



PORT HAWAII: OUR COMMERCIAL HARBOR SYSTEM

Hawaii, its people, and its history are tied to the ocean as a source of sustenance, transport, and commerce. Over 3,000 years ago, a group of Polynesians set sail on wooden double-hulled canoes for the Hawaiian Archipelago equipped with knowledge of the currents, winds, and constellations as wayfinding tools. The cargo these voyagers carried included cuttings and seeds of plants for food, medicine, fabric, and cordage that would be vital for their survival in their new home. Following the settlement of Hawaii, there is evidence of trade and transport among Polynesian communities across the Pacific Ocean for centuries until the ocean carried new explorers from Europe to Hawaii in the late 18th century. Western contact meant the arrival of new “cargo” to the islands – metals, firearms, textiles, and plants and animals new to Hawaii’s ecosystem. Soon thereafter, Hawaii became a central point in the Pacific whaling industry through the middle of the 1800s. As Hawaii’s economy transitioned from whaling to agriculture, ships that carried immigrant labor to Hawaii’s shores and ocean transport of sugar and pineapple became the crux of the new economy. Cruise liners bringing tourists to the islands also spurred Hawaii’s tourism industry that remains the state’s primary economic engine. Hawaii continues to rely on the goods that are carried on the ocean to sustain its people and the ocean remains Hawaii’s lifeline.

Hawaii’s isolated island geography underscores the significance of ocean cargo transport as the lifeline and only viable means to serve and support every facet of the local economy, including tourism, construction, national defense, agriculture, and all other industries. An estimated 80% of all goods consumed in Hawaii are imported, and 98.6% of the imported goods arrive through the commercial harbor system. Hawaii’s residents heavily depend on its commercial harbor system and a disruption of ocean transport services will severely impair the state economy.

The State of Hawaii Department of Transportation Harbors Division (“HDOT Harbors”) is tasked with the mission of effectively managing and operating the statewide commercial harbors system that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods to, from, and between the Hawaiian Islands.

Hawaii’s commercial harbor system, Port Hawaii, operates as a hub-and-spoke system with Honolulu Harbor on the island of Oahu (where 68% of Hawaii’s 1.4 million residents live) as the hub and primary entry point for incoming cargo from the continental United States and foreign countries. From Honolulu, cargo is distributed to five other islands served by seven commercial harbor facilities on six islands. The two harbors on Oahu are responsible for generating 78% of the system’s operating revenue.

In Fiscal Year 2017, 1.5 million TEUs of containerized cargo, 265,000 automobiles, 4,439 tons of bulk cargo, 31,263 barrels of liquid cargo (through pipelines), and 1.08 million passengers moved through Port Hawaii.

Port Hawaii is a self-sufficient and self-funded enterprise that generates revenue from harbor use fees and charges to cover operating and maintenance costs as well as capital improvement projects.