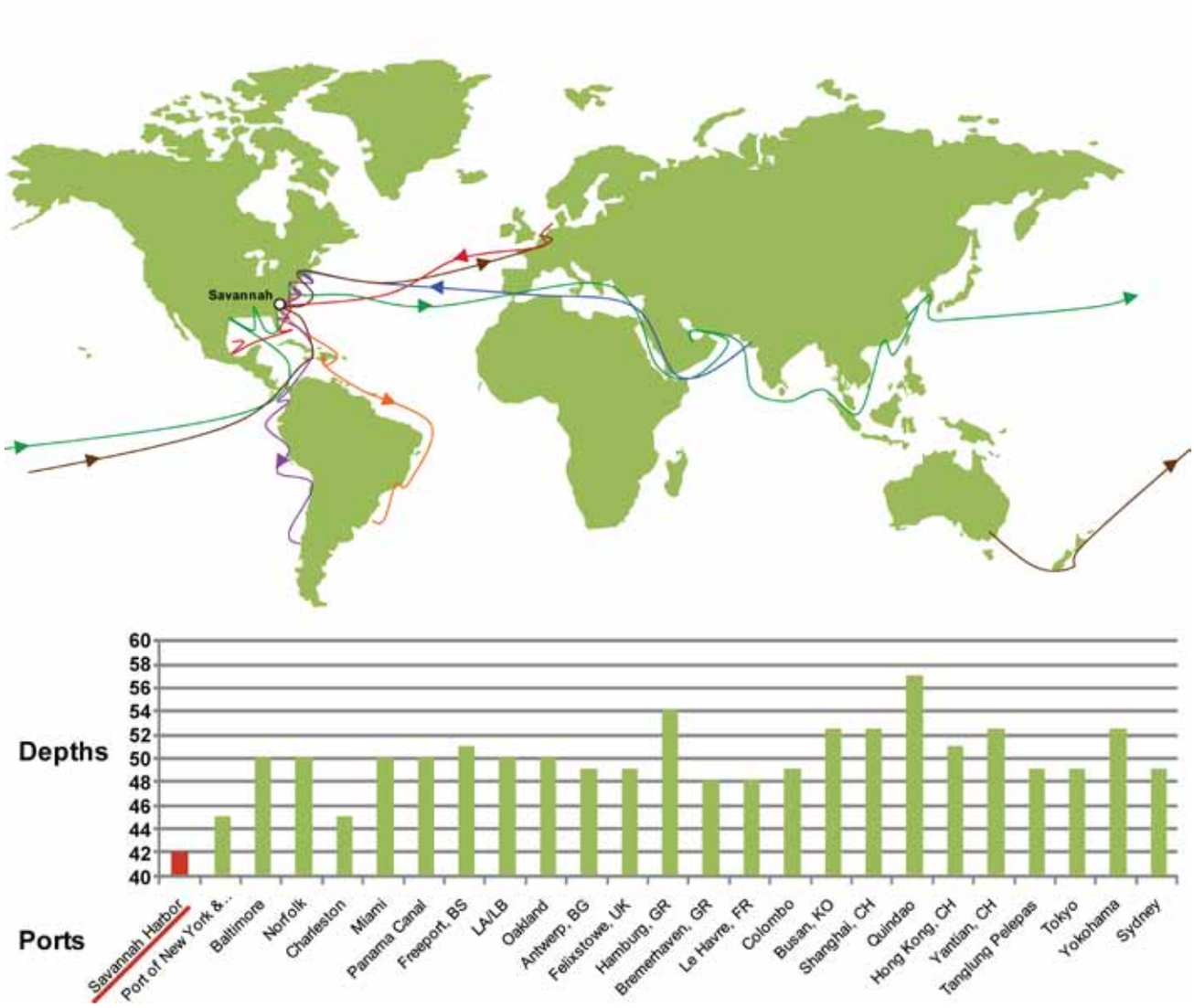
Balancing the three "Es" of expansion
Engineering, environment and economics

Savannah Harbor is the fastest growing and fourth largest port by container volume in the nation and second largest on the East Coast, according to Port Import Export Reporting Service compiled by the Journal of Commerce. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District last deepened the harbor from 38 to 42 feet in 1994.

Since the last expansion, container shipping has significantly increased. To accommodate the increased containerized cargo, the world's shipping vessels continue to increase in capacity, size, and efficiency. However, Savannah Harbor has the shallowest depth of the top 10 containerized cargo ports in the United States. Most of the ports on the trade route that include Savannah are deeper than 42 feet, with the majority at a depth of 50 feet or greater. Harbor improvements, particularly deeper channels, reduce waterborne transportation costs and enhance efficiency in national and international trade.

Major Trading Routes and Port Depths



While Savannah has the fastest growing container port in the nation, its harbor has the shallowest depth in comparison with its trade partners, which limits transportation efficiencies.

Request for Expansion

The state of Georgia is seeking a deeper port, in particular to prepare for expansion of the Panama Canal set for completion in 2014. The expansion will shorten the trip from Asia to the U.S. East Coast for larger ships with deeper drafts.

On Nov. 15, 2010, after in-depth study and analysis, the Savannah District released the Draft General Re-evaluation Report (GRR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on a proposal to deepen the Savannah Harbor from its current depth of 42 feet to a maximum depth of 48 feet. The GRR and EIS identify the tentatively selected 47-foot "National Economic Development" Plan and the "Maximum Authorized Depth" Plan of 48 feet. A single plan will be recommended in the final report.

The congressionally-authorized study reflects an extensive analysis of the engineering alternatives, environmental issues, and economic costs and benefits of deepening the Savannah Harbor and shipping channel. Funded by the federal government and the state of Georgia, the study examined the characteristics of future international shipping fleets, current and future trade routes, and the capacity of the Garden City terminal on the Savannah River. The articles in this issue provide an in-depth explanation of the engineering, environmental, and economic aspects of the project.

Cargo is loaded and unloaded from container ships at the Georgia Ports Authority Garden City Terminal. *Photo courtesy of Savannah Morning News.*

The way ahead

The Savannah District held a public workshop Dec. 15 to give the public a chance to learn more about the project, ask questions, and provide comments (See pages 14-15). The public was given 60 days to comment on the report, and their input will be considered and become part of the official record. The Record of Decision, issued by the Corps' Chief of Engineers, is scheduled to be released in December 2011 and will state what actions will be taken.

By Sandra Hudson, Corporate Communications Office

Frequently Asked Questions

The Corps answers questions about the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project:

Why is the Corps of Engineers involved in a navigation plan like the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project?

- Congress charged the Corps of Engineers (USACE) with the responsibility for improving harbors under the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899. That responsibility remains with the Corps of Engineers. As part of this mission, we must ensure that commerce has safe and adequate access to ports throughout the USA.
- Congress provides funding to the Corps to study potential harbor improvements around the country. These studies provide Congress with information to decide which projects are justified and would best benefit the nation.
- The Savannah District is the long term operations and maintenance agent for the harbor.
- The non-Federal sponsor for the project, the Georgia Department of Transportation, participates in the project by sharing the costs of deepening the harbor.

What is the Corps of Engineers current role in the expansion project?

- Congress charged the Corps with evaluating all practical expansion alternatives. We began with looking at alternatives to deepening the harbor. We found that none of those preliminary measures would provide the same level of transportation efficiencies as would deepening up to the Garden City Terminal. The Corps analyzed each harbor deepening alternative—dredging to depths from 42 to 48 feet—in detail using computer models of water and wave actions, computer-simulated ship movements, and