of whether its marine terminals should have longer gate hours.

A survey sent out by the Port Performance Council, a port stakeholder group, this month seeks to determine what hours the warehouses are at present open, how they operate, and whether they would be willing and able to accept cargo late into the night, and even round the clock.

In the past, port stakeholders who don't think longer gate hours are needed have questioned the usefulness of the move by saying that many warehouses that serve port users are small, and aren't open late, so truckers would be unable to deliver cargo even if they could get it out of marine terminals.

NY-NJ prepare for more mega-ships, and more volume

The move comes as the port, like others across the US, is preparing for a rise in the number of [mega-ships \(https://www.joc.com/special-topics/mega-ships\)](https://www.joc.com/special-topics/mega-ships) calling at the port that is expected to increase cargo volumes and place stress on port resources through intense bursts of loading and unloading activity.

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Longer hours likely would benefit shippers as truckers could extract cargo from the terminals more quickly. But it's unclear whether shippers would be willing to pay extra for improved service if the terminals levied a fee to pay for the longer hours they are operating.

Truckers see longer gate hours as a way to smooth the flow of traffic in and out of the terminals, spreading it out around the clock, and so avoiding the congestion created when a heavy volume of trucks seeks to enter the terminals at once.

New York-New Jersey's four terminals at present open at 6 a.m. and close between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m., depending on the terminal. The port's terminal operators say there is not the cargo volume to warrant extending gate hours at present, but some would consider that change if the cargo flow was there.

The message accompanying the survey sent out by the Port Performance Council, a stakeholder group created by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to improve efficiency in the port, said: "Industry trends suggest that off-hour drayage of containers may become more common as today's new generation of ultra-large container vessels off-load significantly more cargo in a single visit than traditional vessel calls."

"If the marine terminals stay open longer in order to process that cargo," the message said, "there must be places for the cargo to go after it leaves the terminals."

Ports across the US are wrestling with whether to extend gate hours and other options to respond to the growth in cargo volume, and the growing size of mega-ships. That shift is expected to be bigger in New York-New Jersey, where [the elevation of the Bayonne Bridge](https://www.joc.com/port-news/port-productivity/smooth-sailing-ny-nj%E2%80%99s-first-14000-teu-service-call_20171122.html) (https://www.joc.com/port-news/port-productivity/smooth-sailing-ny-nj%E2%80%99s-first-14000-teu-service-call_20171122.html) allowed ships of more than 9,500 TEU to reach three of the port's four main terminals for the first time, and the opening of the expanded Panama Canal also allowed bigger ships to flow through to the East Coast.

Other ports have extended gate hours

Ports such as Oakland, Seattle-Tacoma, Houston, Virginia, Charleston, and Vancouver, Canada have extended their gates.

At the Port of Montreal, two terminals this summer agreed to extend gate hours from a 2.30 p.m. close to an 11 p.m. close, after a spate of congestion earlier this year forced truckers to wait for hours to enter some terminals. The other two main terminals are expected to make a similar move.

In Southern California, [the PierPass extended gates program](https://www.joc.com/port-news/us-ports/port-long-beach/bcos-truckers-hope-pierpass-20-delay-will-produce-more-gate-equity_20180626.html) (https://www.joc.com/port-news/us-ports/port-long-beach/bcos-truckers-hope-pierpass-20-delay-will-produce-more-gate-equity_20180626.html) was developed in 2005 as a way to relieve traffic congestion on Southern California roads and freeways by pushing some of the port traffic, which exceeds 30,000 truck moves per day, from the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. shift to newly created night shifts from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Often, the debate over the move revolves around who will pay for the extended gates. Montreal settled on a \$35 per container charge on laden cargo. Los Angeles and Long Beach are in the process of reassessing its long time fee of \$72.09 per TEU and \$144.18 per FEU on cargo moved in the day - a congestion pricing model - and replacing it with a proposed flat fee of \$31.52 per TEU and \$63.04 per FEU for all moves.

The New York-New Jersey survey, aside from asking what hours a warehouse or distribution center is open, asks questions about operating practices, whether it has an appointment system, what would prevent it from extending gate hours and whether it would be willing to pay a surcharge for longer hours at the terminal. The council expects to have results of the survey compiled by its November meeting.

In the past, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey has said it faces a tougher task in extending gate hours than, say, Southern California, where large warehouses that are open 24/7 are the main customers. About 100,000 shippers use the Port of New York and New Jersey, and about 80 percent of them handle 250 or fewer containers a year, and are less able to adjust to changing demands on opening hours, authority officials said last year at JOC's Port Performance Conference in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Amanda Valdes, the authority's port efficiency manager, said on Friday that the council is looking beyond simple solutions such as adding a shift to warehouse work day.



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"We are trying to look at everything. Maybe it's not so much extending the hours but changing the hours," she said. "Maybe the more productive window is not 7 to 4 but the middle of the night ... Nothing is off the table. We just try to think about all the different ways that the operations can be more efficient."

Loaded cargo volumes through New York-New Jersey grew by 6 percent in 2017 over the year before, to 4.77 million, as the East Coast volume grew by 6.2 percent. The volume of loaded TEU handled by the port in the first half of 2018 grew by 8.2 percent over the same period in 2017, to 2.3 million TEU, according to Port Authority figures. Imports increased by 7.8 percent and exports by increasing by 9.2 percent over the same period in 2017.

Major NJ warehouse: We're ready for extended gates

Mike Wynne Jr., warehouse manager and sales director for The Judge Organization, which has warehouses totaling more than 750,000 square feet in Jersey City, Elizabeth, Kearny, and other locations close to New York-New Jersey port, said he did not think extending the gate hours would be a problem for the company. He said it already has a day and a night shift, and frequently is open until 1 a.m., with hours determined by customer volume.

"From our point of view, the large benefit would be efficiency," he said of the proposal to extend marine terminal gate hours. "Every trucker in the area would spread out. So instead of going in the terminal and waiting three hours, we would hope we are there an hour and half, because everyone is not there trying to get (cargo) at the same time."

Mike McGuinness, CEO of NAIOP, the commercial real estate development association, said discussions with a few of his members showed that some already are open long hours, mainly to satisfy big shipper customers. He said key issues for some are whether municipal rules allow warehouses to be open late into the night, and the impact of traffic and noise on a community in off-peak hours.

"Large national and international companies moving a lot of product in and out of big spaces are the primary drivers of 24/7 operations," McGuinness said, quoting one of his industrial space owner members. "And they would likely welcome greater or extended gate hours."

But the final determinant may be the task of finding employees, he said.

"The bigger issue, in keeping warehouses open longer, is finding labor — the labor force having access to these places," he said, quoting another warehouse owner. "They may not have cars. There may not be a bus route. It may be too expensive to figure it out," he said, noting that Amazon has had to bus workers in from nearby cities to get workers to its two New Jersey locations.

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