

# No Doubts Are Harbored Here

The Port of Corpus Christi keeps commerce flowing

The Port of Corpus Christi – the sixth-largest in the country – is poised for an even greater role in the nation’s shipping future.

Blessed with a warm, dry climate, a great location 150 miles north of the Mexico/U.S. border, excellent highway and rail access, and more than 295,000 square feet of covered dockside storage, the port offers unmatched advantages

on the Gulf Coast.

“We are the cleanest port in America,” says Ruben Bonilla, port commission chairman. “Dolphins swim in our shipping channels, while other ports often have reduced hours as a result of not being in air attainment [failing to meet federal air-quality standards].

“We have a strong and capable workforce, abundant water and we’re

a deep-draft port – the first to be at 45 feet anywhere on the Gulf,” he adds. “We consider Corpus Christi to be the gateway to the world.”

Bonilla points to the port’s immediate access to the Gulf as a major selling point, as compared to Houston’s distance from the water.

The port is also one of only two – the other is Beaumont – designated by the



MICHAEL W. BUNCH

*The Port of Corpus Christi is one of only two ports in the country designated by the Department of Defense as a strategic military seaport.*

Department of Defense as a strategic military seaport. The Corpus Christi port, along with Beaumont, has shipped about 50 percent of all the military cargo that has gone to support the war in Iraq.

Not content to stand still, several years ago port officials recognized that increased containerized shipping worldwide was creating congestion at many ports, and that more ocean ports were needed. Especially crucial would be ports that could provide efficient transportation and warehousing options.

Looking ahead, the port acquired 1,100 acres on Corpus Christi Bay and set about planning a state-of-the-art, world-class containerized shipping port called the La Quinta Trade Gateway.

In November 2005, port officials entered into an agreement with Dragados-S.P.L. of Madrid, one of the world's largest port operations companies, to develop the gateway.

"Trading routes are shifting from East-West to North-South," Bonilla says. "The Gateway will offer shippers the most immediate path to centers of trade in South America. La Quinta positions us to build a container terminal that will exponentially increase our port's importance. It's really a rebirth."

The project will be a major economic shot in the arm for the entire city, Bonilla



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WES ALDRIDGE

says. Initially, some 2,000 construction jobs will be created, but downstream commerce will be most affected, as truck and ship traffic increases dramatically and workers are needed for warehousing, security, loading and unloading ships, and other crucial jobs. Tentatively, the

project may be built out by 2008.

"It's pretty remarkable, really," Bonilla adds. "This is a transformation of not just Corpus Christi and the waterfront, but the whole region. Folks will be surprised by our growth – and the responsible way we'll manage it." – Laura Hill

## Moving Down the Highway

When built, Interstate 69 will boost the Coastal Bend area's growth

The construction of Interstate 69 will be good news for the Coastal Bend region – whenever the highway gets built.

The interstate was proposed in 1991 as a planned 1,600-mile national highway and will eventually connect Mexico, the United States and Canada. It will span from the Texas/Mexico border to Port Huron, Mich.

For the Coastal Bend region, I-69 would mean an expansion and upgrade of existing U.S. Highway 77, which runs south to Brownsville and north to Victoria. Plans are to potentially make I-69/U.S. 77 into a four-lane interstate in both directions instead of its current two lanes each way.

In addition, plans also call for a connector road from I-69 to The Port of Corpus Christi, with exclusive truck lanes and higher weight limits.

"Having a fast-moving interstate instead of an often-congested Highway 77 would obviously be

good for truck traffic and business in Corpus Christi and the surrounding area," says Steve Jenkins, vice president of business development for the Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corp.

Funding for the Texas portion of the interstate project has been a stumbling block ever since the highway was proposed 15 years ago. According to Texas Department of Transportation officials, construction of the 600-mile stretch of interstate through the Lone Star State will cost \$12 billion to \$15 billion.

TxDOT officials hope that a finalized construction and financing plan will be in place by late 2007.

"I-69 would give us a faster connection with Houston to the north and Mexico to our south," Jenkins says. "I look forward to the day when it all happens."

– Kevin Litwin