

New port equipment should arrive in Baton Rouge by summer 2017

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Specialized equipment that will make it easier to load shipping containers onto barges at the Port of Greater Baton Rouge for trips to New Orleans should be in place by the third quarter of 2017, the port's executive director said Tuesday.

Jay Hardman said the plan is to put out a public bid for the equipment in January. Because the loading cranes are so specialized, Hardman said they practically have to be custom fabricated.

"If you were to watch them put a box on a barge with the existing crane — it's painful," Hardman said after an awards ceremony for the \$1.75 million grant the U.S. Department of Transportation gave to the Baton Rouge and New Orleans ports. "You would want to go out and help them."

While the current cranes can load about 15 shipping containers an hour onto a barge, the new equipment is capable of loading 25 to 30 containers an hour, said Richard Teubner, vice president of operations for SEACOR AMH, which launched the container-on-barge service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans in late July.

About 100 to 200 containers a week are being shipped on the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to New Orleans every week. Empty barges are coming down from Memphis. They then go to Dow Chemical, Shintech and ExxonMobil, where they're filled with plastic pellets. Those loaded barges are shipped to New Orleans where they are distributed to plants in Europe, Asia and South America.



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Specialized cranes being ordered by the Port of Greater Baton Rouge to load barges bound for New Orleans will be capable of loading 25 to 30 cargo containers an hour. The port's existing cranes handle about 15 an hour.

Since the containers are being shipped by barge, they can be loaded to capacity. Teubner said containers that are trucked to New Orleans can't be filled to capacity, so that they don't exceed weight limits for highways.

Paul "Chip" Jaenichen, the U.S. Department of Transportation's maritime administrator, said the partnership between the ports, the chemical plants and SEACOR, is the

sort of public-private collaboration that's necessary.

"This is an exciting supply chain solution that uses the Mississippi River," he said.

Gary LaGrange, executive director of the Port of New Orleans, said the state saves \$118 for each round trip a shipping container makes down the Mississippi River instead of along Interstate 10. That's based on the wear and tear on state high-

ways. LaGrange joked about how he got stuck in traffic on the way to Tuesday's ceremony and he should have taken a barge to get to the Baton Rouge port.

"There are 32 ports in Louisiana and there's no reason why many of them can't be involved in similar operations," he said.

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