

POLICY AGENDA FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS

TOP PRIORITY: INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Surface Transportation Reauthorization:

As Congress begins to negotiate a new bill to fund the nation's ports, highways, bridges, rail, transit, and more, AAPA calls for infrastructure funding at least as high as the level provided in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Priority grant programs for the port industry include the Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP), Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG), Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI), Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE), and America's Marine Highways Program (AMHP).





WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT (WRDA)

Pass WRDA 2026 on time:

AAPA encourages Congress not to delay in passing this critical bill that governs how the nation’s channels and harbors will be dredged and maintained in the years to come. WRDA 2026 should include robust funding for construction, maintenance, and investigations. It should also consider common-sense reforms to expedite the speed at which the US Army Corps of Engineers studies and permits new projects.



OPPOSE TARIFFS

Do not expand tariffs on imports:

Tariffs are a tax on American companies and businesses that are passed on to consumers and will only exacerbate inflation. Tariffs will also reduce port authority revenue when ports need to expand infrastructure to accommodate anticipated cargo volume increases. Should the Federal Government determine that tariffs are necessary, any existing and expanded tariff revenue should be used to fund port infrastructure, which would strengthen our supply chains and have a deflationary effect on the economy.



PERMITTING REFORM

Update the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to expedite permitting reviews:

Strengthen actions taken in the Fiscal Responsibility Act to impose time and page limits on NEPA reviews and expand the use of Categorical Exclusions.

Expedite Department of Transportation permitting:

The port industry is grateful for DOT grants that fund critical projects to move cargo more efficiently, but DOT must institute reforms to get shovels in the ground faster. The Maritime Administration (MARAD) has often taken a backseat to other DOT modal agencies. DOT Office of the Secretary should consider reforms to approve grant contracts faster, conduct NEPA reviews faster, and give MARAD access to the same NEPA policies and categorical exclusions that other modal agencies have.



VESSEL SPEED RESTRICTIONS

Provide more resources for ports, pilots, and all maritime stakeholders to test and employ technologies to detect the presence of and avoid marine mammals.

Do not impose speed restrictions on vessels between 35–65 feet in federal navigation channels.

Account for the importance of navigation in the Gulf of Mexico when designating the Critical Habitat Designation of the Rice’s Whale.



ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

End the freeze on permitting reviews for LNG export terminals:

American LNG is in high demand around the world. As global conflicts affect energy supplies, we must be able to continue exporting energy to our allies and consumers abroad.

Do not rescind infrastructure funds from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and BIL:

These two pieces of legislation have led to the announcement of dozens of new projects across the country to expand cargo throughput and advance energy security in our supply chains. These awards and tax credits should come into effect as planned.

Transfer federal revenue raised from offshore lease sales to state governments to develop offshore wind port infrastructure, such as proposed in the RISEE Act (S.373-118/H.R.913-118).

Encourage the development of additional fuels in the maritime industry, including biofuels, LNG, hydrogen, methanol, ammonia, propane, and more. As competitors abroad develop innovative new maritime fueling infrastructure, the US should keep pace by building out new energy production and infrastructure.



SECURITY

Reintroduce and pass the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) SPACE Act (H.R.6409-118):

Securing the nation’s ports of entry is a Federal Government responsibility. However, CBP has recently required local and state port authorities to fund costly upgrades to inspection facilities, including office space, parking structures, and computer equipment. This bill aims to ensure that the existing Merchandise Processing Fee covers CBP’s necessary expenses at ports, eliminating the financial burden on local port authorities.

Provide sufficient appropriations for CBP staffing:

Congress does not provide sufficient funding to hire the staff CBP needs to inspect incoming and outbound cargo from America’s ports. With a wave of officer retirements incoming, and cargo volumes only expected to increase in the years to come, Congress must provide funding to hire the staff necessary to inspect cargo at port terminals.

Expand the Coast Guard’s Cyber Protection Teams (CPTs):

Currently, only three CPTs are available to conduct voluntary cybersecurity assessments at ports, with wait times exceeding one year. To address this gap, the Coast Guard requires additional funding to increase staffing for these exercises.





DOMESTIC MANUFACTURING

Expedite and provide transparency into the Build America Buy America (BABA) waiver process.

The BIL strengthened BABA requirements that federal grant recipients purchase infrastructure components from US manufacturers. Unfortunately, many types of port equipment are simply not made in America. When ports apply for a BABA waiver, they typically face months-long reviews by the Made in America Office, which does not provide information on the expected review timeline. This leaves ports in the difficult position of managing expectations with private project partners and community stakeholders. The Made in America Office should be required to complete waiver reviews in two months.

Incentivize the manufacture of American-built ship-to-shore (STS) cranes, for which there are currently no American manufacturers. The vast majority of the world’s STS cranes are manufactured in China, which takes advantage of state-owned corporations and subsidized industrial inputs to undercut competitors’ prices. For an American company to make an STS crane that ports can afford, the government will need to provide financial assistance. Any program to subsidize STS cranes could also include other port equipment without a strong manufacturing base in the US, including rail-mounted and rubber-tired gantry cranes.



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