Presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Study on Supporting, Diversifying, and Modernizing Quebec and Canada's Ports
March 23, 2026

Thank you, Chair and members of the Committee.

I am pleased to be here on behalf of the Association of Canadian Port Authorities, representing Canada's 17 port authorities. Canada's ports are essential national critical infrastructure and will play a central role in delivering on the country's trade diversification and economic resilience objectives.

Let me focus on four key areas.

First, financial agility.

Canada's port authorities are facing a significant infrastructure gap, estimated at between $15 and $21.5 billion by 2040. Unlike many other parts of the transportation system, port authorities do not receive ongoing public funding. Port authorities rely on their own revenues, access to federal programs, and private financing to build and maintain critical infrastructure.

The challenge is that the current borrowing framework from1998, is too rigid and does not reflect commercial realities. Borrowing limits are fixed, tied to outdated ratios, and can take years to adjust through federal approvals. That creates delays, increases project costs, and makes it harder to attract private capital.

There is a clear opportunity here. By introducing higher and more dynamic borrowing limits that reflect the actual earnings capacity and potential of port authorities, the federal government can unlock significant private investment, provide greater financial certainty, and reduce reliance on unpredictable public funding.

Port authorities are already working with Transport Canada on solutions, but some aspects of the port authority model itself must be improved. If ports are expected to deliver on Canada's trade diversification agenda, they must be equipped with modern financial tools to do so.

Second, governance and board appointments.

Canada's port governance model strikes the right balance between local and regional stakeholder needs and federal oversight, but the federal appointment process is creating real challenges. In some cases, board vacancies have remained unfilled for years. That affects continuity, reduces effectiveness, and slows decision making at a

time when ports are expected to move quickly on major infrastructure and trade priorities.

There is a straightforward fix. Bill C-33 previously included a provision that would have introduced a 12-month deadline for federal appointments. We believe that approach should be reinstated in future legislative efforts.

Timely and transparent appointments will strengthen governance, improve investor confidence, and ensure that boards are able to provide the leadership needed to deliver on national objectives.

Third, unlocking partnerships and expanding permitted activities.

Modernization is not only about infrastructure, but also about giving port authorities the flexibility to operate in a more commercial and competitive environment.

Today, legislative limitations restrict the scope of activities that port authorities can undertake. They limit their ability to capitalize subsidiaries, participate in joint ventures, and pursue partnerships that could strengthen their financial position.

Expanding the definition of permitted activities and enabling greater participation in partnerships would allow ports to develop complementary revenue streams and reinvest those revenues into core marine infrastructure.

This is not about moving away from their core mandate. It is about strengthening it. Greater flexibility would improve financial resilience, accelerate project delivery, and better position Canadian ports to attract private capital in support of public objectives.

Finally, trade corridor investments.

We strongly support the Trade Diversification Corridors Fund and the federal government's focus on building more resilient and diversified supply chains. Ports are central nodes in these corridors, and investments must be coordinated across marine, rail, road, and inland logistics systems.

We were also encouraged to hear Minister MacKinnon note in his recent appearance before this Committee that the government recognizes the importance not only of major port projects, but also of smaller, less well-known initiatives that are critical to overall system performance. That recognition is important.

It is important that funding supports not only major, high-profile projects, but also smaller, high-impact initiatives that address bottlenecks and unlock regional trade opportunities. The program reflects this with a targeted stream for high-impact projects,

a collaborative stream to address specific, and an open call to address regional infrastructure gaps.

In closing, Canada's ability to diversify trade and strengthen economic resilience will depend on having ports that are financially agile, well-governed, operationally flexible, and supported by coordinated infrastructure investment.

We appreciate the Committee's leadership on this study and would welcome your support in advancing these practical and necessary reforms.

Thank you.