

**STATEMENT OF CAPT. PAUL C. LaMARRE III,  
PRESIDENT, AMERICAN GREAT LAKES PORTS ASSOCIATION,  
PORT DIRECTOR, PORT OF MONROE,  
BEFORE THE THE SENATE COMMERCE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
SURFACE TRANSPORTATION, MARITIME, FREIGHT, AND PORTS**

**Wednesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024**

**“Examining the Impact of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law  
on Transportation Infrastructure”**

Good morning, Chairman Peters, distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Maritime, Freight and Ports, and fellow witnesses. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the impact of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law on transportation infrastructure in Michigan.

My name is Captain Paul C. LaMarre III, and I am proud to speak as the Port Director of the Port of Monroe, MI as well as the President of the American Great Lakes Ports Association which represents all U.S. Great Lakes Ports and is regarded as one of the industry’s leading trade associations.

I am honored to share our experiences and insights on the opportunities and challenges we have encountered while implementing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and cannot overstate the importance of continued investment in our maritime industry’s resilience.

**Overview of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Impact**

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, commonly referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, has authorized unprecedented investments in our nation’s surface transportation and port infrastructure projects. These investments are crucial for addressing long-standing infrastructure deficiencies and modernizing our transportation networks to meet future demands.

In October 2022, the Port of Monroe was awarded \$11,051,586 through the Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP). This grant award represents the single largest investment in the Port of Monroe’s infrastructure since the organization’s creation in 1932 and will have profound effects on the sustainability and enhancement of our maritime infrastructure which supports the Port of Monroe’s continued growth as a regional hub for both domestic and international renewable energy cargoes.

**Successes in Implementation**

1. **Enhanced Funding for Projects:** PIDP funding has allowed the Port of Monroe to undertake several critical projects that were previously unfunded. For example, the project rehabilitates and reinforces end-of-life infrastructure to increase vessel and cargo handling capacity, improves the efficiency of managing bulk materials used in local road infrastructure projects and the manufacture of building materials, improves the handling of steel coils and plates used in regional automotive manufacturing, adds shore power to reduce vehicle and vessel idling,

provides new docking capacity to harbor assist vessels to increase the port's responsiveness against climate change-related weather events, and adds dedicated vessel berthing capacity for handling international containers and the marine transport of wind energy components manufactured at the Port of Monroe.

2. **Rural and Urban Benefits:** The law's provisions for discretionary and formula funding have ensured that both rural and urban areas in Michigan benefit. The Port is in the City of Monroe, Monroe County, Michigan. The Port is within the federally designated Urban Area and community development zone Opportunity Zone 8318. This positioning allows us to leverage funding to improve infrastructure that benefits our economically challenged rural community.
3. **Job Creation:** The infrastructure projects funded by this law will create numerous construction and operational jobs in our community, providing economic stimulus and supporting local economies, thereby contributing to the reduction of unemployment in the region.

### **Leveraging State and Federal Funds**

As a small public Port, the Port identifies and collaborates with state and local governments to leverage and ensure the maximum impact of public funding sources for infrastructure investment. Examples of the Port using federal funding to attract non-federal sources of infrastructure investment include:

1. Federal Railroad Administration funds for the development of rail siding to Port tenant manufacturing wind towers were leveraged with financial participation from the Michigan Department of Transportation, Ventower, and the Port.
2. U.S. Department of Transportation's America's Marine Highways Program funds for the purchase of a U.S.-made Manitowoc MLC165 crawler crane were leveraged with financial participation from the Michigan Department of Transportation, City of Monroe, and the Port.
3. Department of Homeland Security Port Security grant funds for the purchase of a radiation portal monitor to screen international containers were leveraged with financial participation from the Port.

### **Challenges Encountered**

1. **Implementation Delays:** While we are grateful for the significant funding provided, we have encountered delays in project implementation due to bureaucratic red tape and compliance with numerous federal and state regulations. These delays have hindered our ability to deliver projects on time. Additionally, the requirement for additional engineering reviews, despite our own licensed engineers providing plans, has added unnecessary layers to the process. Simplifying these procedures would significantly expedite project delivery. While the Port of Monroe's PIDP grant was awarded in October of 2022, it was not until May of 2024 that we were able to achieve a signed grant agreement with MARAD to be able to proceed.
2. **Coordination Issues:** Effective coordination between various stakeholders, including federal, state, and local agencies, has proven to be challenging. Instances of miscommunication have led to project delays and increased costs. Establishing more robust communication channels would greatly enhance project efficiency.

3. **Resource Allocation:** Despite substantial funding, there remains a need for strategic resource allocation to ensure that the most critical projects are prioritized. There have been instances where less urgent projects received funding over more critical ones, underscoring the necessity for a more data-driven and prioritized approach.

## Recommendations

- **Equitable Distribution of PIDP Funds:** There is a pressing need for an equitable distribution of Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP) funds by regions, particularly for the Great Lakes region. For example, in 2023, only two Great Lakes ports received a combined total of \$14.4 million, which is just 2% of the \$653 million distributed, despite the region's robust cargo flows and critical role in the national economy.
- **Streamlining the PIDP Process:** The PIDP process, like many other grant processes, can be cumbersome. The framework created to regulate and oversee the grant process often prioritizes compliance over construction. We urge for a balance that allows responsible management while ensuring timely project initiation. For instance, we received the PIDP grant two years ago but have yet to see federal dollars disbursed.
- **Clear Metrics:** Expectations for performance monitoring without clear metrics have created difficulties. For example, criticisms for not moving containers with the Port's crane funded through the Marine Highway Grant Program were issued without providing specific metrics or interagency conversations when multiple government agency approvals are necessary to accomplish certain portions of a project. Grant programs should consider the broader implications and roles of other government entities involved.
- **Focus on Marine Transportation System:** The priority of funding should be the bolstering of the marine transportation system, which includes support vessels and ports but equally important the seafarers and maritime personnel required to support the overall system. Currently, there is a heavier focus on monitoring and managing grant funds rather than on systemic support. There should be equitable investment in the American flag fleet, shipbuilding, and the promotion of seafaring occupations.
- **Investment in the Great Lakes:** On the Great Lakes, it is essential to shore up existing infrastructure. Unlike coastal investments that sometimes bolster foreign transportation systems, we need comprehensive investment in every aspect of the process, including infrastructure, vessels, and the people who operate them.

## Conclusion

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law represents a historic opportunity to transform our transportation infrastructure. While we have seen significant successes, there are areas for improvement that can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation. It is vital that programs like PIDP continue to receive support and funding to sustain and enhance our infrastructure.

The Great Lakes St Lawrence Seaway system represents the vein of domestic manufacturing and agriculture which fuels the industrial might and sustainability of our nation. Investment in the Great Lakes is direct investment in American manufacturing. Unbalanced investment in coastal interests further subsidizes a foreign transportation network.

We are deeply appreciative of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and PIDP. These initiatives are crucial not only for strengthening infrastructure but also for injecting funds into the economy, thereby promoting economic vitality and job creation.

Most importantly, we are eternally grateful to Senator Gary Peters and Secretary Pete Buttigieg for their unrelenting support of the Port of Monroe, the Great Lakes St Lawrence Seaway as a whole, and this 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Great Lakes mariner who beams with pride anytime we shake hands.

We appreciate the continued support of this subcommittee and look forward to working together to build a better future for Michigan's transportation infrastructure.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.