

How important are marine cargo shipments to the Coastal Bend economy?

According to a June 2016 economic impact study conducted for the Port of Corpus Christi, in 2015:

- 103.5 million tons of domestic and foreign waterborne cargo moved via the Port’s public and private marine terminals, creating 13,770 full-time jobs.
- An additional 14,456 jobs in the regional economy were supported by the purchases of the 13,770 directly employed individuals.
- The direct local purchases of the firms employing these 13,770 workers made \$1.6 billion of local and in-state purchases in 2015, creating an additional 16,212 indirect jobs in the local economy.

Domestic maritime cargo, the majority of which is transported by barge via the Gulf Intrastate Waterway, is critical to creating and supporting thousands of local jobs and contributing billions of dollars to the local economy.

How does fleeting work and why is it necessary?

Fleeting is a term that refers to the mooring of barges.

There is a limited amount of dock and fleet space within the Port of Corpus Christi, restricting how many barges the Port can accommodate at a time. The tow boats pushing these unmanned barges commonly do not know of dock availability until they are within 6-8 hours of the harbor. Barges awaiting space inside the Port must therefore “line-up” in the channel until their turn to enter the Port.

Until the LAC Fleet began operations, waiting barges were often “grounded” against the shoreline by tow boats, sometimes for days at a time. Grounding barges is far less safe for personnel, cargo, or the environment than mooring the barges using a fleet. Grounding a barge against the shore requires constant attention and vigilance by tow boat captains who must constantly “steer” and push the barge to prevent it from drifting and becoming a navigational hazard. While grounded, the hull of the barge grinds against the shore, contributing to accelerated deterioration and erosion, and tow boats constantly churn the sand and seagrass beneath their props.

Since 2015, LAC Fleet has provided the option for barges to “tie up” to moorings (also referred to as ‘dolphins’), turn off their engines, and await their turn in the Port – a far safer alternative for crews, cargo and the environment than grounding these vessels along the shoreline.

Between 2011 and 2015, barge traffic into and out of the Port of Corpus Christi increased by 44 percent, and with many new Port projects and commercial operations commencing, barge traffic and congestion will continue to grow. LAC Fleet provides the best way to ensure the safety of these vessels, their crews, their cargo, and our shorelines.

This is why the Aransas County Navigation District, which is responsible for the conservation of natural resources and wildlife habitats of the area where the fleet is located, has expressed its official support for the operations of the LAC Fleet as a far preferable alternative to grounding barges against the shorelines.

Why is fleeting barges a safer alternative to grounding barges?

Although hundreds of barges are grounded every year as they wait to enter the Port, grounding barges is far less safe for personnel, cargo, and the environment than mooring the barges using a fleet. Grounding a barge against the shore requires constant attention and vigilance by tow boat captains, who keep their engines running day and night as they constantly “steer” and push the barge to prevent it from drifting or moving during tidal changes and weather. While grounded, the hulls of the barges grind against the shore, while the tow boat props churn, contributing to accelerated deterioration and erosion.

In addition, weather, high winds, currents, tides, channel traffic, and human error are all variables that must be constantly managed while a barge is grounded – variables that increase the potential for an accident or a spill. As barge traffic continues to expand, the greater this potential becomes. Mooring barges using a fleet is the best way to ensure the safety of the vessels, their crews, their cargo, and the environment.

LAC Fleet provides moorings located in a minimum of 12 feet of water, which allows barges to “tie up,” and tow boats to turn off their engines, rather than expend the 1,000 gallons of fuel per day required to ground a barge. The fleet also keeps moored vessels away from San Jose Island, protecting the sea grasses and shoreline. In addition, because the moorings are located at least 200 feet from shore, the shoreline and the channel remain available for fishing and recreational use.

Where is the Lydia Ann Channel Fleet located and why?

The Lydia Ann Channel Fleet is located across from the Port Aransas Light House just off the south bank of San Jose Island between beacons 97 and 101. The fleet consists of over 8,500 linear feet of steel moorings at least 200 feet from the shore, driven a minimum of 30 feet below the mud line with a minimum controlled depth of 12 feet of water. There are no buoys or lines to shore that will damage or ground equipment or interfere with recreational activities, such as fishing.

Located on the preferred route for 85% of the inland marine traffic heading to the Port of Corpus Christi, the LAC Fleet is only a few hours away from the harbor, yet out of the way of other barge and ship traffic.

LAC Fleet evaluated 10 potential sites and selected Lydia Ann Channel because it is the only location that satisfies a series of critical standards, including a sufficient length and depth, an ability to operate without impeding other ship and barge navigation, the ability to moor vessels at least 200 feet from shore, convenient access to the Port of Corpus Christi, sufficient protection from hazardous weather, and minimal impacts on wetlands, wildlife habitat and the shoreline.

Where do the barges come from and what are they carrying?

Approximately two-thirds of the barges that use the LAC Fleet are empty and awaiting entry into the port to be loaded with cargo. Loaded barges carry a variety of cargoes such as petrochemicals, chemicals, agricultural liquids, grains, rock and sand.

The majority of the barges come from the Lower Mississippi River (Baton Rouge/New Orleans), Lake Charles, Port Arthur, Houston, & Texas City refiners. Some of the barges transit between Brownsville to New Orleans, Victoria, or Point Comfort areas. Some cargoes even transit between Corpus Christi and Chicago.

What activities are conducted while barges are moored at LAC Fleet?

Activities include minor maintenance and repairs to the vessels and barges, fueling, crew changes, dock preparation, cargo sampling by refinery inspectors, as well as required equipment and safety inspections by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Do the barges moored at the LAC Fleet interfere with recreational activities, such as fishing?

No. Barges are moored at least 200 feet from shore and do not interfere with fishing. Fishermen are welcome to fish between the shore and the moorings, and boats may drive between the barges and the shore. The moorings cover a distance of 8,000 feet, approximately half the distance of the shoreline on one side of the Lydia Ann Channel, which is approximately 2,000 feet wide.

What kind of spill response plan or security is in place at LAC Fleet?

Each vessel parked at LAC Fleet is required by the U.S. Coast Guard to have an emergency spill plan, customized for the cargo they carry. LAC Fleet would be called upon to serve as a first responder should an accident or spill occur, however, and we are always prepared to deploy the spill boom we keep on site.

Over its first year of operation the LAC facility has responded to multiple requests for emergency assistance from barge tows that have experienced loss of power or other events that presented the potential for out of control barge tows. For example, LAC Fleet boats were able to prevent a loose tow from colliding with the Corpus Christi channel bridge.

In addition, LAC Fleet is monitored 24/7 by the U.S. Coast Guard in compliance with security regulations. Grounded barges are not monitored by the Coast Guard.

Is mooring barges at the LAC Fleet harmful to seagrasses in the shallow waters of the Redfish Bay Scientific Area?

No. The LAC Fleet helps protect seagrasses by providing an alternative to grounding barges against the shorelines of the Lydia Ann Channel. The Redfish Bay State Scientific Area (RBSSA) was established by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department to protect seagrasses from being uprooted by boat propellers in shallow areas popular for fishing, not in the deeper waters of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway designed and used for decades to move maritime commerce into and out of the Port of Corpus Christi. The “state scientific area” designation does not and has never precluded the use of the channel for maritime commerce. The barges, tow boats and moorings do NOT operate in the shallow areas designated by the RBSSA as sensitive seagrass bed areas.

Furthermore, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department [website](#): “The no-uprooting regulation does not close any portion of the Texas coast to any type of water craft. In fact, the no-uprooting regulation is specifically intended to preserve access to all areas of the coast while protecting valuable seagrass habitat. Boaters may access any area along the Texas coast, but will need to be aware of water depth and the capabilities of their boat to avoid damaging seagrasses.”

What government agencies are involved in the permitting and oversight of the LAC Fleet and how has the permitting process unfolded?

There are many government organizations involved in the approval and oversight of the fleet. The three that figure most prominently are the Texas General Land Office (which grants leases for commercial projects on state-owned submerged land), the U.S Army Corps of Engineers (which provides engineering services and coastal protection of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway), and the U.S. Coast Guard (which is responsible for maritime law enforcement, homeland security, and the maintenance of intra-coastal navigation aids).

LAC Fleet has a 20-year lease agreement with the General Land Office for use of the submerged land off the south bank of San Jose Island between beacons 97 and 101. Prior to installing the mooring structures (dolphins), the company was instructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to apply for a “Letter of Permission” before starting construction. The company did so and received the USACE’s approval to begin construction in January 2015. Construction soon followed, and fleeting operations began in March 2015. In September 2016, the USACE revoked the letter of permission for the construction, which had been completed 1.5 years before.

The USACE has required the company to provide a “Removal and Restoration Statement of Alternatives,” which explains the options available for removing or maintaining the fleet.