

Oct. 31, 2019

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Virginia Begins First Phase of 55-Foot Dredging Project Ahead of Schedule

Work to Reclaim Title of USEC's Deepest Port Gets Underway

NORFOLK, VA – The Port of Virginia® is beginning work on its ship-channel deepening-and-widening project as the staging of heavy equipment needed for the project got underway today following one last approval from the federal government.

John F. Reinhart, CEO and executive director of the Virginia Port Authority, made the announcement today at the Hampton Roads Navigational Summit, an annual meeting where regional navigational projects are prioritized. Earlier this week, the US Environmental Protection Agency approved use of an offshore site for placement of the dredge material; that approval triggered the notice to proceed, he said.

“Today, the work to make The Port of Virginia the deepest port on the U.S. East Coast gets underway,” Reinhart said. “This project holds long-term benefits for Virginia, for the port, for cargo owners, our customers and the ocean carriers. Safe, two-way movement of ultra-large container vessels, unrestricted by tide, is a significant competitive advantage for our port. This project and all other improvements we are making at the terminals tells the ocean carriers ‘we are ready for your big ships.’ ”

In early October, Reinhart signed a contract with New Jersey-based Weeks Marine to begin the deepening of the western side of Thimble Shoal Channel. The contract for the first phase is \$78 million and the total cost of the project, including the preliminary engineering and design work, is \$350 million.

The work includes dredging the shipping channels to 55 feet – with deeper ocean approaches – and widening them up to 1,400 feet in specific areas. When dredging is complete in 2024, the commercial channels serving the Norfolk Harbor will be able to simultaneously accommodate two, ultra-large container vessels.

“Modern container terminals served by deep, wide channels and the ability for cargo to reach important markets by rail truck and barge positions Virginia to be the East Coast’s premier trade gateway, and this will fuel cargo growth, job creation and economic investment across the Commonwealth for decades to come,” Reinhart said.

The dredging project will enhance accessibility to The Port of Virginia while providing significant benefits to the national economy and national security, Reinhart said.

“When the flow of cargo is efficient, it is the consumer and the economy that benefit. Additionally, movement of vessels to and from Naval Station Norfolk becomes more efficient because the wider channels allow for safe, two-way passage of military and commercial vessels.”

In 2015, the deepening effort got underway when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the port agreed to share the cost of evaluating the benefits of dredging the Norfolk Harbor to a depth beyond 50 feet.

The dredge work begins nearly two-and-a-half years ahead of schedule, and more than two months ahead of the aggressive start date of Jan. 2020, Reinhart said. The port’s preparation, its collaboration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, its understanding of the streamlined permitting process and the support of the elected officials on the state and federal levels were all factors in securing final, early approval.

“The support of the governor, the Virginia Legislature, the Army Corps’ Norfolk District office and the Virginia Maritime Association for this project cannot be over-stated,” Reinhart said. “This has been a collective effort and we are grateful to all who were behind it. This is what a world-class port looks like.”

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The Virginia Port Authority (VPA) is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The VPA owns and through its private operating subsidiary, Virginia International Terminals, LLC (VIT), operates four general cargo facilities Norfolk International Terminals, Portsmouth Marine Terminal, Newport News Marine Terminal and the Virginia Inland Port in Warren County. The VPA leases Virginia International Gateway and Richmond Marine Terminal. A recent economic impact study from The College of William and Mary shows that The Port of Virginia helps to create more than 530,000 jobs and generated \$88.4 billion in total economic impact throughout the Commonwealth on an annual basis.