Mississippi State Port Authority at Gulfport

Five Year Strategic Plan

Fiscal Years 2028–2032

1. COMPREHENSIVE MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Mississippi State Port Authority at Gulfport is to provide world-class maritime terminal facilities and services to our customers, to facilitate economic growth, and to foster job growth for the people of Mississippi through the promotion of domestic and international trade.

2. STATEMENT OF AGENCY PHILOSOPHY

The Mississippi State Port Authority at Gulfport is committed to leveraging the assets of the Port and the State to sustainably assist Mississippi companies in reaching global markets and to create well-paying jobs on the Gulf Coast. As steward of a state-owned asset, the Port measures its success not only in tons and containers moved, but in private capital attracted, tenants retained, and facilities maintained. The philosophy of the Port is to adhere to the highest ethical standards, and to be transparent and accountable to our local community and to the citizens of the State.

3. RELEVANT STATEWIDE GOALS AND BENCHMARKS

Statewide Goal #1 – Economic Development: To develop a robust state economy that provides the opportunity for productive employment for all Mississippians.

Relevant Benchmarks #1:

1. Number of new and renewed tenant leases, and jobs committed, resulting from recruitment of businesses to the State of Mississippi.
2. Volume of cargo activity at the Port, measured in short tons and twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs).
3. Dollar value of externally funded capital investment at the Port, including private tenant investment.
4. Percentage of Port property under active lease or otherwise producing revenue.
5. Number of Blue Economy tenants and subtenants operating at the Port, square footage occupied, and jobs created.
6. Number of uncrewed and autonomous surface vessels manufactured, tested, or commissioned at the Port, by Port tenants.
7. Longshore labor hours and berth utilization generated by military cargo movements handled under the Port's Strategic Seaport designation.

Statewide Goal #2.1 – Education (Public Schools): To make available a quality K-12 public education for all Mississippians that prepares them, upon high school graduation, to either enter the labor force with an employable skill or to successfully complete a higher education program.

Relevant Benchmarks #2.1:

1. Number of partnerships with local schools and school districts on education activities related to the Port.
2. Number of outreach activities informing students about maritime, logistics, and Port-related career pathways.

3. Number of students participating in Port career events, site visits, and maritime education programs.

Statewide Goal #2.2 – Education (Higher Education): To make available an accessible, quality public higher education at an affordable cost that prepares Mississippians to become productive, financially self-sufficient members of society while meeting the human resources needs of Mississippi and its employers, including the creation of new jobs through the commercialization of university-based research.

Relevant Benchmarks #2.2:

1. Number of partnerships with community colleges and Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning on education, research, and workforce development activities related to the Port.
2. Number of workforce development and training partnerships meeting the needs of the Port's tenants.
3. Number of research vessels homeported at the Port, and university research activities supported.
4. Square footage of Port-built space occupied by institutions of higher learning and their research subtenants.

Statewide Goal #3 – Public Safety and Order: To protect the public's safety, including providing timely and appropriate responses to emergencies and disasters, and to operate a fair and effective system of justice.

Relevant Benchmarks #3:

1. Number of U.S. Coast Guard facility security inspections completed and Maritime Transportation Security Act compliance maintained across the Port's regulated facilities.
2. Number of United States military training exercises supported on port facilities.
3. Number of vessel movements handled under the Port's Strategic Seaport designation, to include equipment import and export.
4. Number of hurricane preparedness meetings and readiness exercises conducted with tenants and agency partners, and number of attendees.
5. Time required to secure the Port and complete tenant evacuation upon activation of a port condition.

Statewide Goal #4 – Natural Resources: To ensure that current and future generations have access to the State's abundant natural resources through protection, conservation, and wise development of those resources.

Relevant Benchmarks #5:

1. Number of inspections confirming that air and water quality in and around the Port meet applicable national standards.
2. Green Marine certification maintained, and performance indicator levels achieved under that program.
3. Number of electric and hybrid vehicles, cargo-handling equipment, and cranes in service, and electrical infrastructure installed to support them.

4. Cubic yards of dredged material placed through beneficial use or approved containment.
5. Number of hours contributed to The University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Blue program.

Statewide Goal #5 – Infrastructure: To ensure the construction and maintenance of infrastructure (including roadways, waterways, railways, airports, water and sewer systems, pipelines, electricity lines, broadband connections, public buildings) adequate to meet the needs of citizens and the business community.

Relevant Benchmarks #5:

1. Number of tenants utilizing the Port's facilities.
2. Number of companies, especially Mississippi companies, that are directly and indirectly associated with the Port.
3. Continued and steady progress on the USACE deepening and widening project, measured by federal milestones achieved: congressional authorization, execution of a project partnership agreement, receipt of federal appropriations, and commencement of construction.
4. Amount of funding spent on new construction, repairs and maintenance, and mitigation projects.
5. Acres of Port property permitted, filled, or otherwise brought to a market-ready condition.
6. Time required for the Port and the businesses located on the Port site to resume operations following a natural or man-made disaster.

Statewide Goal #6 – Government and Citizens: To create an efficient government and an informed and engaged citizenry that help to address social problems through the payment of taxes, the election of capable leaders at all levels of government, and participation in charitable organizations through contributions and volunteerism.

Relevant Benchmarks #6:

1. Number of findings reported in the Port's annual independent audit conducted in accordance with Government Auditing Standards.
2. Outstanding bonded debt, and annual debt service as a percentage of operating revenue.
3. Number of public Board of Commissioners meetings held and public notices issued under the Mississippi Open Meetings Act.
4. Number of public records requests received, and average time to respond.
5. Number of outreach and advisory meetings, events, and tours held by the Port each year.

4. OVERVIEW OF THE AGENCY 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

The Port of Gulfport is a deep-water international seaport owned by the State of Mississippi and managed by the Mississippi State Port Authority at Gulfport. The Port receives more than 160 deep-draft vessel calls, over two million tons of cargo, and approximately 200,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent unit containers) annually. Its location allows customers to distribute product to much of the U.S. market within twenty-four hours — as far west as El Paso, Texas, north to Chicago, Illinois, and east to Charleston, South Carolina. As a key gateway for Central American trade, the Port of Gulfport is one of the leading importers of green fruit in the United States and maintains the refrigerated container capacity that trade requires.

Encompassing nearly 300 acres, the Port has ample berthing space, plentiful warehousing and laydown area, and access to 30,000 feet of on-dock rail track served by two Class I railroads. The Port is equipped with four ship-to-shore gantry cranes, mobile harbor cranes capable of handling breakbulk and project cargo, and a specialized ramp built for roll-on/roll-off vessels. More than 300,000 square feet of dry bulk warehousing on the East Pier, together with a dedicated finger pier and silo system on the West Pier, support a bulk business that moves by rail daily to an in-state processing plant. A short eighteen-mile transit from sea buoy to dock makes Gulfport one of the most accessible deep-water terminals on the Gulf of Mexico.

The Port of Gulfport is, in practical terms, an economic development agency with transportation at the core of its daily operations. The Authority operates as a landlord port: it owns and develops the facilities, while terminal operations and stevedoring are performed by private operators, principally Ports America and SSA Marine, with labor provided by I.L.A. Local 1303. The entire Port is designated as Foreign Trade Zone No. 92. The Port is also one of a limited number of commercial Strategic Seaports designated by the U.S. Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, a designation that has allowed the Port to participate in the loading and unloading of military equipment and has produced additional labor hours for local longshoremen.

Following completion of the Port of Gulfport Restoration Program in 2018, the Authority entered into a long-term agreement with Ports America, the largest terminal operator and stevedore in the United States. Ports America is implementing a $43 million investment to develop Terminal 4, purchase new cargo-handling equipment, add a fourth gantry crane, and enhance training of local labor. Private investment has continued outside the restoration program: tenants including Ports America, Island View Casino Resort, The Chemours Company, and Ocean Aero have committed private capital to expand their operations in Gulfport. In 2026, SSA Marine commissioned an additional hybrid mobile harbor crane at the Port, supported by $1.6 million from the Mississippi Strategic Multimodal Investment Fund and $400,000 in private funding to build the electrical infrastructure that will allow it to run on electric power.

The Port has also built a working cluster around Mississippi's Blue Economy. The Port constructed the Roger F. Wicker Center for Ocean Enterprise, a 62,000-square-foot facility in the North Harbor completed in 2023 and leased to The University of Southern Mississippi; subleases with NOAA and other subtenants have been executed and the building is now nearly fully occupied. The Port serves as homeport for USM's R/V Point Sur and has rehabilitated portions of the East Pier to berth additional research vessels, including NOAA's R/V Nancy Foster. Ocean Aero relocated its headquarters and manufacturing from San Diego to Gulfport in 2021, creating more than 60 jobs, and completed a multi-million-dollar renovation of East Pier warehouse space in 2023.

In August 2026, Saronic Technologies announced a Gulfport site of more than 30,000 square feet for on-water testing and commissioning of its 180-foot Marauder medium unmanned surface vessel, with the first vessel arriving in July 2026. A $1.0 million MDOT multimodal grant will fund construction of additional warehouse space to support that growth. Few U.S. ports offer manufacturing, testing, and open-water range access in a single location; that combination is the Port's principal advantage in this sector and the basis for continued recruitment.

Deepening and widening the federal navigation channel is the most consequential undertaking in this plan. The channel is currently maintained at an operational depth of 36 feet. In April 2023 the Port entered into an agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to complete a feasibility study of a deeper, wider channel; on June 23, 2026, the Chief of Engineers signed a Chief's Report recommending the project to Congress for authorization. The recommended project will deepen the channel from 36 feet to 46 feet and widen it from 300 feet to 350 feet.

The estimated cost is $548 million, cost-shared 75 percent federal and 25 percent state and local. Congressional authorization through the Water Resources Development Act is the next required step, followed by federal appropriations, execution of a project partnership agreement, preconstruction engineering and design, and construction. Securing authorization, the non-federal cost share, and initial construction funding is the Port's central objective for FY2028 through FY2032.

The Port also holds permitted capacity for physical expansion. In November 2017, USACE issued the Record of Decision for the Port of Gulfport Expansion Project (PGEP), following the Final Environmental Impact Statement. The project contemplates a 200-acre dredge and fill program allowing further expansion of the West Pier, North Harbor, and East Pier, together with a 4,000-linear-foot breakwater system. That authorization expires during this planning period, which makes converting permitted acreage into constructed, revenue-producing terminal a priority rather than an option. The Port is evaluating uses for that acreages include heavy-lift and advanced manufacturing.

In 2026 the Port was awarded $11.25 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration under the Port Infrastructure Development Program; combined with state, Port, and private match, the project represents approximately $24.5 million in improvements that will build capacity for intermodal rail service to and from the Midwest, increase capacity for movement of military equipment as a Strategic Seaport, improve operational resiliency, and connect terminals by rail.

In 2024 the Port received $2.6 million from the Mississippi Strategic Multimodal Investment Fund to enhance intermodal service. A $650,000 MDOT multimodal grant awarded in 2022 funded rehabilitation of approximately 4,100 track feet of East Pier rail, work now complete, which opens the East Pier to breakbulk rail movements and reduces truck traffic and emissions. The Port is also partnered with the Gulf Regional Planning Commission (GRPC) on a Port of Gulfport Traffic Mitigation and Congestion Study, funded by a $200,000 federal grant and a $50,000 Port match, and on a $275,000 USDOT Safe Streets for All planning grant awarded in 2024 addressing safety and access on the roadway network surrounding Port property.

The Port is updating its 2023 Strategic Master Plan, which established seven lines of effort to focus the Port's development. The economic impact analysis completed as part of that plan found that in 2022 the Port of Gulfport provided $3.8 billion in economic value to the region, contributed $62.5 million in local and state taxes, and supported 3,600 direct and 5,300 indirect jobs. That analysis will be refreshed as part of the master plan update so that FY2028–FY2032 performance is measured against a current baseline. It should be noted that these plans are dynamic and may be altered and revised depending upon market demands, the economy, and environmental regulatory agency reviews and approvals.

5. EXTERNAL/INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

The following are significant external factors which may impact the Port of Gulfport's performance:

1. Federal authorization and appropriations. Construction of the deepening and widening project depends on congressional authorization and sustained federal appropriations, neither of which the Port controls. Delay would push construction beyond this planning period and affect the Port's competitive position relative to deeper Gulf ports.
2. Global economic and trade conditions. Tariff and trade policy, currency movement, and growing conditions in Central America affect refrigerated cargo volumes, which remain a concentration in the Port's cargo mix.
3. Severe weather and natural disasters. Damage resulting from hurricanes and other natural disasters can severely impact existing and future Port facilities, and can also impact trading partners, resulting in negative performance. The cost and availability of property insurance on the Gulf Coast is an increasing operating pressure.
4. Competition. Neighboring Gulf ports are pursuing their own channel, terminal, and rail programs. The competitive nature of operating a port can have both negative and positive impacts on operations and revenue.
5. Carrier and railroad decisions. Ocean carrier alliance restructuring and Class I railroad service decisions can shift volumes independent of the Port's own performance.
6. Construction market conditions. Escalation in construction costs and limited marine contractor availability affect the scope and schedule of the capital program.
7. Labor. The availability of skilled maritime and construction labor, and the terms of collective bargaining agreements, affect terminal throughput and project delivery.

5.1 Internal Management Systems Used to Evaluate the Agency's Performance

The Port of Gulfport's Finance Department prepares monthly managerial financial and informational reports comparing actual performance against management objectives. The Port has effectively managed operations, ensuring the occurrence of timely debt payments; in September 2018 (Fiscal Year 2019), the Port extinguished all long-term debt and has operated debt-free since.

The Port's Board of Commissioners meets monthly to conduct business, establish policy, and review management's progress in meeting policy and program objectives. The Port has an annual audit performed by an independent, licensed CPA firm, conducted in accordance with Government Auditing Standards, and has had clean audits with no findings for the last 15 years.

Procurement is conducted under state law and, for federally funded work, under applicable federal grant requirements, including uniform administrative requirements and environmental and historic preservation review. The Strategic Master Plan and the associated capital plan are reviewed and updated on a recurring basis so that the goals in this document remain tied to a funded program of work.

6. AGENCY GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND MEASURES BY PROGRAM — FY 2028–FY 2032

Program 1: Port Operations

GOAL A: Continue to implement a diverse, effective, and engaging business recruitment strategy to benefit overall port operations.

Objective A.1. Port management will actively collaborate with current tenants to ensure their business needs are met, while also proactively recruiting new businesses to the Port of Gulfport.

Outcome: Increase (Decrease) in Number of Vessel Calls (%)

Outcome: Increase (Decrease) in Tons of Cargo Shipped (%)

Outcome: Increase (Decrease) in Number of Containers Handled (%)

Outcome: Increase (Decrease) in Number of Intermodal Tons Shipped (%)

Outcome: Increase (Decrease) in Number of Non-Traditional Freight Customers (#)

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Maintain current tenant agreements and recruit new tenants to the Port of Gulfport.

Output: Number of vessel calls, number of short tons, number of TEUs, tons of intermodal cargo

Efficiency: Percentage of Port property actively utilized for maritime and non-maritime activity, with a corresponding yield of revenue per acre

Explanatory: Availability of property, timeliness of infrastructure build-out, global pressures on tenant activities

A.1.2. STRATEGY: Diversify the cargo and tenant base beyond containerized refrigerated cargo, including breakbulk, project, and dry bulk cargo, roll-on/roll-off business, and uncrewed maritime and advanced manufacturing tenants.

Output: Number of new leases executed; acres and square footage newly leased

Efficiency: Percentage of operating revenue derived from sources other than the Port's largest cargo segment

Explanatory: Market demand, competitor pricing and capacity, availability of build-ready property

GOAL B: Modernize the Port's marine and landside infrastructure to accommodate larger vessels and higher throughput

Objective B.1. Advance the Gulfport Harbor deepening and widening project and deliver the Port's funded capital program on schedule and within budget.

Outcome: Federal milestones achieved (congressional authorization, project partnership agreement, appropriations received, construction commencement)

Outcome: Percentage of funded capital projects completed on schedule and within budget

Outcome: Authorized and maintained channel depth (46 feet)

B.1.1. STRATEGY: Work with the State and the congressional delegation to secure authorization, appropriations, and the non-federal cost share for the channel project.

Output: Milestones completed; dollars of federal appropriation received; dollars of non-federal share committed

Efficiency: Non-federal dollars committed per federal dollar secured

Explanatory: Congressional schedule, USACE work plan priorities, national competition for construction funding

B.1.2. STRATEGY: Deliver funded grant projects and convert permitted expansion acreage into revenue-producing terminal.

Output: Dollars of construction placed; acres brought to market-ready condition; track feet of rail rehabilitated or constructed

Efficiency: Cost per acre developed; grant dollars leveraged per Port dollar committed

Explanatory: Construction cost escalation, marine contractor availability, permit duration and regulatory review timelines

GOAL C: Expand the Port's role as the center of Mississippi's Blue Economy and strengthen the maritime workforce pipeline

Objective C.1. Invest in facilities, waterfront access, and partnerships that support uncrewed maritime systems, marine research, and the commercialization of higher education research.

Outcome: Increase in Blue Economy square footage occupied and acreage leased (%)

Outcome: Number of research and uncrewed vessels homeported, tested, or commissioned annually

Outcome: Number of jobs created by Blue Economy tenants

C.1.1. STRATEGY: Deliver the facilities and waterfront access required by uncrewed maritime and research tenants and sustain partnerships with Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning and local schools.

Output: Square feet of facility delivered or occupied; number of active partnerships; number of student outreach activities

Efficiency: Occupancy rate of Port-owned Blue Economy facilities

Explanatory: Federal defense procurement cycles, research funding availability, workforce supply

GOAL D: Operate as an efficient, transparent, and accountable steward of a State-owned asset

Objective D.1. Maintain clean independent audit results, open public governance, and a stable, skilled workforce.

Outcome: Number of findings reported in the annual independent audit

Outcome: Percentage of Port employees retained beyond five years

D.1.1. STRATEGY: Maintain internal controls, procurement practices, and public meeting and records procedures that meet state and federal requirements.

Output: Number of public Board meetings held; number of public records requests processed

Efficiency: Average time to respond to a public records request

Explanatory: Federal grant compliance obligations, changes in state procurement law, regional labor market conditions

Program 2: Debt Services

GOAL A: Prudently finance the Port's capital program and soundly manage any debt obligation of the Authority.

Objective A.1. Manage Port finances so that all obligations are met on time and any financing undertaken is structured within the Authority's capacity to repay.

Outcome: Outstanding bonded debt of the Authority; the Authority's bonded debt was eliminated in Fiscal Year 2019

Outcome: Percentage of debt service payments made on time

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Evaluate the full range of funding and financing structures available for major capital projects, including federal and state grants and programs, state financing, and obligations of the Authority, and structure any obligation issued by the Authority so that projected revenue is sufficient to meet its debt service.

Output: Dollars of federal, state, and private funding secured for capital projects; dollars of debt service paid

Efficiency: Ratio of external (federal, state, and private) funding to Authority funding in the capital program

Explanatory: Interest rate environment; State bonding capacity and legislative action; timing of federal authorization and appropriations; tenant lease terms