

What is the proposed Utah Inland Port and how could it impact Utah?

In the final hours of its 2018 session the Utah legislature created the Utah Inland Port Authority. It's an appointed body with development control over 16,000 acres of land mostly within the boundaries of Salt Lake City¹. It has the power to take 90% of future tax revenue to support development in the area and to hand out as tax breaks to developers.²

Generally, an inland port is a freight storage and transfer facility. Cargo comes in and out and may be stored. It's also intended to have a customs clearance zone, so cargo can be shipped to sea ports and put directly on ships. The primary modes of transport are trucks, trains, and airplanes. In anticipation of increased truck traffic from the proposed port, Utah legislators are entertaining allowing trucks on Legacy Parkway, an 11-mile stretch of roadway next to Great Salt Lake that is currently free of big-rigs.

Currently within the Port Authority's 'jurisdictional area' there is an intermodal truck to train facility operated by Union Pacific, but warehouse developers want another one.

The only other Class A railroad with trackage rights on parts of the Union Pacific mainline is the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF). So, they're the only prospect for ownership and operation of a second railyard. BNSF built a similar facility in Kansas that cost \$250 million and was heavily subsidized with public money. A second railyard would 'supersize' the operations of the proposed port.

Recently, in the 2019 legislative session, the powers of the Utah Inland Port Authority were expanded in a newly troubling way. Now the Port Authority can create project areas and distribution hubs throughout the state, collecting future tax revenue to hand out to developers and others to support development in rural locations. Fossil Fuel exports were specifically mentioned by the sponsor of the legislation, Rep. Frances Gibson, who is also a Port Authority Board member.

What are the problems associated with the proposed polluting port?

It's a terrible place to build

Approximately 10,000 acres of the land the Port Authority controls is undeveloped. A big reason being that it's not a good place to build. Adjacent to Great Salt Lake and wetlands, it has a high water table, very sandy soil, and is upwind of Salt Lake City. It also has a high concentration of mosquitos and other insects' humans find annoying, but birds love to eat.

It will make our air quality worse

Research shows that sea ports and inland ports are enormous emitters of pollution. There are no 'clean' ports in the U.S. (or the world for that matter) and data shows that they are major contributors to local air pollution. Ports run on diesel and diesel emits tons of pollution.

For example, because overwhelming scientific evidence shows pollution from ports in Southern California have created a 'diesel death zone', people are organizing and litigating to clean up these

¹ Small pieces of land from Magna, and West Valley City were also included.

² The other 10% is for development of affordable housing.

emissions. The Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach have committed to becoming zero emissions ports over the next 17 years at an estimated cost of \$14 billion.³

There is every reason to believe that emissions from the proposed Utah inland port will have a devastating impact on air quality along the Wasatch front. Currently this area does not meet federal Clean Air Act standards. The state recently submitted a plan to enable compliance with federal standards, but it doesn't take into the potential emissions that come with an inland port.

Damage to quality of life in neighboring communities

In addition to harm from air pollution, the communities closest to the proposed port will suffer from increased traffic congestion, noise and light pollution. Salt Lake City schools will suffer from these impacts, especially those on the west side, with the additional insult being that the Port Authority plans to take the estimated more than \$581 million in new tax revenue that would otherwise go to the Salt Lake City School District⁴. Overall the amount of new tax revenue the proposed port would claim control of could be more than \$1.4 billion. Leaving Salt Lake City, which is already struggling to provide services city wide in an even more difficult position.

Destruction of wildlife habitat and harm to Great Salt Lake ecosystem

The primary land proposed for development is next to a flood plain and consists of playas and uplands, with canals meandering through. Wildlife in the area include a herd of 90 antelope, deer, coyote, red fox, raptors of all sorts, burrowing owls and a host of migratory birds – among others.

Because the main development intersects the migratory bird flyway, and these birds are using Great Salt Lake in huge numbers (sometimes almost entire populations of bird species show up) there are numerous concerns about the harmful impact an inland port could have on migratory birds – from air pollution, to light pollution, to noise, to habitat loss (including mosquito abatement).

Making climate change worse

Based on statements made by the Port Authority Board members who are legislators, the legislation just passed expanding the port authority's jurisdiction, is intended in part, to create fossil fuel transloading hubs in rural communities. The legislation allows the Port Authority to subsidize development of these facilities.

Concerns with the fossil fuel hub plan include the negative impacts on air and water quality rural communities will face from these transloading facilities; the fact that most fossil fuels being extracted in Utah are from public lands; and, the last thing we should be doing on the verge of a climate catastrophe is increasing fossil fuel-based greenhouse gas emissions.

Lack of Accountability and Planning

Underlying the whole ill-conceived idea of the proposed port is a lack of accountability and planning by port supporters. The Port Board couldn't even hold its first regularly scheduled meeting due to discovery

³ <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ports-clean-air-20170719-story.html>

⁴ <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/900022824/with-dollar580m-at-stake-salt-lake-city-school-district-wants-voice-on-inland-port-board.html>

of numerous conflicts of interest by proposed board members. They also have no official plan for the proposed port but went ahead with legislation expanding their ability to use public funds for hubs in rural communities.

What can you do?

Educate yourself about the issue and get involved – the good news is that community concern is having an impact on this ill-conceived project.

The Port Authority Board meets once a month and allows for general public comment, as well as comment on action items. Members of the public are allowed 3 minutes each. By testifying before the Port Board, community members are creating a public record of concern. You can also register your concerns through written comments.

There are informational resources and meeting information on the www.StopthePollutingPort.org coalition website, as well as at the Utah Inland Port Jurisdiction's official website www.UtahInlandPort.org.

Tell your elected officials and candidates for office what you think – local elected officials also need to hear our concerns. Reach out to your state legislators, county and city representatives and candidates for office.

Write a Letter to the Editor or op-Ed – getting a letter, or op-Ed published in your local newspaper can help raise community awareness and influence decision makers. Also, if you use social media help spread the word there.

People power is making a difference in the effort to stop the harm from the proposed polluting port!