Securing Canada's Economic Future through Canada's Port Authorities

Association of Canadian Port Authorities
Association des administrations portuaires canadiennes

Canada's 17 port authorities play an essential role in our country's economic security and competitiveness, and we are committed to working together to grow and diversify trade.

International trade, which accounts for over half of Canada's GDP depends on efficient port infrastructure. Ports are essential to Canada's economic security, with marine shipping handling 18% of exports ($139 billion) and 24% of imports ($181 billion). Since 80% of global goods move by sea, ensuring that Canada's ports remain competitive is critical to long-term economic health.

As U.S. tariffs and retaliatory measures continue to burden supply chains, Canada's trade situation remains dangerously vulnerable to policy shifts by a single market. Canada's economic future depends on trade diversification, which in turn requires modern, efficient, and well-funded port infrastructure.

Canada has a critical opportunity to strengthen its trade infrastructure at a time when it's more essential than ever. Port authorities across the country have identified over $10 billion in strategic upgrades and expansions needed by 2040 to unlock trade growth, enhance efficiency, and modernize facilities. Realizing this vision will require securing funding for the 61% of planned projects that have yet to be financed, and streamlined review and permitting processes so that projects can move more swiftly from planning to delivery. With the right investments and policy improvements, Canada can position itself to meet growing global demand and advance its international trade ambitions.

Our ability to expand and diversify trade can be accelerated through greater financial flexibility for ports, improved regulatory processes for project reviews/approvals, and enhancements to border security and trade facilitation.

Left: Port Oshawa
Right: Port of Montreal, Contrecœur

Greater CPA Agility to Support Canada's Economic Security

To help Canada realize its economic potential and expand global trade, port authorities must become more agile. This requires faster project approvals and greater financial flexibility. Ports need greater autonomy to make key investment decisions, expand capacity, and finance revenue-generating projects. Simplifying borrowing rules for Canada Port Authorities (CPAs) would help attract private capital and reduce reliance on federal funding.

Canadian ports receive 60% less funding per unit of traffic than U.S. ports and face more complex regulations. Prolonged approval timelines drive up costs, delay construction, and reduce investment impact. Streamlining approvals—while maintaining environmental safeguards—would enable ports to advance essential projects more quickly.

"We must expand our roads, rail, airports, port infrastructure and new pipelines — all made with Canadian steel — in order to transport our goods and resources safely and efficiently across our country."

Candace Laing, CEO,
Canadian Chamber of Commerce

Granting CPAs more flexibility to secure private investment, form strategic partnerships, and collaborate with other CPAs would better equip them to manage and grow these vital trade assets.

While shippers depend on a connected supply chain, current laws confine port authorities to port lands and restrict their ability to work with partners through subsidiaries or joint ventures.

The now defunct Bill C-33 would have provided CPAs with some improved tools for collaboration, but these and much more must be pursued by Canada's next government. Key reforms include allowing CPAs to sell shares in subsidiaries to private investors to finance major infrastructure projects.

What can be done now

- Modernize and streamline CPA borrowing rules
- Reevaluate the need for a strict debt coverage ratio to reflect changing roles in economic demands.
- Speed up infrastructure project review and permitting timelines
- Create a dedicated federal trade infrastructure program, with eligibility for capital intensive equipment like cranes, to improve productivity and global competitiveness and to fill gaps that private investment cannot address.

A shipment of Ontario corn being loaded at the Port of Hamilton for export to global markets.

Recommendations

Long-term:

- Enable CPAs to better collaborate through joint ventures, shared projects, and joint procurement with other CPAs and partners.
- Give CPAs flexibility to capitalize subsidiaries without earning caps, aligning investment limits with the market.
- Allow CPAs to hold equity stakes in Special Purpose Entities and joint ventures with private partners for port-related activities.
- Put time limits on the federal board director appointment of CPA directors to support good governance.

Break bulk lumber shipment being loaded at the Port of Saguenay.

National Security and Port Resiliency

As Canadians focus on economic stability, the smooth operation of Canada's ports is essential to growth, trade, and quality of life. Canada's Port Authorities (CPAs) keep supply chains moving and trade commitments on track. While responsible for securing federal port infrastructure, CPAs lack the enforcement authority, waterside security capacity, and access to intelligence needed for full effectiveness. Limited information sharing with partner agencies hinders response to security incidents.

Rising vehicle theft and digital system integration highlight the urgency of smart, secure infrastructure. CPAs face coordination challenges with multiple law enforcement bodies, complicating unified security efforts. Expanding clearances, enabling secure information exchange, and training CPA personnel in data handling are key steps forward.

Enhancing the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is also critical. With its dual role in security and trade facilitation, CBSA needs more staff, better technology, and reliable resources. Strengthening inspections and enforcement will support national security and trade diversification.

Targeted investments in infrastructure, new terminals, and updated marine security protocols will boost supply chain reliability. These reforms will enhance port resilience, global trade ties, and Canada's economic security.

What can be done now

- Ensure that Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and law enforcement have the resources and support to fulfil their roles for security at ports.
- Ensure that CBSA's vital role for national security is accompanied by a strong mandate to support new opportunities to expand and diversify trade.
- Improve the requirements and provisions around Marine Transportation Security Clearances.

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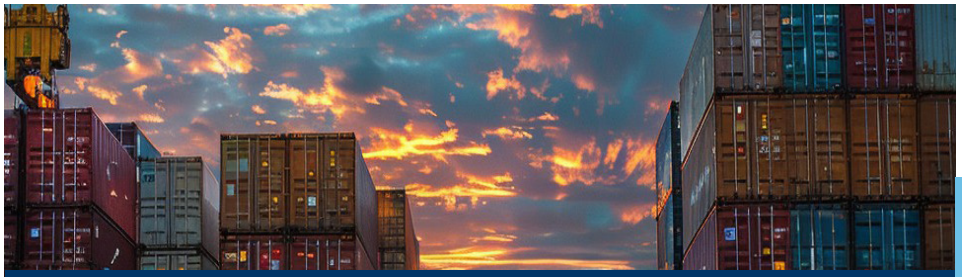
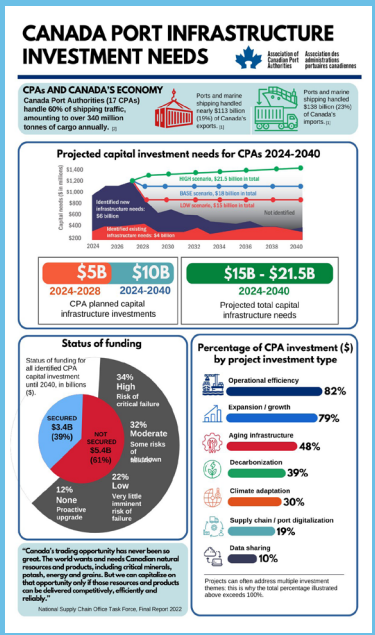


Recommendations

Long-term

- Review and modernize CBSA's security and trade facilitation mandate, to ensure the agency is well suited to the rapidly evolving security and trade demands of today.
- Fully Integrate CPAs into real-time government and enforcement information-sharing on port and supply chain security.
- Clarify and communicate roles and responsibilities of federal agencies and police of jurisdiction for waterside and landside port security
- Support resilient and secure port infrastructure through a dedicated fund for transportation infrastructure.



Infographic explains short and long-term investments, urgency of funding needs and investments by region and type.

Available as a PDF:
https://acpa-aapc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Infographic_EN.pdf

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